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Politics against the Political
Rereading Classical Realism as a Challenge to Carl Schmitt

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Abstract

Interwar German influences on Classical Realist thought are frequently cited as having had a formative effect on core ideas of such authors as Hans Morgenthau and Henry Kissinger. Ideas novel to American political thinking are presented as having their roots in Weimar Germany, where these ideas had been purportedly commonplace. Relevant names mentioned in this context include Friedrich Meinecke, Max Weber and Carl Schmitt. This paper attempts to provide a more fine-grained analysis of this continental European genealogy by highlighting the Realist reception and reinterpretation of some of Schmitt’s key ideas on the sovereign state and on politics.

The fundamental argument of the first, analytical section of the paper is that Classical Realism accomplished a radical inversion of Schmitt’s key tenets. While indeed integrating a number of ideas, Realist authors changed the modalities of these ideas, turning what was embraced by Schmitt into the tragic predicaments of international relations. This transformation had far-reaching consequences for practical prescriptions in politics. “Exception”, the foundational event of Schmitt, became a periodical and inescapable recurrence to be held to minimal frequency. The Political, the founding concept or *Grundbegriff* of state and community, to be rescued from liberal “technicity” and “neutralization” according to Schmitt, was reinterpreted as what needs to be contained by the technique of international diplomacy. Perhaps most tellingly, the ideal type of the individualized sovereign embodying and (re)founding the political community through decisions taken in cases of exception was replaced by its very counter-image, that of the diplomat – a figure detached from his own state and devoted to an international system/society.

The final section of the paper seeks to engage the products of this anti-Schmittian re-reading of Classical Realism. If the insistence on the autonomy of foreign policy is revealed as more than just an anti-liberal catchphrase and is shown to include the consideration of preserving or restoring technicity in international politics, one is left with an image of the international system as eternally suspended between the “natural” aggression of the sovereign as foundational acts of domestic politics (“revolutionary states” and the rise of nationalism) and the fragile secondary order of international society. This dualism, however, produces a catachresis: the diplomat as agent of the state nevertheless needs to work to restrain the state from rejuvenating itself. The more devoted to international politics he is, the less he remains a functionary of state politics and of the Political. The disjunction of the two types of politics causes Classical Realism to fall back to its core myth of the Schmittian Leviathan. Pessimism triumphs over transformational potential not as a result of logic, but as a result of the incomplete revision of Schmitt’s theory of state. This position is tenable as long as the assumption about the primacy of the state holds. If, for various reasons, the state’s position of defining domestic preferences falters, diplomacy, having lost its principal, could for the first time engage in a transformational enterprise. Unless – of course – James Der Derian’s “anti-diplomacy” or any other mode of producing meaning without the possibility of mediation between meanings, in a sense the new form of the Political, overtakes what’s left of politics to build on.

I. Introduction: Ethical Realism and the Threat of the Ultrapolitical

That Realism is a rich tradition is probably the most frequent commonplace in introductions of papers exploring some aspect of Realist thought. Commonplaces, however, are often worthy of analysis. That Realism is, more than anything else, significant today as thought and tradition is in part a result of this richness, as the partial loss of credibility of attempts to produce a rigorously scientific theory based on this richness has directed commentators, friendly and critical alike, back to the original, pre-positivist texts. The most recent chapters of the *Rezeptionsgeschichte* of Realism suggest that a hermeneutic turn has taken (is taking) place: what was once posited as containing the intuition necessary to build a positivist theory is today increasingly recognized as resisting being turned into a testable construct of theory-cum-hypotheses while containing a large reservoir of observations about human behaviour in the realm of international politics, more appropriately engaged as a distinct horizon of thought than as a “mine” of raw material for testable hypotheses.¹

This turn has rearranged the range of appropriate tools, questions and puzzles that make up the discourse on the hitherto overlooked or forgotten *wisdom* of Realism. In many ways, the criticism of Richard Ashley in 1984 has borne fruit: what he famously identified as the elimination of the four “p”-s (process, practice, power, politics) in “Neorealism” constitutes today the main lure of pre-positivist or Classical Realism in renewed, overtly or latently normative discussions of the possibilities and cognitive determinants of international politics.² The positive suggestion of Ashley’s scathing criticism – that a richer Realism had once existed – has been taken up by a series of authors, going back, notably, to Michael Smith’s 1986 monograph on Weber and Classical Realism, but really coming into full bloom in the late 1990s and the first years of the new millennium.³

This new and still expanding body of commentary on Realism has already grown far too rich to be done justice in a paper dealing with Carl Schmitt and the Realist response to his theorizing. Yet it should be pointed out that at least one strong current within this new literature emphasizes the question of ethics, notably of a pragmatic ethic of restraint thought to be immanent to a Realism once routinely described as amoral. The rediscovery of Christian moral imperfectionism as a tradition reaching from Augustine to Reinhold Niebuhr, suggested by Smith and best elaborated by Alastair Murray represents a significant turning point in International Relations thinking about Realism.⁴ This thread was elaborated upon further by discussions of tragedy and its significance for Morgenthau’s generation, culminating in Ned Lebow’s magisterial 2003 study *The Tragic Vision of Politics*.⁵ The focus on the tragic character of political life is today a firmly established, yet by no means exhausted current in the ongoing “second life” of Classical Realist thought.

Interestingly, the imperfectionist stance identified as the key element in the seemingly paradoxical Realist insistence on preserving an ethical outlook whilst promoting power politics has resurfaced in several other interpretations of international politics, of which, for the purposes of this paper, investigations of politics and the political are of the greatest significance. Especially in the context of the Iraq war it has been rediscovered with a sense of urgency lacking in the 1990s that our notions of state action, emergency, war and politics in

¹ Robert Cox, “Realism, Positivism and Historicism”, In Idem, *Approaches to World Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 53.

² Richard K. Ashley, “The Poverty of Neorealism”, *International Organization* 38 (1984) 237.

³ Michael J. Smith, *Realist Thought from Weber to Kissinger*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990.²

⁴ Alastair J. Murray, *Reconstructing Realism: Between Power Politics and Cosmopolitan Ethics*. Edinburgh: Keele University Press, 1997.

⁵ Richard Ned Lebow, *The Tragic Vision of Politics. Ethics, Interests and Orders*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

general may profit from bringing an interpretation of various realisms to bear on them. A particularly appealing distinction between political/diplomatic realism and ultrapolitical realism has been proposed recently by Jeff Huysmans who linked the former with reasoned self-restraint and cost management through coordination, and the latter with a minimalist view of international “society” coupled with its corollary, strict pursuit of narrow self-interest in a world assumed to be perfectly anarchical and generating situations of emergency or exception.⁶ On a more empirical level, Michael C. Williams has produced a perceptive analysis of the conflict between neoconservatives and realists in the domain of foreign policy planning, highlighting the notions he too identified as central to traditional Realism as being in sharp contrast with the purported imperialism of the hawks around the Bush administration.⁷ Perhaps the most revelatory pieces of writing in this stream, however, were written – as if in a dire premonition of what was to come – prior to the invasion of Iraq, in the form of two dialogical monographs by James Der Derian. Der Derian first identified in *On Diplomacy* the mode of functioning of the diplomat as creating shared meaning among estranged actors (states) in international politics, then complemented this argument by offering an account of the alternative way to orient foreign policy through an analysis of the immanent production of images of the Other in *Antidiplomacy*.⁸ Der Derian’s earlier arguments rhyme in crucial places with those of Huysmans and Williams: they all locate communication in the process of constructing images of the Other to orient political action as a precondition for a politics of restraint and mitigation. While this is meant by no means to reduce extremely rich texts to such a simple denominator, the shared thrust of the authors is hard to miss.

Yet what do they turn to a supposed ethical Realist thought from the chimera of Realist scientific theory and discussions of the dangers of modern foreign policy decision-making have in common with each other and how do they bear on the relationship between Carl Schmitt and Classical Realism? This paper undertakes to investigate the latter by relying on recent reinterpretations of Realism for a starting point, and undertakes to demonstrate that re-reading Classical Realism as a critical response to, rather than a tempered reiteration of, Schmitt’s ideas converges around the very dilemmas that current crises in international politics bring to light. In short, it discusses a hermeneutical problem while simultaneously maintaining that this problem has direct relevance to our understanding of the world around us. Realizing this goal implies a series of tasks, some of which can only be partially accomplished in a single paper. Notably, a reading of Carl Schmitt has to be advanced, with a formidable body of commentary on his oeuvre in the background – it follows that no justice can be done to either the full complexity of Schmitt’s thought and to the literature it has spawned. Also, a body of writing as vast and with borders as fluid as those of Classical Realism must be filtered and reconfigured for this enterprise with unavoidable losses of nuances and contradictions. If in spite of these “costs” such a paper deserves to be prepared, it is for two reasons: there is still room enough for more fine-grained analysis of the Schmittian influence on Classical Realism, and the payoffs of such analysis are considerable, especially in view of the recent resurgence of discussions about the role and meaning of the Political in our world.

Most importantly, it is argued below that such a fine-grained analysis can highlight that Classical Realism accomplished a radical inversion of Schmitt’s key tenets. While indeed

⁶ Jef Huysmans, “International Politics of Insecurity: Normativity, Inwardness and the Exception”, *Security Dialogue* 37 (2006) 11-29.

⁷ Michael C. Williams, “What is the National Interest? The Neoconservative Challenge to IR Theory”, *European Journal of International Relations* 11. (2005) 307-337.

⁸ James Der Derian: *Antidiplomacy: Spies, Terror, Speed, and War*. New York: Blackwell, 1992.

integrating a number of ideas, Realist authors changed the modalities of these ideas, turning what was embraced by Schmitt into the tragic predicaments of international relations.

This transformation had far-reaching consequences for practical prescriptions in politics. “Exception”, the foundational event of Schmitt, became a periodical and inescapable recurrence to be held to minimal frequency. The Political, the founding concept or *Grundbegriff* of state and community, to be rescued from liberal “technicity” and “neutralization” according to Schmitt,⁹ was reinterpreted as what needs to be contained by the technique of international diplomacy. Perhaps most tellingly, the ideal type of the individualized sovereign (*Reichspräsident* or *Führer*), embodying and (re)founding the political community through decisions taken in cases of exception was replaced by its very counter-image, that of the diplomat – a figure detached from his own state and devoted to an international system/society. Thus, Realist wisdom prescribes the moderation of the Political (the state) by international politics. This praxis of diplomacy also functions as a direct commentary on today’s discussions about and experiences of the exception in international politics – hence its direct and undeniable contemporary political significance.

Investigations of relationships, however, tell us about the subjects that are part to these relationships. For this reason, the concluding section of this paper also attempts to think further the results gained from contrasting Schmitt with Classical Realism with the goal of locating the consequences of Schmitt’s undeniable influence. In this case, what reveals itself is that if the insistence on the autonomy of foreign policy is revealed as more than just an anti-liberal catchphrase and is shown to include the consideration of preserving or restoring technicity in international politics, one is left with an image of the international system as eternally suspended between the “natural” aggression of the sovereign as foundational acts of domestic politics (“revolutionary states” and the rise of nationalism) and the fragile secondary order of international society. This dualism, however, produces a catachresis: the diplomat as agent of the state nevertheless needs to work to restrain the state from rejuvenating itself. The more devoted to international politics he is, the less he remains a functionary of state politics and of the Political.

The disjunction of the two types of politics causes Classical Realism to fall back to its core myth of the Schmittian Leviathan. Pessimism triumphs over transformational potential not as a result of logic, but as a result of the incomplete revision of Schmitt’s theory of state. Classical Realism identifies at least one type of agency needed for transformation (a cosmopolitan diplomat), the mode that permits such transformation of the international system (an ethics of mediating between preferences and constructing meanings), but leaves potential vistas of the agency’s transformational work unexplored. The state (the Political) and diplomacy (politics), in the best possible scenario considered by Realists, virtually cancel each other out, yielding the pragmatist-technical maxim of “interest defined in terms of power”, rather than the primordial desire to engage the “foe”. This “satisficing” position is tenable as long as the assumption about the primacy of the state holds. If, for various reasons, the state’s position of defining domestic preferences falters, diplomacy, having lost its principal, could for the first time engage in a transformational enterprise.

II. A Conservative Revolutionary Theory of Pure Relationality

Carl Schmitt is more appropriately described as a signature figure of the conservative revolution than either the *Kronjurist* of the Third Reich or a worried communitarian thinker of

⁹ John McCormick, *Carl Schmitt’s Critique of Liberalism: Against Politics as Technology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. esp. 48-49, 121-122.

the *nomos*.¹⁰ Not merely because the most frequently quoted texts are products of 1920s Weimar (despite later changes to them), but also because neither the justification of the *Führerprinzip* nor the argument of geographically specific large cultural units required the abandonment of core ideas of the so-called Conservative Revolution of Weimar Germany. While a reading of his works in the mode of contextualist intellectual history is certainly not the only legitimate approach, it may be argued to be the most appropriate if his influence on Classical Realism is to be investigated, given that the nature of this influence was one deeply influenced by how realists perceived, contextualized and labeled Carl Schmitt. In this sense, talking about the relationship is a hermeneutic exercise aimed at grasping a diachronic dialogue – itself a hermeneutic procedure – through the movement of our own respective horizon closer to the two horizons participating in the dialogue.

The context for a reading of Schmitt, then, is provided by Weimar's conservative revolution. Many accounts of this complex process of spiritual fermentation exist, yet it seems most share an acknowledgment of the preoccupation with the authentic and the absolute that characterized conservative revolutionaries. Just what it was that paraded as the authentic and the absolute varied a great deal – for many, it was the unchanging essence of the people, the *Volk*, for others war and battle and the community of brothers in arms it purportedly forged. For both groups, however, the state, held a special significance. As opposed to German *Historismus*, the dominant historico-political current of the Second Empire, the state did cease to function as value-in-itself, a concrete historical product complete and discreet as it is. It became, instead, a target to be conquered, a vehicle to be used to promote the interest and self-realization of the *Volk* or any other community of the true or of the initiated. For all the emphasis on the awaited Third Reich, conservative revolutionaries were rarely pure statist – they usually posited some absolute, ahistorical interest prior to the state in the name of which the state was to be conquered or founded, (re)designed and ran.¹¹

This is, in short, the context in which Carl Schmitt burst onto the scene as a characteristic figure of the right, arguing for the extension of the emergency powers of the *Reichspräsident*. No German intellectual of Weimar would have mistaken his zeal for constitutionalism – Schmitt was easily identifiable as a spokesperson of authority, more specifically of the authority of the anti-party symbol Paul von Hindenburg elected by a coalition of reactionaries against a pro-republic and pro-parliamentarist candidate of the centrist parties in 1925.¹² Also, his insistence on the necessary unity of society and state was a product of the discourse about the essentially alien character of parliamentarism in Germany. Germans were taken to be substantially different from the French and the British, their social *Gemüt* or constitution unfit for democratic politics, requiring, rather, a sentimental unity symbolically expressed and embodied in the State.¹³

If Schmitt's writing is interpreted with an eye on its context, a rough reconstruction of how young intellectuals growing up in Germany (and in an Austria that had its gaze fixed on

¹⁰ Joseph Bendersky: "The Expendable Kronjurist: Carl Schmitt and National Socialism, 1933-36", *Journal of Contemporary History*, 14, (1979), pp. 309-328.

¹¹ Sontheimer, Kurt: *Antidemokratisches Denken in der Weimarer Republik*. München, Nymphenburger, 1962., Schneller, Martin: *Zwischen Romantik und Faschismus: Der Beitrag Othmar Spann's zum Konservativismus in der Weimarer Republik*. Stuttgart, Klett, 1970. 52. o., Freyer, Hans: *Der Staat*. Leipzig, Rehfelden, 1925. 33. o Breuer, Stefan: *Anatomie der konservativen Revolution*. Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1993. 41. o Grunewald, Michel: „Reichseuropa gegen Paneuropa: Die Europa-Auffassung der jungkonservativen Zeitschrift *Gewissen*“. In Uö.: *Le discours européen*. 313-342., küf. 318-327. o Moeller van den Bruck, Arthur: *Das dritte Reich*. Berlin, Ring, 1923

¹² Strong, Tracy B.: „Foreword: Dimensions of the New Debate around Carl Schmitt“ in: Carl Schmitt: *The Concept of the Political*: Expanded Edition. Chicago – London: Chicago University Press, 1996. xv.

¹³ David Gross, "Heinrich Mann and the Politics of Reaction", *Journal of Contemporary History* 1973 8: 125-145. esp. 134.

the *Reich* in a fit of *Anschluss* desire) saw the brilliant public intellectual who had more Academic credentials than most popular and often idiosyncratic conservative revolutionaries such as Ernst Jünger or Armin Moeller van den Bruck.

It was also quite clear to readers of Schmitt that his main theoretical target was Neo-Kantian social theory, a moderate and neutrality-seeking derivative of German pragmatic idealist tradition that – much like Historismus – came to dominate many university chairs in the early 20th century. It is perhaps with the wisdom of hindsight that it becomes clear that Schmitt identified Neo-Kantianism as an offshoot of liberal philosophy – contemporaries may not have reflected on this. But it must have been apparent that Schmitt was challenging fellow scholars like Hans Kelsen, a prominent Neo-Kantian, on the same grounds that he challenged liberalism: on the grounds that Neo-Kantianism/liberalism sought to eliminate authentic experience of life, replacing organic, concrete wholes (“true form”) with barren artificial categories and the experience of the immediate with theories of intermediacy and mediation.¹⁴

The more directly ideological counterpart to this metatheoretical polemic concerned liberalism conceived as thought concerned with organizing social life through norms, rights and the elimination of pure force as an instrument of politics. While most conservative revolutionaries never ventured to deeper analysis beyond that of exploring the alienness of liberalism in Germany, its anti-communitarian and degenerative effects, Schmitt may be said to rank among the most perceptive of its critics. Long before liberalism as a theory of neutrality had been propounded by liberal philosophers, he expounded the view, explored by John McCormick in what is perhaps the best monograph on Schmitt, that liberalism rested on the dual pillars of neutrality and technicity. Neutrality referred to the idea that the state as a sum of institutions has to remain neutral in matters of ideology and political debate, while technicity captured the mode of operation proper to such a state, that of running politics as a series of sector-specific consultations and discussions aimed at reaching the greatest degree of consensus possible. This profoundly anti-heroic concept of liberalism (echoed by scores of German liberals and anti-liberals alike) contrasted sharply with the cult of holism, decisive action and substantive community that the conservative revolution embraced.¹⁵

If, based on the above, an evaluation of the “project” of the conservative revolution is to be attempted, it could be said that – on the most abstract level – it was concerned with regaining immediacy and holistic, organic “forms” in social life. Despising artificiality and mediation as modes of human practice, it is the search after the concrete realization of this dual project in various instances of life that drove conservative revolutionary theorizing. For Schmitt, famously, this took the form of identifying the exception and the sovereign decision taken in exceptional circumstances as the moment of immediacy, and the (re)unified state-and-society molded into a homogenous “we” by virtue of the sovereign decision as the true form. It has to be granted that the above interpretation challenges standard anti-foundationalist descriptions of Schmitt’s writing. If, however, the scope of investigation is broadened beyond the most often quoted texts of *Political Theology* and *The Concept of the Political*, it becomes abundantly clear that the seeming anti-foundationalism in practice did have a referent: the German people seeking justice and self-realization in and against the forces of history.¹⁶

Viewed in this light, the observation made by Tracy Strong, according to which Schmitt’s theory can only be properly interpreted if the “we” that is constructed is taken to be homogenous and self-explanatory, ranks among the most profound and basic commentaries on Schmitt. Other works by Schmitt suggest that he was in fact very much concerned with the problem of defining a “we”. He seems to have moved from a Catholic-European (almost neo-Roman) view to a more *völkisch* direction where peoples forming states were regarded as

¹⁴ McCormick, *Carl Schmitt’s Critique*, 85-92.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 48-49.

¹⁶ Carl Schmitt, *Die geistesgeschichtliche Lage des heutigen Parlamentarismus*, Munich: 1926.

organic and natural units, especially large and powerful peoples capable of efficiently organizing geographical space. A synthesis, finally, of the young and the middle-aged Schmitt was produced by the elderly author in 1950 in the *Nomos of the Earth*, where he reunited his “telluric” or earthbound inclinations and his cultural affinities in the myth of a continental European *Grossraum* or large cultural and geographic space as the “proper” way of organizing the region (as opposed to being dominated by superpowers).¹⁷

Encoded in this long series of extraordinary texts, however, was the friend-enemy distinction which surfaced in 1923 (long before the Concept of the Political was conceived) in *Roman Catholicism and Political Form*.¹⁸ This distinction as the defining feature of the Political is of special importance with regard to international relations. Regardless of alternative readings in the context of domestic politics, it proposes a simple scheme as the underlying deep structure of the international system: discreet units engaging in conflict and cooperation based on their respective stance towards each other. Very little is said in later works to the effect of what should determine this stance – economic interest, cultural affinities, domestic structure or something completely different – it is indeed a very open-ended statement in this sense. Still, Schmitt does intimate at one point that the difference leading to the identification of the enemy is “existential”, and, if specific examples such as the Crusades and Germany’s surrounded position by alien *Völker*, are also considered, it becomes quite clear that by existential Schmitt had in mind something that is a priori given and potentially impossible to erase or overcome.¹⁹ Also, Schmitt conspicuously avoids using the term of creating or conjuring up the enemy – at all times he refers to the mere identification accomplished in the sovereign decision on war. This is a somewhat stronger evidence than unexplained examples used as illustrations that the enemy is a given, it merely has to be identified or recognized.²⁰

This, however, constrains Schmitt’s other famous argument about the sovereign decision creating the strong community that is the state through the act of miracle to an interpretation in which the decision merely makes apparent the common bond, awakens the individuals to their communal identity and creates the *nomos* – the ordering-by-decision – on the basis of which law proper can function and enemies of the state can be punished.²¹ His infamous statement according to which the *Führer schafft Recht*, then, is by no means a momentary lapse of reason, but the application of the very essence of the Political, reiterated in his purportedly anti-Nazi 1938 commentary on Hobbes in the form of the general statement that no sovereign state can ever be “*in Unrecht*” (in a position of illegality) by virtue of an action it takes against citizens or other states.²²

It is at this point of Schmitt’s thinking that the interventions attempted by Classical Realism gain their significance. An anti-liberal project in the name of the rescuing of immediacy, action, self-preservation and true form in the life of a political community, Schmitt’s grand oeuvre culminates in the complete negation of the possibility of communication among *nomoi* – geographical spaces, each organized by a sovereign will-as-ordering. The elimination of common codes of mutual intelligibility leave at most the

¹⁷ Carl Schmitt, *Roman Catholicism and Political Form*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996., Carl Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth in the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum*, G.L. Ulmen, trs., (New York: Telos, 2003

¹⁸ McCormick, John: „Political Theory and Political Theology: The SEcond Wave of Carl Schmitt in English”, *Political Theory*, vol. 26. no. 6. (1998) 830-854., esp. 831-832.

¹⁹ Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, 26-27.

²⁰ Cf. *Ibid* and *passim*.

²¹ Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1985. 5-12..

²² Carl Schmitt, „Nationalsozialismus und Rechtsstaat” *Juristische Wochenschrift* 63. évf. (1934) 713-718., Carl Schmitt, *Der Leviathan in der Staatslehre des Thomas Hobbes: Sinn und Fehlschlag eines politischen Symbols*. Stuttgart, Klett-Cotta, 1982. 104-105.

possibility of recognizing my enemy as the Other for whom I too must be the enemy – an egalitarianism in conflict, but one which can only proceed as far as conceding the mutual right of annihilation. *Nomoi* order the world – and only *nomoi* can accomplish this ordering – therefore there can be no ordering of the relations of *nomoi*, and any such attempt (as universal humanism or liberalism) is of necessity the ideological guise of a particular *nomos* to overtake and annihilate others.²³

This egalitarianism, incidentally, is that of pure relationality: the enemy has no positive content, it is the pure Other. Schmitt the neo-Hegelian would, of course, throw Hegel himself in fit of rage: the pupil – identified as such first by a journal of the SS then subsequently by some post-war research as well - identifies as the terminus in the history of the world and of consciousness the stage where the Self becomes conscious of other selves as pure Others and prepares to enter into a life-and-death struggle with those who, by virtue of their pure otherness, can be nothing but threat to the existence of the Self. This is the very beginning, in the Phenomenology of Spirit, of self-consciousness, its most primitive and inadequate stage, from which, according to Hegel, one can only move up, to higher and more sophisticated levels of contemplating the self-in-the-world.²⁴

III. Classical Realist Interventions in a Schmittian World

In received phraseology (as far as theorizing in International Relations is concerned), when Schmitt takes a theoretical stance against attributing positive content to the enemy, his view amounts to a restatement of pure conflictual anarchy: all are wolves and all wolves are by definition equal and similar. A barren image of the world, it is here that positive content is reintroduced by Classical Realism through a series of cognitive operations, and the Schmittian world of pure anarchy is superseded by what has been called by Michael Williams a “disenchanted liberalism”.²⁵ The key metatheoretical component reintroduced by Classical Realism into the Schmittian world picture is the mode of hermeneutic understanding as a possible *modus operandi* of the human mind. While no Classical Realist would have ever ventured to use such jargon, this is in fact a prerequisite for attributing knowable content to the Other, which sublates the pure otherness and makes the Other more as simply un-Self. In a Hegelian perspective, Classical Realism accomplishes a dialectic step by accepting, as starting point, the pure otherness as the determining feature of international politics, but seeks to create an opening for at least partially reversing the effects of the initial procedure of othering, of identifying the someone as Other. The Other, however, can only be reshaped if something beyond pure otherness is attributed to it – this could be denoted as “content” (to emphasize the initially indeterminate nature of this content). Once such content is assumed to exist in the Other, the Other becomes comparable to the Self – it no longer poses as perfect difference, instead it takes up position in the intermediate zone between sameness and perfect difference.

This, as it has been forewarned, is a speculative prefix to what Classical Realism explicitly theorized, a partial metaphysical grounding of sorts. What Realist authors did argue, was a return to politics as mediation, known in international relations as diplomacy. Such Realists would have likely conceded that attributing content to the Other, as a precondition of politics, is inextricably linked up with ethics. What otherness cannot be accepted into a

²³ This is the reading of *nomos* and sovereignty proposed by Giorgio Agamben, *Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998.

²⁴ G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* by G. W. F. Hegel, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1977. para.186-199., 113-119.

²⁵ Michael C. Williams, *The Realist Tradition and the Limits of International Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2005).

partnership implies passing value judgments and it is only on the basis of value judgments that specific political decisions by either “us” or “them” become discutable. In this sense, eliminating the original force of the othering opens up the possibility of mediation and immediately threatens the unity of the sovereign state, since mediated politics cannot function without value judgments which can be subjected to criticism by observers.²⁶ The pure standard of the efficiency of recognizing enemies and friends is lost, in exchange for a fuzzy standard of evaluating the Other in substantive terms rather than pure relationality. This observation, in fact, is the basis of Schmitt’s proposed neutrality towards content and his criticism of humanity and liberal universalist politics.²⁷ He is right in this much, but the logical statement remains that all hermeneutic politics (i.e. politics allowing for mediation) must operate with assumptions about the content of the Other. Such political assumptions about others are always asymmetric (Schmitt is right), since they are rooted in our image of what constitutes them, but also a precondition to an ethics of the political. This is the transition that in this paper is referred to as the transformation of the political into politics, the movement from a pure decision-based anarchical (non-ordered) world into one of imperfect and ever ongoing ordering – a world of politics as process and mediation.

A short and almost certainly incomplete survey of the series of discursive operations undertaken by Classical Realist authors permits the establish not only the degree to which they were simultaneously influenced by and opposed to the theory of Carl Schmitt, but also helps greatly to establish the position of Classical Realism with regard to liberal politics (if it is accepted that Schmitt was a perceptive critic of liberalism). Knowing how Schmitt defined his thought in contrast with liberalism, and how Classical Realists inverted much of Schmitt’s reasoning by starting with the assumption of “content” in the Other, it becomes possible to engage in a sort of intellectual triangulation to mark out the relationship between the two discussion partners to Schmitt, as well. To accomplish this task at least partially, the following section presents key points of Schmitt’s challenge to liberal ideas, and then proceeds to establish to what extent these challenges were integrated into or subverted by Realist thought.

From the outside, no obvious starting point for such a survey can be defined. A possible starting point is suggested by taking the notion of the state as the most concrete concept, and move towards more abstract and systemic ideas from there. The state was conceived by Schmitt as the product of decision in the situation of exception, with the main inward function of the decision being to generate a *nomos*, and the main outward function consisting in creating a unit capable of protecting those who identify with it. He argued that this basic feature was overturned by liberal arguments that identified contract as the basis of the creation of the state which is brought about to eliminate lawlessness.²⁸ In other words, the state is a contractual institution of society to ensure normalcy, meaning the substitution of norms in the place of the recurrence of exception. According to Schmitt, there are a series of problems with such a view. First, the contractual state cannot eliminate those who do not accept the contract and seek to bring down the state itself. Also, it creates the false consciousness that norms can be efficient managers of all political affairs and that discussion can replace decision. This, therefore, breeds enemies sensing weakness and creates complacency in citizens – such forgetfulness, he was quick to assure his readers, only ensures the demise of the state in the face of a serious challenge on the part of its enemies.²⁹

Classical Realism was never overly concerned with the quality of statehood per se, preferring to focus on the role of states in the international system. Yet merely by accepting the Hobbesian myth of the genesis of the state without too much commentary, it positions

²⁶ Derrida, Jacques, *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 199. 135-136.

²⁷ Schmitt, *Concept of the Political*, 26-27., 48-49.

²⁸ Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 42., 49-51.

²⁹ Carl Schmitt: *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986.

itself in the middle of the polemic. As Schmitt himself drew attention to it in the less read 1938 commentary on *Leviathan*, two vistas are open if the Hobbesian myth is accepted. Given that the state provides protection to citizens, it may be “derailed” towards functioning as the basis of a contractualist notion of the state, where citizens may be judges of the state’s functioning, i.e. may evaluate if the desired normalcy is actually brought about by the state.³⁰

His own preferred – purportedly “true” – reading which sought to cleanse Hobbes of the detrimental effects of Spinoza’s proto-liberal interpretation highlighted the sovereign decision as constitutive of the state. The state, in this perspective, is created by the sovereign who becomes such in the act of deciding on enforcing his will over a population to provide an efficient community within which the laws derivative of this will can regulate life. Classical Realism shifted the focus of the argument: disinterested in the question of the principal, it emphasized the efficiency with which states overcome the state of nature domestically, and nevertheless fail to repeat this in the international system. States, as such, are imperfect units, something that neither liberalism nor Schmitt was willing to concede with anything like the forcefulness of Realist discourse.

To make more sense of the Realist stance, a more in-depth investigation is required of the abstract components that a characterization of the state brings into play. A notable difference between the conceptualizations of the state is the emphasis on the state as the zone of law, eliminating exception in liberal thought, and the upholding of the possibility of exception in Schmitt. Norms, for Schmitt, are eternally conditional upon the *nomos* they are derivative of. If the *nomos* is threatened by foes from inside or outside, the laws must be suspended to make way for the rejuvenation of the state accomplished by the sovereign or the bearer of sovereignty. If a state can no longer re-enter the state of exception, it is a moribund actor, limiting it to upholding norms means, thus, sealing its fate.³¹ From either this moribund course or from the situation of no state existing over a geographical area, only a miracle, a theological concept can help escape – a new state-founding decision in the situation of exception which can be either direct threat or the exception brought about by lack of an extant state. By way of this decision, *nomos* is founded anew, norms taken on meaning once again, but they are ever conditional upon the founding will, ideally the will of the sovereign eyeing the horizon for new dangers, for the exception about to emerge.³²

A natural corollary to such different conceptions are the ideal types of state behaviour in the liberal and in the Schmittian universe. In view of democratic peace theory, much prescience can be granted to Schmitt for extrapolating from Wilsonianism the desire inherent to liberal ideology to “upload” itself into the international system. In his scathing criticism, he accused liberalism of cloaking its quest to conquer states by cloaking itself in the guise of universalism denying otherness the right of existence.³³ Schmitt’s rhetoric here, in turn, is aimed at making impossible of asking the question of *how* in this context. His argument roughly runs by stating the desire to dominate the international system on the part of liberalism and contrasts this desire with the sincere recognition of the legitimate otherness of the Other as contained in his theory. However, at this point Schmitt does not reflect – for obvious reasons – on the issue of what liberalism’s drive to dominate and his own renunciation of transformational international politics leaves as the possible toolbox of international action. For Schmitt can say a lot about the enemy, yet nothing about the friend. The state stripped of content can only exist as the Other which is like the Self only inasmuch as it is capable of identifying us as the Other.³⁴ Given that otherness is the grounds of

³⁰ Schmitt, *Der Leviathan*, 102-104.

³¹ Schmitt, *Concept of the Political*, 38.

³² Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 12-13., 32.

³³ Schmitt, *Concept of the Political*, 53-55.

³⁴ Leo Strauss: “Notes on the Concept of the Political in Schmitt”, *Concept of the Political*, 88-89.

identifying the enemy, the Schmittian universe can only offer a meaningful vision of the enemy – any other *nomos* is bound to be a hostile *nomos*, being the product of a different sovereign will, being “existentially different”. Thus, the otherness existing in the anarchy of the international system is downloaded into the state, on the one hand as the condition justifying the suspension of the norms (re-creating the boundless quaking of all citizen-bondsmen in the face of the State-as-Lord promising protection only in exchange of accepting perfect powerlessness) and, as Giorgio Agamben perceptively argued, in the logic of dispensing with all those resisting this situation who are dealt with as swiftly as outside threats.³⁵

Liberalism, on the other hand, can define otherness substantially, rather than relationally. Minimal requirements of coexistence can be identified, it is open to a spirit of temperance – at least potentially. While it is true that such content-based vision of otherness cannot fail to become normative, it leaves open a larger toolbox for action and while seeking total similitude as the ideal, it may potentially accept different outcomes if its own norms would be violated by trying to bring about total similitude in the international system.

Given the specific historical context in which Classical Realism emerged – in its original form known to contemporaries as the “national interest school of foreign policy”, to contemporaries and later commentators, the polemic of Morgenthau with other with liberal foreign policy could have easily suggested the influence of Schmitt.³⁶ This is in fact the case with many authors, last but not least McCormick himself. Classical Realism very much doubted that liberalism could triumph and often, it seemed, it doubted even the desirability of such a triumph. Instead, it emphasized that other players in the international system have to be accepted as they are, as Others and treated with the respect due to equals.

This is, however, only the first movement of the Realist argument. The differences to Schmitt’s position abound. In the case of Classical Realism, there is not only the opposition to the futile desire to upload domestic societal preferences relating to the politics of the good life into the international system, there is also a strong resistance to download the processes and toolbox of international politics into the domestic sphere. Neither are democratic processes to be checked at home, nor is the character of the international system to be used for re-organizing society as a homogenous whole. The emphasis falls instead on the separation of the domestic and the international, as discreet zones of human actions. The upwardly open channel of liberalism, merely inversed by Schmitt, is finally severed here: neither sphere should provide a blueprint for organizing the other.³⁷

The third movement in this line of thought concerns the retaining of content. Classical realism was intensely occupied with defining a vantage point from where content could be addressed without making an implicit argument for systemic transformation as the necessary goal of state-run foreign policy. It would be hard to make any other argument about the origins of this commitment than one which identifies it as simply a moral choice: a purely political man, according to Morgenthau, would simply be a beast.³⁸ As this statement implies, there is a strong rejection here, made on moral grounds, of the validity of Schmitt’s procedure. Yet dislike alone does not yield a solution – the solution is finally located by re-introducing a restrained, technical universalism which can at once allow for substantive otherness, keeping the range of possible action in the international system wide, while setting minimal criteria for not being identified as the enemy.

³⁵ Hegel, para 191-192., 116-117., Agamben, 20-21.

³⁶ Hans J. Morgenthau: *Scientific Man vs Power Politics*. [1946] Reprint, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974.

³⁷ Morgenthau, Hans J.: *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*. A. A. Knopf, 1985.⁶ 14-17.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 16.

This movement, as it should be obvious from the above, involves the sublation of the friend-enemy distinction and its replacement by two different distinctions with circumscribed zones of validity. States and societies, being substantively defined, can be described by virtue of their distance from the order in our state. Kennan's famous analysis of Soviet society is a classic example of this. Yet, as Kennan proceeds, it becomes clear that such difference, while significant, cannot double as the ethic of action in international relations.³⁹ It must be complemented by the ethic of responsibility, which means asking the question of what effect our action will have on the system and on our state and society. Good can be known, but it cannot always be enforced. Evil, on the other hand, must always be checked, while it cannot be eradicated. In this much, an ideological ethic is preserved, since good and evil as categories of analysis are preserved. On the other hand, what is to be done with good and evil in the world is identified as a complex issue. The way out from the dilemma was identifying as the ultimate test of an ethic of responsibility the systemic interest. The yardstick of interstate relation and value structures was not entirely discarded, but practical primacy was afforded to a systemic perspective. This way, a neutral universal standard was established: the enemy, in the Schmittian sense, was limited to imperialist states that endanger the balanced functioning of the system – i.e. these were cast as enemies of all, while enemies of specific states were radically reinterpreted as partners in conflict where no peaceful agreement was reached. Such conflict could potentially be managed, and such enemies were not pure relational Others, in fact, hardly possible to be referred to as Others, at all.

The principle of pure relational mutuality, as contrasting it with Realist reasoning unveils, fails to produce any constellation that could lead to self-restraint. Relational otherness implies the absolute othering of the enemy, as there remains nothing to temper the conflict. Any unqualified conflict has to be just that: unqualified, in other words total conflict. Qualified conflict can exist if otherness itself is qualified. As long as the opponent has a stake in the norms that function in the system, the opponent cannot become the enemy. Only if systemic norms are disregarded, is the pure relationality of Schmitt's universe restored, with the *guerre a outrance* remaining as the sole option for self-preservation.

The distinction Classical Realism makes between domestic and foreign policy has an other important – I am inclined to say metaphysical – aspect. It concerns Schmitt's unconditional acceptance and occasional celebration of the domination of the Political over other aspects of life. This domination can be refused, but only at one's own peril, since the Political is ultimately about self-preservation as a group. If, however, it is accepted, it rejuvenates the community as a miracle rejuvenates faith – in the situation of the exception, it rephrases the “us” by virtue of identifying the enemy and refounds the *nomos* under which we live. Exception is thus to be celebrated since it not only demands sacrifice, but repays this sacrifice by providing proof of identity for the community – indeed, for all of his avowals of being a neutral commentator, Schmitt's exception is often described as a miracle would be – in infinitely positive terms.

If, however, the Self and the Other are substantive rather than relational, the grounding of the self is not dependent on the otherness of the enemy being identified as such. The separation of domestic and international politics also restores the autonomy of spheres of life. Such spheres cannot be taken as necessarily subordinate to the Political, since the existence and selfsameness of the community is no longer dependent on it. *Sachgebiete*, areas of specialist knowledge, can exist once more – a key element of Neo-Kantian thought is restored. Henceforth, knowledge is required *en lieu* of the decision, as much for organizing various dimensions of social life as for running foreign policy. Being knowledgeable becomes a

³⁹ George F. Kennan, *American Diplomacy*, Expanded Edition (Chicago-London: University of Chicago Press, 1979)

prerequisite for making decisions, as Morgenthau emphasizes very much the specialist skills required to engage in various sectors of human activity.

Viewed in this light, the insistence on the autonomy of foreign policy, the most famous practical demand perhaps of Classical Realism, does not lose its anti-democratic edge but it regains at least some liberal republican credential. What was presented by Morgenthau as a correction to the politics of liberal idealism in the most accessible and journalistic episodes of his writing, has had the unfortunate effect of covering up vast sections in his work and that of other Realists where the autonomy of foreign policy is required not merely to escape democratic control and populist manipulation, but also to create a terrain where *Sachwissen*, professional knowledge may become operational. The very notion, as we have seen, of such a *Sachwissen* amounts as much to a defense of a liberal theory of competencies and autonomies as it also becomes a challenge to – usually illusory – democratic control. The introduction of content into the image of the Self and the Other thus accomplishes a second fracturing of the universal sway of the Political: not only are pure relationality and the lack of means of restraint derivative of it superseded by a policy of yardsticks, the Political is also limited in its validity as the organizing principle of society. It is here that Williams' statement about Realism being a form of disenchanting liberalism starts finding support.

The consequences of reestablishing the validity of *Sachwissen* derivative of specific types of content which needs to be appropriated as knowledge are manifold. On a particularly theoretical level this can be shown to reintroduce the idea of a *Gesellschaft* in the place of the *Gemeinschaft*, society in the place of community as produced by the miracle of political decision. Since no universal code exists, plurality is reintroduced in the language, or rather, languages about human practice. More pointedly, language – dependent on content for referentiality – becomes possible once more. A language of the Political can hardly go beyond perfect tautologies: the us and the them, the us and the Other, the us and the enemy – any further elucidation requires content to be acknowledged as existing.

Taking up this point, the final movement of Realism's restatement and subversion of Schmittian theory and liberal thought alike begins with the possibility of speech as a means of communication. Two elements at least deserve special attention, the national interest and the balance of power as a managed system. The former, as it has been pointed out, once served as the common symbol by which Classical Realism was identified as a project or school of thought. Yet, over time, it has very much been covered up by the language of rational choice, having become almost a synonym for utility-maximization. While such an interpretation is certainly legitimate, it strips the term of its particular hermeneutic context, one which had a meaningful and instructive richness as regards to the whole of the Classical Realist undertaking.

Engaging in a hermeneutic of the term yields significant payoff. If we take the other most frequently quoted statement of Realism, equally from the *Six Principles* as proposed by Morgenthau, we learn – or rather, are reminded – that national interest needs to be defined in terms of power.⁴⁰ It is all too tempting to jump from here to the summary statement that the “meaning” of this phrase has to do with states being utility-maximizers and the perfectly fungible measure of utility in politics is power, the ability to bend others to our will. However, in a Schmittian context, the “interest determined in terms of power” means something else, as well. It contains a polemic against the idea that goals could include the annihilation of enemies by virtue of them being enemies and against any attempt to define the enemy through substantive characteristics. The goal of politics is power and maybe survival, but certainly not necessarily the elimination of the Other identified as enemy.

⁴⁰ Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations*, 5.

Schmitt's reasoning is further challenged here. Combat, the natural, because the only possible outcome of identifying the enemy in his universe (other than non-events) cannot be conceived of as self-constraining combat as long as no other modes of relating to the Other are available. In this context, the goal of politics can only be the elimination of the Other, unless an eternal state of exception is desirable (by no means impossible if one reads Schmitt's enthusiastic descriptions of the richness of experience in situations of exception).⁴¹ Power here is not only instrumental, it is an intermediary necessary from getting from A to B. Making power a goal in itself lifts the determinism from political processes: whatever maximizes relative power appears as the best strategy. This will – as history attests to it – often involve making friends with enemies or simply making peace when no more threat is present or when the cost of war exceeds the benefits. The doctrine of the national interest, thus, is revealed as incompatible with the Political, if defined in terms of power rather than in terms of the friend/enemy distinction.

IV. The Final Movement of Classical Realist Subversion as Tragic Grand Narrative

A further, more dialogical aspect of the referentiality of language in a universe made up of substantive actors is the possibility of communication in the international system. This is a crucial precondition to the replacing of the Political by politics, defined in this paper as the process of bargaining and reframing by self-interested actors. Inasmuch as Classical Realism is a political theory, it is certainly one that deals with politics rather than with the Political. So far, predominantly negative arguments have been presented, the single most important positive argument to this end is yet to be made. It concerns the balance of power as employed in realist discourse.

Since its forceful introduction into American foreign policy thinking, the balance of power has attracted considerable attention. Most importantly Ernst Haas and Inis B. Claude have sought to disentangle the layers of meaning bundled into the term, yet today neither interpretation seems adequate.⁴² More recently, Stefano Guzzini undertook a masterful analysis of what he termed the Morgenthau-Kaplan model of the balance of power, with his argument emphasizing the systemic nature of the balance of power as a natural phenomenon.⁴³ Not denying the merits of this approach with regard to establishing a common core to realist theorizing, it is nevertheless the analysis of Michael Smith that seems to best identify the crucial duality of the concept for specifically Classical Realist texts. The balance of power, according to Smith, refers on the one hand to the Weberian “iron law” according to which states will naturally counter hegemonic attempts, and permanently seek to change the balance according to their status quo or counter-status quo preferences. As it should be evident, the balance of power fails to make an appearance in Schmitt for obvious reasons: there is hardly a term which would be more opposed to the absolute categories of Schmitt thinking: balance implies degrees, small movements as well as larger swings, the measurement of which requires a register Schmitt's theology-inspired discourse simply does not possess.

But there is also a second reason why no theory of the Political could appropriate the balance of power concept. The second layer, according to Smith, involves the *management* of

⁴¹ Levinas, Emmanuel: *Totality and Infinity – An Essay on Exteriority*. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969. 198.

⁴² Inis B. Claude, *Power and International Relations*. Random House, 1962. Idem., “The balance of power revisited,” *Review of International Studies* 1989 (Vol. 15) pp. 75-89

⁴³ Stefano Guzzini, *Realism in International Relations and International Political Economy: The Continuing Story of a Death Foretold*. London: Routledge, 1998. 136.

the balance of power.⁴⁴ The iron law cannot be erased or suspended, but knowledge of it (especially shared knowledge) renders purposeful human action capable of mitigating the swings of power and the conflicts dissatisfaction with the balance of power brings about. It was about the possibilities of dealing with the balance of power that Classical Realist thought reached its apogee of analytic power and practical advice alike, in a terrain utterly beyond the grasp of a theory of the friend-enemy distinction. As one commentator pointed out, this implied the reversal of war doubling for politics in the theory of the Political to war becoming the continuation of politics by other means, the original Clausewitzian (and Realist) statement.

Why does the concept of the balance of power as a managed system imply such a reversal? First and foremost because it supposes joint management. Any unilateral attempt to optimize its functioning is doomed to fail, since being treated as the pure Other leaves little choice as to how to react to it. Joint management, however, implies communication among the parties which places them into a situation where shared meanings can emerge. The crucial and realistically attainable set of shared meanings according to most Classical Realism concerns the balance of power rather than other more explicit institutions because it requires only minimal shared assumptions and commitment only to the norm of resisting boundless power-maximization by virtue of the insight that absolute security is unattainable. If “absolute power for one country means absolute insecurity for all others” is realized as a neutral rule of pure logical operations it becomes predictable that all attempts at absolute security accomplish the very opposite since any cost associated with resisting such policies must be per definition smaller than or equal to accepting them.

In this form, the balance of power is less than an institutionalized norm, but also more and of a richer texture than pure decision. It is not unlike the liberal emphasis on process and discussion in a competitive situation, yet without the liberal *finalité* of unsuspendable regulations derived from it. It accepts Schmitt’s thesis that self-interested decisions are crucial for efficient policies, yet adds to this approach the *caveat* that the concept of interest is infinitely malleable and contingent upon the designs of other players in the system. Ideally, these designs can be both predicted and influenced, yielding limited cooperation. For Classical Realism, then, managing the balance of power functioned as the attainable political process of mitigating the conflicts inherent in the “modified Schmittian universe” of an anarchic system inhabited by qualified Others.

States as basic actors of international politics are not challenged by an image of the international system as a balance of power mechanism. Yet if the nature of interstate communication is to be substantively defined, a more fine-grained approach is needed. This is the analysis of diplomacy, so subtly accomplished by Classical Realist authors. According to this narrative, systemic balance of power, as an “iron law” compels great powers to join in arms races at the times of increased threat in the international system, while also looking for potential allies to counter imperialist powers or rising systemic hegemons. These actions comprise the “dynamic sense of balance of power” as “policies adopted by governments to maintain that condition.”⁴⁵ The precondition for the “ad hoc” formation of overwhelming coalitions was a “flexibility of policy, involving the capacity to switch the foci of friendship and enmity.”⁴⁶ This, however, presupposed a common motivation and interest in sustaining the balance of power as a diplomatic arrangement promising the benefit of softening or preventing security dilemmas. Realising this, “wise and experienced statesmen sh[ield] away from commitments likely to constitute limitations on a government’s behavior at unknown

⁴⁴ Smith, Ch. 4.

⁴⁵ Quincy Wright, *A Study Of War*. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1983) 116.

⁴⁶ Claude, *Power*, 129.; Wright: *Study of War*, 323.; Edward Vose Gulick, *Europe’s Classical Balance of Power: A Case History of the Theory and Practice of One of the Great Concepts of European Statecraft* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1982) 65-67.

dates in the future in the fall of unpredictable situations.”⁴⁷ As evident from these statements, the managed balance of power is as profoundly anti-Schmittian as any liberal idea – while also being tacitly opposed to stronger institutional designs of liberal idealism.

The greatest danger for the balance of power as a common policy stood, understandably, in the formation of rigid alignments that overruled the interests of states as beneficiaries of the joint arrangements demanding action against any rising hegemon. In this context, the French and Russian arrangement of 1893, called “endlessly unfortunate” by Kennan marked the beginning of the formation of rigid coalitions that prescribed unconditional support and thus eliminated moral concern and considerations of justice, replacing it with pure power politics.⁴⁸ The rigidity of the system became complete when Britain, the traditional balancer joined the Entente abandoning its policy of moderation pursued “throughout the nineteenth century.”⁴⁹ As a result, “by the end of the twentieth century’s first decade, the concert of Europe, which had maintained peace for a century had for all practical purposes ceased to exist. The Great Powers had thrown themselves with blind frivolity into a bipolar struggle that led to petrification into two power blocks, anticipating the pattern of the Cold War fifty years later.”⁵⁰

It is hard not to read into such argumentation the normative refusal to accept the friend/enemy distinction, posited as laying at the heart of the destruction brought on by the First World War. This bearing of the Classical Realist account of modern history is further accentuated by analyses of the more abstract and general trends underlying the catastrophe. Asking the question about these implies asking what the mysterious evil that caused balance of power diplomacy to be abandoned by the great powers was?⁵¹ Morgenthau, as other Classical Realists, observed a crucial transformation of the international system, claiming in *Politics among Nations* that “while the democratic selection and responsibility of government officials destroyed international morality as an effective system, nationalism destroyed the international society itself within which that morality operated.”⁵² This change has to be identified as the cause of the simultaneous lack of trust and interest in the international system of “managed balance of power” that supposedly prevented major war in the system since 1815.

Apart from eliminating potential alliances, thus contributing to polarization and systemic rigidity, nationalism and mass politics also resulted in the emergence of a totalising perspective on national roles in the international system. In an increasingly nationalistic environment, “[t]hrough all the nations of Europe contributed to the disaster with their policies, it was Germany and Russia which undermined any sense of restraint by their very natures.” Nationalism transpired also into the military, which in turn found “uncritical and implicit sanction” in their respective national public, producing “deep, powerful currents upon which the nations were carried, unaware and unsuspecting, to the tragedies of 1914-1918.”⁵³

Offered here is nothing less than a specific historical narrative of the Political coming to dominate politics. Morgenthau is perhaps the most explicit in this perspective: his statements imply a clear structure: managed balance of power is the superstructure over the raw fields of

⁴⁷ George F. Kennan, *The Fateful Alliance: France, Russia and the Coming of the First World War* (New York: Pantheon, 1984) 238.; Osgood and Tucker, 61.

⁴⁸ Kennan, *Fateful Alliance*, xiii.

⁴⁹ Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 176.

⁵⁰ Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 168.

⁵¹ Jack S. Levy, “Preferences, Constraints and Choices in July 1914”, *International Security* 15/3 (1990/91) 154.

⁵² Morgenthau, PaN.; 254.; Benjamin Wong, “Hans Morgenthau’s Anti-Machiavellian Machiavellianism”, *Millennium* 29 (2000) 396. Niebuhr, *Moral Man*, 94.

⁵³ Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 169. Arnold Wolfers, “The Goals of Foreign Policy”, In Idem, *Discord and Collaboration: Essays on International Politics*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965²) 67-80.; Kissinger, *Diplomacy*, 170

the Political, tempering and harnessing the forces inherent in anarchic international politics. The Political can triumph only by making politics impossible – this means eliminating diplomacy as a means of producing shared meaning. This is accomplished cognitively by nationalisms seeking to identify enemies according to the logic of the Political and historically by “frozen” alliances which must per definition be contrary to the national interest. Kissinger’s argument is slightly different. He perceives Weltpolitik as more profoundly imperialist, putting more of the blame on Germany than Morgenthau’s account. Yet his logic is not very different: it is still the discarding of deliberation for a single-minded policy in which Great Britain and France can only function as the enemy that ruptures the diplomacy of the 19th century. In both accounts, as in those of other Realists, the historical instances of leaders seeking to reinforce communities and their hold on power rhyme clearly with Schmitt’s triumphalist accounts of the sovereign decision refounding the political community by virtue of identifying the enemy. The major difference is that what Schmitt described in mythical-positive terms, Classical Realism deplored as the elimination of the precondition for politics.

In the Classical Realist reading, the era of nationalism and mass politics highlighted with poignancy the squandering of the early modern heritage of aristocratic-rationalist politics. As the Austrian émigré Charles Gulick, himself an exile of nationalism, wrote, with obvious nostalgia:

one of the many services provided by this period of Indian Summer is to illustrate for us more clearly the difference of our nation-state diplomacy from the classical diplomacy. ... Wars were limited, fought for provinces and followed by negotiated, and not dictated, peace treaties. There was a certain universalism in the concept of Europe in the recognition of the historical state, as opposed to the more modern and unhistorical nation-state; the passionate middle-class patriot had little place in this cold-hearted and aristocratic world of mathematical observers and analysts.⁵⁴

Gulick’s remarks rested on Niebuhr’s distinction between an especially adept, qualified political minority and the ignorant masses who intrude into the previously autonomous sphere of foreign policy.⁵⁵ This supposedly autonomous sphere had been run, according to the Classical Realist master narrative, by the Weberian “true politician” with a “personal knowledge of the tragedy with which all action, but especially political action is truly interwoven.”⁵⁶ The realisation of the tragic duality of the nature of man and of international politics imbued the true politician with both a sense of restraint and of freedom. He restrained himself inasmuch as he could predict the responses of other states to his actions, and retained in this his freedom due to his ability to transcend pure power politics in assuming the task of systemic caretaking.⁵⁷

That there is indeed a hard core of poetics structuring realist discourses has been highlighted in the past by several studies. Classical Realism is usually interpreted as resting upon the realisation of the fundamental conflict between system and man, or, in philosophical terms, between man’s drives (nature) and spirit (human ideals). This realisation is attributed

⁵⁴ Gulick, 309.

⁵⁵ Niebuhr, *Moral Man*, 87.

⁵⁶ Hans H. Gerth, and C. Wright Mills, eds., *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (Oxford – New York: Oxford University Press, 1965²) 116-117.

⁵⁷ Henry A. Kissinger, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace, 1812-22* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957) 172-177.; For the roots of the idea of self-restraint and freedom cf. Carl Schmitt, *Political Romanticism* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1986) 116.; as well as Smith’s discussion of the recurrence of Weber’s concept of responsibility in Realist thought. (Smith, 200.)

by Classical Realists a “privileged ontological status,” on the basis of which other theorising is subjected to fierce criticism.⁵⁸

This duality can legitimately be described as tragic, inasmuch as the tragic is taken to rest on the realisation that “the spheres of reason, order, and justice are terribly limited and that no progress in any science or technical resources will enlarge their significance. Outside and within man is l’autre, the ‘otherness’ of the world.” Tragedy, of course, supposes the impossibility of redemption. While Classical Realism may rest on Niebuhr’s Augustinian morality, it is itself thoroughly secular, leaving no explicit hope of redemption, as the example of the end of diplomacy and the eruption of the First World War demonstrate. This restores the tragic character of the narrative, since the most man can achieve is to become “ennobled by the vengeful spite or injustice of the gods. It does not make him innocent (no redemption), but it hallows him as if he had passed through flame.”⁵⁹

In recounting the tragic story in the mode of diplomatic history, Classical Realism completed its rereading and partial subversion of Carl Schmitt. History, as the ultimate argument, stood to educate the present about the dangers of succumbing to the Political, in the sense of making absolute the friend-enemy distinction and abandoning the concept of interest defined in terms of power.

V. Instead of a Conclusion: The Incompleteness of Realist Subversion

The above analysis sought to highlight a number of interconnected distinguishing features between Schmitt’s late Weimar texts and Classical Realist thought. These distinctions are very significant, yet they could be also abused – notably by using references to them with the subtext of the negating important shared arguments that characterized Schmitt as much as Realists. For this reason, the concluding section attempts to present two lines of thought: first, as a summary, the differences identified in the previous part of the paper are traced to an ethical discourse rooted in shared meanings and reciprocity, while subsequently the question of to what extent the accepted Schmittian bases of international politics constrain ethical action in international politics is also asked. In the course of answering these questions Realism is revealed as an ethical enterprise which – due to its antiutopian inspiration – selects to hold on to the key building block of Schmitt’s analysis, sovereignty, which creates a tension within the master text of Realist thought about the realm of international relations and chooses to fall back on the discourse of sovereignty whenever the tension threatens to break up the coherence of reasoning. In its deep structure, therefore, Realism excludes the real possibility of thinking transformation not so much because it fails to detect the vehicle and agents of change in international relations, but because any reasoning to this effect is checked by an initial commitment to not thinking about how constraints on sovereignty can function.

The analysis of the previous section amounts to the claim that Realism, like much modern political thought in the humanist tradition including that of Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas, is also a normative discourse rooted in the assumption of the possibility of communication and self-consciousness that can rise above the basic procedures of othering as described in the parts on Lordship and Bondage in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. This is certainly one of the great philosophical routes to take when seeking to identify a way to escape the predicaments of the state of nature, and, being linked to the capacity of the human mind to overcome itself through knowing the Other, is fundamentally opposed to accounts where the state of nature is not overcome, but at most is mitigated or displaced by a narrative about how necessity drives rational actors to work out protective schemes in the state of nature without transcending it. This latter line of thought is what famously provides the

⁵⁸ Smith, 127.

⁵⁹ Steiner, *Death of Tragedy*, 8-9.

philosophical starting point for Realism and the humanist colouring Realist discourse receives through its gaze directed at transformationist and transcendentalist political philosophy – at the poetics of overcoming the predicaments of nature – is bound to generate tension.

Christian imperfectionism, highlighted by Smith and Murray among others as providing the basic logic to contain this tension by its reference to the possibility of ethical action in a world where good and evil both reside, proposed the maxim of acting morally by measuring alternative outcomes and making choices based on these. Such choices may prove to be tragic, requiring the sacrifice of human life or lesser maxims, but consciousness of such tragedy only educates about the importance of careful moral consideration, rather than suspending the validity of ethics in politics. A practical response to the predicament of living in such an imperfect world espoused by Realism is the renunciation of boundless transformationism (identified as integral to liberal idealism by Morgenthau and others) which incidentally opens up the possibility of cooperation. Acting as if I were not in the truth is a precondition to creating shared meanings, making reciprocity possible in interaction. In practical terms, Realism accepted a minimalist version of reciprocity (refusing the risks taken by Buber and others, feasible in philosophy yet far too great in politics), focusing only on the reciprocity of the validity of the national interest, for which the precondition is the renunciation of systemic transformation on the part of all actors. In this sense, Realism made acceptance of what is, of the status quo, a preconditions for the functioning of its vision of politics.

Based on the reciprocity of the renunciation of total transformationist and expansionist action, moderation (letting be) appears as an alternative to the friend/enemy distinction. Such moderation creates the minimal level of communality required for politics as process and deliberation to come into being. In the last end, if politics as process and deliberation is permitted to function, platforms may emerge about what constitutes acceptable change in the system, the reasonable dynamics of compensation and correction. Were these platforms not to emerge, the notion of the Other being not the enemy of pure relationality, but some substantive Other which by virtue of its content cannot be pure difference in relation to the Self still obtains. This renders even war truly the continuation of politics by other means, rather than the life-and-death struggle of Schmitt's universe (and Hegel's account of primitive self-consciousness).

It is at this point that the conflict between Schmitt and Classical Realism is the most pointed. The image of the world that allows "existential difference" – ultimate difference of pre-determined otherness – but is nevertheless defined exclusively in terms of relationality hovers between pure determinism and pure decisionism. In Schmitt's universe the idea that the enemy can be identified through decision brings freedom and necessity to a common denominator. Since very little of the motivation of the decision about the enemy can be known, this decision at once reaffirm a world of necessity that cannot be changed and a world of vital experience which is lived in freedom through the practice of othering.

Compared to this, Classical Realism is indeed starkly different. Assuming content of the Other eliminates both perfect freedom and perfect determinism, one derivative of lack of difference, the other of absolute difference. This is an alternative argument for the one proposed by Lebow who argues in a similar vein that ethics are not only instrumentally important, but that it is impossible to formulate interests intelligently outside of some language of justice'.⁶⁰ This is just what this paper has been chiefly concerned with: showing why the assumption of content at once makes possible and requires ethical action, and how any interest which is not directly defined by the elimination of unqualified otherness must necessarily become ethical. Yet highlighting this distinction may easily direct attention away from the consequences of the Realist insistence on the Schmittian sovereign state, currently

⁶⁰ Lebow, 16.

retained in social science discourse as the unitary actor assumption. The concept of sovereignty, however, contains far more than this. As the vehicle of producing a unitary actor, it implies certain procedures which have an obvious bearing on society and politics.

The concept of sovereignty in Schmitt is inextricably linked up with the concept of the Political. The sovereign, in fact, seems to depend on the Political and the exception to function as such – were these removed from the universe, no sovereign action would be possible. The actor whose actorness consists in its capability to take decisions of a Political nature cannot be conceptualized without acknowledging its field of activity. Yet if this is so, what is one to make of the dual nature of the diplomat in Realist thinking? The diplomat, as has been shown, can only succeed by virtue of certain shared assumptions, not the least of adopting a systemic perspective peculiarly reminiscent of the systemic perspective of Realist authors themselves. True, diplomacy as a practice is aimed realizing the national interest yet this interest itself is conceived in terms that render it unviable unless the interest is firmly embedded into the sustenance of the system itself. The very central precondition for a policy of the national interest, the lack of fixed images of the enemy, in itself requires rising above the national perspective so as to not confuse conflict over aims with life-and-death struggle. Also, it is only in a systemic perspective, enabled by the practice of reciprocity of recognition, that shared meanings can exist – this is exactly the type of shared sets of meaning that, in the Realist reading, modern nationalism so aggressively challenges around 1900.

The net result of these is that diplomacy – imbued with positive connotations through and through – is moved away from the semantic pole of the sovereign state, closer to the pole of the international system/society (a term which, as has been shown, Morgenthau was not averse to using). This movement generated considerable tension in Realist thought. What is identified as required to temper the Political, ideally to replace it with politics is not conceived exclusively in terms of the sovereign state but in terms of a superstructure that possesses its own logic, discourse and norms. At the same time, the sovereign state remains the preferred actor as far as action in the system is considered in the abstract. Such sovereign states may eschew diplomacy, becoming imperialist aggressors, seeking to radically alter the balance of power. And, in fact, that what is – the status quo – , as conceded by Morgenthau, is by no means a neutral system but the product of previous successful imperialist policy.

With this concession, the very notion of diplomacy is thoroughly undermined. What is presented on the one hand as the practice of the politics of restraint is at the same time conceded to be something like a fragile *nomos* of the sovereign/hegemon extended over the system. The same will that creates the tyranny of *nomos* in domestic politics generates a less legalized, nevertheless equally arbitrary order. The status quo, then, is but the limit of the power of successful states in an institutionalized form.

This aporia between the autonomy of diplomatic culture and the origins of the status quo is reminiscent of the scene in Nietzsche's *Gay Science* where the shepherd is seen paralyzed on the ground, with a serpent in his mouth. Solution requires radical action. "Bite it off"! – cries the author, urging the shepherd to take a sovereign existential decision of sorts. It seems that to escape the paralysis of Realist thought, radical action is needed, as well. Either the serpent (rather, the serpent's head) must go, or the shepherd must face torment and debilitation for good. In this perspective, the radical step Realist thought never made was thinking sovereignty as obstacle, decoupling it from diplomacy and opening the way for ordering the international system purely deliberatively. This would have implied an adoption of liberal politics through and through, yet not of the politics of much criticized "liberal uploading", rather the liberalism of pluralism, the extension of domestic *practice*, not of domestic *identity*, to the international system. Yet Realism never conceived of such a liberal politics – it remained caught up in the image of liberalism generated by Schmitt and others as a simultaneously naïve and devilish ideology seeking to eradicate the capacity of communities

to translate their identities into practice. As such extension was never considered, no theoretical possibility of transforming international practice was opened up.

Carl Schmitt was, undoubtedly, a thinker of epochal significance, all the more chilling to consider in view of his convictions. His sway, as a sure sign of ingenuity and significance, extends over those who sought to confront him and, as the example of radical democrats like Chantal Mouffe proves, still extends over those whom Schmitt would have most despised. The word is no accident: the theory and practice of very real and brutal exclusion and violence at least the middle-aged Schmitt (if not the young Catholic and the old retired professor) proposed constitute the very heart of the problem of engaging his insights. Under such circumstances, it is to be expected that those with a practical experience of the consequences of Schmitt's vision of the sovereign state founded on the exception would search for ways to retain parts of his thinking while eliminating problematic components. One person who grappled with this dilemma was Hannah Arendt, a philosopher who deemed Schmitt about as dangerous a mind as did Morgenthau, arguing in her book on totalitarianism that practicing the logic of sovereignty does lead to the total state. Her choice, roughly speaking, was that of abandoning sovereignty to reshape a concept of the political more amenable to democratic social life, resulting in the extension of the capacity for political action to all citizens and culminating in her visions of the Greek polis and revolution as permanent states of fertile, yet ideally peaceful political exception. Another route was taken by international political theory of the national interest school: here the exception was requalified as tragedy, and, with sovereignty as a key concept retained, the question was raised about how the Political may be replaced by politics.⁶¹

As Realist texts attest to it, the most such reasoning can propose is an eternal calm before the storm, with the Damoclean sword hanging above the practice of politics as deliberation in the fragile framework called diplomacy. Beyond the conceptual contradiction such a vision harbours, it is of special importance in the age, according to Giorgio Agamben, of the becoming permanent of the exception and of the war on terror as forceful evidence to Agamben's late 90's premonition to come to terms with such a vision. An analysis of it seems to problematize the recent trend of theorizing Realist wisdom as an antidote to the domination of the ultrapolitical and anti-diplomacy. As mentioned in the introduction, realists and constructivists/reflexivists alike have engaged in the reconstruction of realism as a challenge to the ultrapolitical – with ample reason, as this paper tried to argue through the comparison with Schmitt.⁶² Yet any such enterprise will inevitably bring up problematic issues, not the least of which is whether there is an intellectual possibility in Realism to escape the sovereign decision which can arbitrarily identify the enemy and thus as much create as realize the looming danger – the exception. The concluding section of this paper sought to suggest that this may be beyond the reach of Realist thought: this is, perhaps, the second, more hidden, tragedy of (theorizing in terms of) power politics. Unless the radical act of biting off the serpent's head, of thinking diplomacy without sovereignty, is accomplished, it seems that no world can be conceptualized in which Schmitt's logic does not prevail ultimately. Just as – in Agamben's view – the *nomos* of the state upholds the exception through institutions, any status quo is bound to remain tied up to its genesis rooted in power politics. Lest such status quos be redesigned so as to incorporate deliberation into the very core of their existence (something Realists shied away from considering) it is potentially impossible to escape the

⁶¹ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*. Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1958. 7., 183., 226., Idem, *On Revolution*. New York, Viking. 221-222., Mark Button, „Arendt, Rawls and Public Reason“, *Social Theory and Practice* 31. (2005) 257-280., Tuija Pulkkinen, „Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Philosophy“ *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 28. (2003) 215-232., Jeffrey Isaac, *Arendt, Camus and Modern Rebellion*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992. 228.

⁶² Huysmans

logic of exception – a logic which, contemporary evidence suggests, may be harder to control than Classical Realism thought.