

# Katechon Over Acheron: Carl Schmitt's Ambivalence and the Sovereignty of Exception

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**ÖZET** Carl Schmitt'in önemini ve meydan okumasını anlayabilmek için onu umursamamaktan veya sorgusuz sualsiz benimsemekten kaçınmak gerekir. Bir başka deyişle, Schmitt'in düşüncesindeki *müphemlik*, onun çalışmalarını tamamen reddetme veya koşulsuz kabul etme şeklindeki tutumların aynı kör noktada buluşmasını sağlıyor. Schmitt'in, Zygmunt Bauman'ın formüle ettiği 'modernitenin müphemliği' mefhumunu yansıttığı ölçüde, modern bir kuramcı, hatta bir modernite kuramcısı olduğu söylenebilir. Bauman'ın bu mefhumuna göre, modernite düzen ve kaosun iki kutupluluğundan ibarettir. 'Düzen-kaos' ikiliğinin Schmitt'in eserlerindeki yansımaları, hem 'egemenlik-istisna' geriliminde, hem de mitolojik-teolojik bir çerçevede ele alınan *Katechon* ve *Acheron* terimlerinde görmek mümkündür. Bu makalede, özellikle egemenlik ve istisna arasındaki ilişki kapsamında, Schmitt'in kuramının temel gerilimi 'Acheron'a kapılan Katechon' mefhumuyla ifade edilecek. Daha sonra, bu genel gerilimin Schmitt'in 1963 yılında yayımlanan eseri *Partizan Teorisi*'ndeki izleri gözden geçirilecek. Bu eserin altbaşlığının da gösterdiği gibi ("siyasal kavramı üzerine bir yorum/not"), *Partizan Teorisi*'nin eleştirisi okuru doğrudan ABD'nin tek kutuplu hâkimiyeti ve teröre karşı savaşı bağlamında dost-düşman ayrımının sorunsallaştırılmasına yönlendirecek

**ANAHTAR KELİMELEER** Carl Schmitt, egemenlik, istisnai durum, Katechon, Acheron, partizan.

**ABSTRACT** The options of disregarding or embracing Carl Schmitt must be avoided in order to appreciate his significance and challenge. In other words, the *ambivalence* embedded in Schmitt's thought makes sure that its being disregarded or embraced will be obstructed by the same blind spot. Carl Schmitt is a *modern* theorist, or rather, a theorist of *modernity*, to the extent that his theory was a simulacrum of the ambivalence of modernity as formulated by Zygmunt Bauman: modernity as the bipolarity of order and chaos. In Schmitt's work, the 'order-chaos' dichotomy finds its reflection in the 'sovereignty-exception' tension which is also represented in theological-mythical terms as *Katechon* and *Acheron*. In this essay, the central tension in Schmitt's corpus—especially with respect to the relation between sovereignty and exception—will be depicted in the notion of 'Katechon Over Acheron.' Then, this overarching Schmittian ambivalence will be traced in Schmitt's 1963 book *The Theory of the Partisan*. As its subtitle suggests ("a commentary/remark on the concept of the political"), a review of this book will directly lead to a problematization of the friend-enemy distinction in light of the unipolar supremacy of the US and the war against terror.

**KEYWORDS** Carl Schmitt, sovereignty, exception, Katechon, Acheron, partisan.

*"I find myself constantly between two abysses,  
I walk always between being and nothingness."*<sup>1</sup>

## AGAINST THE 'GENTLE COMPULSION' OF LIBERALISM

This essay will try to demonstrate that Carl Schmitt's theory of sovereignty and the political does not allow any of his serious critical readers to *disregard* it for having ines-

1. Louis Gabriel Ambroise de Bonald quoted by Carl Schmitt in Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty* [translated by George Schwab; foreword by Tracy B. Strong] (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005).

capable fascist undertones or *embrace* it for what it is not, that is, a politically empowering account that can challenge global hegemonic power represented by today's US.

"Take it or leave it" is not the way to approach Carl Schmitt's work. Nevertheless, there are various degrees of being for or against Schmitt. The main determinant is undoubtedly his Nazi Party membership. For some, this is the final verdict of history against Schmitt's theory—in which case turning a deaf ear to what Schmitt has to say becomes just another ceremonial occasion for decrying the crimes of the Nazi regime.

A slightly lower level of condemnation is expressed by the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas who portrays "Carl Schmitt to be the emblem of the wrong way of thinking about politics."<sup>2</sup> For Habermas, Schmitt's conception of the political as the ability to distinguish between friend and enemy can only be actualized by the existence of sovereign nation-states asserting themselves through homogenized collective identities, hence their uncompromising belligerence as exemplified in the extreme by the historical lesson of National Socialism.

On the other side of the spectrum of responses to Schmitt, Chantal Mouffe, an important figure of the New Left, sees Carl Schmitt as 'one of the most brilliant and intransigent opponents of liberalism' whose thought is the indispensable cure for the deteriorating aspects of contemporary liberal-democratic hegemony. For Mouffe, "it is the intellectual force of theorists, not their moral qualities, that should be the decisive criteria in deciding whether we need to establish a dialogue with their work."<sup>3</sup>

On the whole, the issue of facing or effacing Schmitt boils down to an evaluation of liberalism. The attitude epitomized by Habermas stresses the point that the *peacefulness* of liberalism is threatened by the Schmittian discourse. Rational consensus insured by liberal rights must be the common ground where all concerned with the future of global politics meet. Others insist on the *violence* of liberalism. The oxymoronic notion of 'gentle compulsion' deployed by Habermas as the mighty right of liberalism to extend its universal values to the 'non-well-ordered peoples' of the world is the harbinger of a seemingly apolitical, 'peaceful' imperialism.<sup>4</sup> The very recent 'liberation' of countries like Afghanistan and Iraq in the disturbing guise of the Orwellian 1984 slogan 'WAR IS PEACE' forces liberal universalism to belie the gentleness of its compulsion. And as war looms large under the aegis of real enmities, Schmitt is bound to occupy our political vocabulary in a confident manner.

2. Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003), p.53.

3. Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp.4-5.

4. William Rasch, "Human Rights as Geopolitics: Carl Schmitt and the Legal Form of American Supremacy," *Cultural Critique*, No. 54 (Spring 2003), p.140.

## AMBIVALENCE: 'WITHOUT CHAOS, NO ORDER'

The options of disregarding or embracing Carl Schmitt are not only limited but also to be avoided in order to appreciate his significance and challenge. In other words, the *ambivalence* embedded in Schmitt's thought makes sure that its being disregarded or embraced will be obstructed by the same blind spot. Shedding light on this blind spot is the aim of this study.

As Gopal Balakrishnan says in the introduction to his impressive work on Schmitt, "Those who still insist on adopting the role of either prosecutor or defence attorney in discussing Schmitt can, I hope, be convinced that there are far more interesting issues involved."<sup>5</sup> I carry the same hope, not to convince the reader that Schmitt felt mistaken or betrayed by his own decisions regarding Nazism. Although Carl Schmitt himself might not have been politically ambivalent at critical times—excepting himself from Bonald's gaping, abyssal in-betweenness in favour of a determinate stasis of being—his theoretical legacy is nothing but a knot of ambivalence, the eternal untying of the tie between order and chaos. Accordingly, Carl Schmitt is a *modern* theorist, or rather, a theorist of *modernity*, to the extent that his theory was a simulacrum of the ambivalence of modernity as formulated by Zygmunt Bauman:

"We can say that the existence is modern in as far as it forks into order and chaos. The existence is modern in as far as it contains the *alternative* of order and chaos.

Indeed: order and *chaos*, full stop. [...] Order as a concept, as a vision, as a purpose could not be conceived but for the insight into the total ambivalence, the randomness of chaos. Order is continuously engaged in the war of survival. The other of order is not another order: chaos is its only alternative. The other of order is the miasma of the indeterminate and unpredictable. The other is uncertainty, that source and archetype of all fear. The tropes of 'the other of order' are: undefinability, incoherence, incongruity, incompatibility, illogicality, irrationality, ambiguity, confusion, undecidability, ambivalence.

[...] But the negativity of chaos is a product of order's self-constitution: its side-effect, its waste, and yet the condition *sine qua non* of its (reflective) possibility. Without the negativity of chaos, there is no positivity of order; without chaos, no order."<sup>6</sup>

In a sense, Carl Schmitt was the personification of this interpretation of modernity, of modernity as the bipolarity of order and chaos.

5. Gopal Balakrishnan, *The Enemy: An Intellectual Portrait of Carl Schmitt* (London: Verso, 2000), p.1.

6. Zygmunt Bauman in Peter Beilharz (ed.) *The Bauman Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), pp.285-286 (original emphases).

The fact that history, sooner or later, disproves the legitimacy and relevance of both Schmitt's own and other sovereign decisions does not change the much bitter fact that these decisions are being constantly made to the extent that they are in effect matters of life and death. Carl Schmitt, the sovereign theorist, puts before us an alluring chance to decide, not between refuting and accepting, but about how to deal with the permanent state of exception employed by the global war against terrorism. The epigram by William James quoted in Andrew Norris's essay on Carl Schmitt's political metaphysics is to the point: "'Do not decide, but leave the question open,' is itself a passional decision—just like deciding yes or no—and is attended with the same risk of losing the truth."<sup>7</sup> Carl Schmitt did not leave us with answers, but lent us some arresting questions. And the risk of losing *any* perception of a definite truth in answering those questions is nothing more than the open acknowledgement of the ambivalence of sovereignty and the political. What Giorgio Agamben, a vivid interpreter of Schmitt, calls "[t]he idea of an inner solidarity between democracy and totalitarianism"<sup>8</sup> must be cautiously advanced in order to grasp the constitutive bond between order and chaos, especially in today's conjuncture characterized by the total and illiberal moulding of the political in the service of a simultaneously depoliticizing and policing US-led liberal (at least rhetorically liberal) sovereignty.

The rest of this essay will basically elaborate the structure of its title. First, the theological-mythical terms *Katechon* and *Acheron* will be explicated in order to account for the central tension in Schmitt's corpus<sup>9</sup>—especially with respect to the relation between sovereignty and exception—which will be depicted in the notion of "Katechon Over Acheron." Then, this overarching Schmittian ambivalence will be traced in Schmitt's 1963 book *The Theory of the Partisan*. As its subtitle suggests ('a commentary/remark on the concept of the political'), a review of this book will directly lead to a problematization of the friend-enemy distinction in light of the unipolar supremacy of the US and the current war against terror.

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7. Andrew Norris, "Carl Schmitt's Political Metaphysics: On the Secularization of 'the Outermost Sphere,'" *Theory and Event*, 4/1 (Summer 2000), §3.

8. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), p.10.

9. I refer to *Schmitt's corpus*, not because I claim to account for the continuities in his every single work, but rather because I am in agreement with Gopal Balakrishnan's comprehensive analysis of Schmitt's intellectual portrait which interprets the ambivalence at work in Schmitt's political theory as a continuous tension: "When his work is reconstructed in a chronological sequence, a pattern emerges in which he repeatedly returned to the same problems, while continually oscillating between ultimately irreconcilable stances when it came to solutions" (Gopal Balakrishnan, *The Enemy*, p.5).

*KATECHON: RESTRAINING 'THE SPIRIT OF UTOPIA'*

Katechon is an early Christian figure mentioned in St. Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians (Chapter 2; Verses 6, 7). Following Balakrishnan's account, the function of this letter was to let the Thessalonians know that the end of the world was not nigh. Those in Thessalonika who thought that the apocalypse was soon to occur began to live carefree, hence sinful lives. St. Paul, however, warned that the expectations of the Thessalonians were meaningless, because before the final battle between Christ (good) and 'the lawless one' (evil), Katechon—which in Greek literally means the 'restrainer'—will hold back the lawless one. The second coming of Christ will only take place after Katechon is destroyed and the lawless one is fully revealed for the ultimate confrontation. According to Balakrishnan, "Paul sought to convince those in Thessalonika who were preparing themselves for an apocalypse in which the powers of this world would be cast down that in truth the Roman Empire under Claudius was the force holding back the evil powers of the cosmos."<sup>10</sup>

What was the political significance of Katechon for Schmitt? Schmitt's 'anti-Judaism'<sup>11</sup> provides the answer to this question. What made the diasporic Jews despicable for Schmitt was their firm belief in 'the awaited Messiah' and "a utopian 'New Jerusalem.'" Authentic Christianity in Schmitt's view was invaluable precisely because it had no room for utopia. Its 'anti-utopian eschatological vision of history' did not allow for a 'this-worldly kingdom of peace,' because such an allowance was the reason why the Jews can easily consider "the role of religion in the states under which they lived in coldly instrumental terms."<sup>12</sup> Therefore, for Schmitt, what was lacking in Judaism was reverence for order in general and the sovereign authority of the state in particular. This political-theological concern was the main reason behind Schmitt's sad comment to a young companion called Nicolaus Sombart: "From 1789 it seemed to be decided that the leading cultural nations answered the question of the meaning of history in terms of Judaism."<sup>13</sup> Such a concern was also in line with Schmitt's interpretation of the 'residually Christian' Hobbes. This point is clearly articulated by Balakrishnan:

10. Gopal Balakrishnan, *The Enemy*, p.224.

11. The use of the term 'anti-Judaism' instead of 'anti-Semitism' is to emphasize the fact that Schmitt's opposition to the Jews seems to stem from his political-theological concerns rather than 'simple' racial hatred. Yet one must be wary of such a distinction, because, as Tracy B. Strong in her foreword to *Political Theology* notes, "[i]n practice, certainly in the Third Reich, one could not be opposed to Judaism without being opposed to Jews" (Tracy B. Strong in Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology*, p.xxix).

12. Gopal Balakrishnan, *The Enemy*, pp.221-223.

13. Carl Schmitt quoted in Gopal Balakrishnan, *The Enemy*, p.223.

“Schmitt saw himself as Hobbes’s kindred spirit, because he believed that he, like Hobbes, had struggled to preserve a residually Christian moment in his conception of political order. If Messianic expectations were not to sink into ‘the spirit of utopia’ [as they did in Judaism], salvation had to be a distant light on the horizon. In this world men must live in fear and insecurity—not because, as Hobbes thought, this was simply the human condition, but because fear and insecurity were the pre-conditions of political virtue.”<sup>14</sup>

So much for Schmitt’s being the ‘Hobbes of the Twentieth Century.’<sup>15</sup> Katechon was necessary because it was the answer to those fears that called forth an orderly political existence. It symbolized a deferred apocalypticism which ensured that no one expected their salvation for the wrong reasons; because if they did, chaos would reign. For Schmitt, Judaism was the contemporary signifier of chaos, that is, the ‘lawless’ (and fearless) adherence to a taken-for-granted utopian prophecy, that “ancient spirit of criticism and rebellion which had reappeared in the modern world in the unruly force fields of civil society.”<sup>16</sup> Additionally, Katechon allayed Schmitt’s fears regarding revolutionary movements by “holding the existing world, the *status quo*, in place.”<sup>17</sup> In this sense, the pressing question is: Was National Socialism a Katechon for Schmitt? At this point, a full-blown manifestation of Carl Schmitt’s ambivalence—the central theme of this study—will be revealed.

#### THE RULE OF EXCEPTION: ‘REAL LIFE’ BREAKS THROUGH

Through Balakrishnan, we learn that “[i]n a 1942 essay [...], it is the force struggling to *break through*, not the force which *restrains* this, which is portrayed positively [by Schmitt]. Indeed the term ‘Katechon’ is applied to those who would prop up an unsalvageable *status quo*.”<sup>18</sup> How to make sense of this differential treatment of Katechon? Does Carl Schmitt’s theoretical inquisitiveness fail when it comes to conceptualize National Socialism? Is this the symptom of his political opportunism for which he was often blamed, or an instance of bearing with chaos insofar as it is directed against a clearly

14. Gopal Balakrishnan, *The Enemy*, p.223.

15. George Schwab in Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology*, p.xl. An important reminder by Balakrishnan: “In his reflections on Hobbes, Schmitt simply ignored the Englishman’s relentless, ‘this-worldly’ materialism” (Gopal Balakrishnan, *The Enemy*, p.223).

16. Gopal Balakrishnan, *The Enemy*, p.222.

17. Gopal Balakrishnan, *The Enemy*, p.225.

18. Gopal Balakrishnan, *The Enemy*, p.293 (emphasis added).

defined enemy? Why is the Katechon both desirable and dispensable, depending on political contingencies? What is the exception to the rule that is the Katechon?

“Sovereign is he who decides on the exception.”<sup>19</sup> This single statement is perhaps Schmitt’s most intensive one insofar as it represents the pedestal of ambivalence on which his political theory stands. The statement itself is structured on a tension as its first and final terms name the two poles of Schmitt’s thought: sovereignty *vis-à-vis* exception. Carl Schmitt is mesmerized by the exception. He is in complete agreement with the Protestant theologian Søren Kierkegaard: “the general is not thought about with passion but with a comfortable superficiality. The exception, on the other hand, thinks the general with intense passion.”<sup>20</sup> In Schmitt’s words, “[t]he exception is more interesting than the rule. The rule proves nothing; the exception proves everything: It confirms not only the rule but also its existence, which derives only from the exception. In the exception the power of real life *breaks through* the crust of a mechanism that has become torpid by repetition.”<sup>21</sup> And, “sovereign is he who decides on the exception.”<sup>22</sup>

What is crucial here is that there is no pre-defined sovereign that can decide on the exception before the exception defines itself, before the exception decides itself into existence. The concrete reality of the state of exception—the time when no rule applies, that space which no norm can legalize—is precisely its undecidability, its irrationality, its ambivalence. Sovereignty, hence sovereign decision, is meaningless without the exception. It is only through the exception that any claim to sovereignty can be made, not *vice versa*. Paradoxically, it is only through the appreciation of the sovereignty of exception that any sovereignty can flourish. The exception (chaos/breakthrough) is the reason why the rule (order/restraint) exists. Without chaos, no order. Without exception, no sovereign.

So, the question of why Schmitt didn’t see any problem in holding back Katechon, restraining the restrainer, in order to give way to the Nazi breakthrough does not have an answer, precisely because “‘restraining’ and ‘breaking through’ [...] are the poles of an oscillation, a restless movement without synthesis,” symptomatic of Schmitt’s “tension-ridden political Project.”<sup>23</sup> “National Socialism had demonstrated [the] historical impossibility” of putting this political tension into practice,<sup>24</sup> and Schmitt had tried to give his

19. Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology*, p.5.

20. Søren Kierkegaard in Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology*, p.15.

21. Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology*, p.15 (emphasis added).

22. Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology*, p.5.

23. Gopal Balakrishnan, *The Enemy*, p.225.

24. Gopal Balakrishnan, *The Enemy*, p.225.

innately ambivalent theory a coherent form which could (and did) only find its concrete shape in the camp.<sup>25</sup> The Schmittian theory belies the idea of coherence; because ‘the power of real life’ *always breaks through* any coherence and sustains its inherent ambivalence; because real life is anything but coherent. In this sense, *the Schmittian theory is so extremely exceptional that every rule—even the ones to be formulated by Schmitt himself—entails the possibility of their own suspension.*

#### ACHERONTA MOVERE: POLITICAL TIGHTROPING ON THE BORDER OF HELL

Virgil’s famous saying ‘*flectere si nequeo superos, Acheronta movebo*’ (‘If I cannot deflect the will of Heaven, I will move Hell’) can be easily applied to Schmitt’s futile expectation that the ambivalent poles of his thought would practically cohere in the National Socialist order. Schmitt would not deflect the will of Heaven, not because he did not believe in Heaven, but because he saw the disorderly consequences of politicizing the idea of a this-worldly Heaven in Judaism and he would not walk the enemy’s way. For him, Heaven needed to stay out of reach so that a political order might survive. Even the promise of Heaven could degenerate human beings whose freedom must be restrained at all times, because once upon a time the Original Sin was committed, the covenant was broken, the divine law was transgressed, and the sovereignty of human soul was denied once and for all. Perhaps this stigma of anti-utopianism, this reverence for the will of Heaven *only* from afar, avenged Schmitt, for the only option left for him was to mobilize Hell. He saw no problem in this, because Hell can always be restrained since Schmitt had faith in Katechon. However, a more direct translation of the second part of Virgil’s saying, ‘*Acheronta movebo,*’ means ‘setting the Acheron flowing’ (derived from ‘the classical locution *Acheronta movere*’ as Schmitt was to note and discuss in his 1963 book *The Theory of the Partisan*.<sup>26</sup> Acheron is a river in Greek mythology over which the newly

25. A perfect theorization of this idea can be found in Giorgio Agamben’s *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*: “The camp is the space of [the] absolute impossibility of deciding between [...] exception and rule, which nevertheless incessantly decides between them” (p.173). Because, in Schmittian terms, sovereign is the one who decides between exception and rule, the logical consequence of Agamben’s argument is the formulation of *sovereignty as impossibility*; hence the need to betray Schmitt’s fondness of Joseph de Maistre who depicts sovereignty as infallibility (Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology*, p. 55): Insofar as the decision between exception/chaos/breakthrough and rule/order/restraint is impossible, *sovereign is perfectly fallible*.

26. Carl Schmitt, *The Theory of the Partisan: A Commentary/Remark on the Concept of the Political* (East Lansing: Michigan State University, 2004), p.28.

dead souls are carried across into Hell. In Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy*, Acheron forms the border of Hell. Consequently, my core argument is that Schmitt's irreconcilable ambivalence can be portrayed as his attempt to situate Katechon over Acheron.

The variations in the meaning of Acheron are important as they can disclose the mythical-conceptual framework on which the Schmittian ambivalence is based. In early Christianity, Acheron is the river bordering Hades, a place where the dead wait for Judgment Day. In mainstream Christianity, Hades has been largely replaced by the notion of the soul going straight to hell, heaven, or purgatory. Yet a more interesting locality, reminiscent of Acheron, can be found in Roman Catholic theology: 'Limbo' (from Latin *limbus*, meaning, edge or boundary, and referring to the edge or boundary of hell). Limbo is the divine place for the unbaptized children who die in infancy. Since they are not freed from the original sin, they are permanently excluded from heaven.

Whatever the discrepancies in various doctrines may be and despite its apparent polysemy, Acheron, as the border of a grim divine location for the dead souls who are stigmatized by the original sin, surely captures Schmitt's fascination with the mythical. As he succinctly put: "I 'learn' by way of discovering myths."<sup>27</sup> Schmitt was not religiously dogmatic and his interest covered a wide range of mythology, theology, and ontology. However, following the example set by the counterrevolutionary Donoso Cortés, Schmitt was enthusiastic about a *political decision* regarding the dogma of Original Sin. The following passage from *Political Theology* is striking:

"[T]he starting point for the Catholic Spaniard was the dogma of Original Sin. [...] Donoso Cortés radicalized this polemically into a doctrine of the absolute sinfulness and depravity of human nature. [However,] the dogma asserts not absolute worthlessness but only distortion, opacity, or injury and leaves open the possibility of natural good. Abbé Gaduel, who criticized Donoso Cortés from the standpoint of dogma, was therefore right when he voiced misgivings about his exaggeration of the natural evil and unworthiness of man. Yet it was certainly not right to have overlooked the fact that for Donoso Cortés this was a religious and political decision of colossal actuality, and not just the elaboration of dogma. When he spoke of the natural evil of man, he polemicized against atheist anarchism and its axiom of the good man[.]"<sup>28</sup>

Hence the likelihood of Schmitt's keenness about ascribing the original sinfulness of humankind to the Judaic societal forces and godless socialisms, as a reflection of the

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27. Carl Schmitt quoted in Jan Müller, "Carl Schmitt's Method: Between Ideology, Demonology and Myth," *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 4/1 (February 1999), p.61.

28. Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology*, p.57.

chaotic nature of political freedom. On the other hand, the sovereign state, acting as the restrainer (Katechon) of this freedom, must always situate itself over the border of Hell (Acheron), ensuring that the original sin would not turn into universal damnation and Hell would not move to Earth. The ever present human vulnerability to evildoing must be constantly restrained, because this is the universal exception to every rule, this is the infinite possibility that real life can always break through to disavow every order. Human politics is like a restless river that needs to be carefully dammed and sovereignly policed.

Katechon is the sovereign whose decision serves to contain and restrain the real human life, the root of every state of exception that can contaminate the orderly political world of clear-cut friends and enemies. Katechon is the sovereign that has to undermine the sovereignty of exception and control the flow of Acheron that delimits the border of Hell. If left unrestrained, that border is bound to shift and even encompass whatever surrounds it, hence carry the world of politics across into Hell.<sup>29</sup> If Acheron floods, human freedom will make Hell home. Schmitt's major dilemma, his central theological-theoretical ambivalence, was to keep heaven (salvation/utopia) afar and hell (doomsday/dystopia) at bay so as to keep the inherently corruptible human freedom at a controllable level and achieve "the highest form of order of which the human is capable" which is nothing but the delicate balance between sovereign nation-states, the wars among which will be limited and restrained, yet noble and human(e).<sup>30</sup> Only in this way, the state of exception (as chaos) will not reign sovereignly. Nevertheless, this would prove to be a deadly form of wishful thinking in the exception become the rule and in the world of partisans and terrorists.

#### THE THEORY OF THE TERRORIST: FRIEND-ENEMY INDISTINCTION

In the shadow of the Cold War, Schmitt formulated his theory of the partisan whom he described as 'an *irregular* fighter.'<sup>31</sup> The figure of the partisan is significant for Schmitt because of its 'intensely political character' that can be easily "distinguished from the common thief and criminal, whose motives aim at private enrichment."<sup>32</sup> Mo-

29. In this sense, sovereignty is truly "a borderline concept [...], one pertaining to the outermost sphere" (Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology*, p.5).

30. Carl Schmitt quoted in William Rasch, "Human Rights as Geopolitics," p.127.

31. Carl Schmitt, *The Theory of the Partisan*, p.9 (original emphasis).

32. Carl Schmitt, *The Theory of the Partisan*, p.10.

reover, the partisan's '*tellurian* character'—that is, his intimate 'relation to the soil' which he defends—is crucial, because this signifies the political commitment of the 'genuine partisan' who is under the threat of the 'increased mobility of the active combat' that can undermine his definitive rootedness and belonging.<sup>33</sup> In Schmitt's words:

“[T]he autochthonous partisan of agrarian origin is drawn into the force-field of irresistible technical-industrial progress. His mobility is so enhanced by motorization that he runs the risk of complete dislocation. [...] A motorized partisan loses his tellurian character. All that's left is a transportable, replaceable cog in the wheel of a powerful world-political machine [*Weltpolitik treibenden Zentrale*] that puts him in the open or invisible war and then, depending on how things are developing, switches him off again [*abschaltet*].”<sup>34</sup>

Thinking in terms of contemporary relevance, the danger for Schmitt is the transformation of the partisan into the terrorist, that replaceable cog who is switched on and off in the everydayness of life, making the modern city's streets his ultimate battleground, making himself the ultimate sacrifice. The delocalized partisan, the terrorist, is a danger in Schmitt's eyes, because Schmitt's realism craves for the old European order shaped by the inimical interactions of sovereign states that kept war at a containable, hence localizable level.

Schmitt's ambivalence, therefore, takes the form of a lament for “the entire system of the reciprocal limitations and rules of the *ius publicum Europaeum* brought to ruin,”<sup>35</sup> and his fascination with the intensely political character which he sees in the partisan falls short of the most extreme politicization—that is, the politicization of everything unpolitical for Schmitt. Just like the exception that is invaluable insofar as its limitless sovereignty is restrained for the establishment of a sovereign political order, the Schmittian political remains real and valid unless absolute war “degrades the enemy into moral and other categories and is forced to make of him a monster that must not only be defeated but also utterly destroyed [...] an enemy who no longer must be compelled to retreat into his border only.”<sup>36</sup> Schmitt longs for “the rare moral force not to declare the enemy as such a criminal.”<sup>37</sup> His conception of the *real war* and the *real enmity* is diametrically opposed to the “war of absolute enmity [that] knows no containment” because such *absolute* war and *absolute* enmity creates the figure of ‘the executor proper,’ that is the partisan become the terrorist.<sup>38</sup>

33. Carl Schmitt, *The Theory of the Partisan*, p.13.

34. Carl Schmitt, *The Theory of the Partisan*, p.14.

35. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, p.38.

36. Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), p.36.

37. Carl Schmitt, *The Theory of the Partisan*, p.24.

38. Carl Schmitt, *The Theory of the Partisan*, p.36.

It is no wonder, then, that Schmitt depicts the utilization of the partisan by the *regular* armies of sovereign states as the act of setting the Acheron flowing.<sup>39</sup> Again, this ‘acherontic dynamic’<sup>40</sup> that represents partisan *irregularity* is militarily feasible and politically desirable only if it is made sure that “Acheron that [has] been released [recedes] immediately into the channels of state order.”<sup>41</sup> Schmitt’s wishful thinking throughout the whole book is that “the partisan still signifies a patch of true home soil; he is one of the last sentries of earth”<sup>42</sup> and has “a real, but not an absolute enemy” that lets him retain ‘his political character.’<sup>43</sup> Against the ‘wishful thinkers’ of ‘immanent rationality and regularity,’ those carelessly blessing the marriage of liberalism and technology in the new world order, he is willing to argue that the partisan will not simply “disappear in the frictionless execution of technical-functionalist processes” like “a dog disappears from the autobahn.”<sup>44</sup> However, he does not pursue this line of thinking to its logical conclusion, partially due to limited historical examples, but, more importantly, because he will never let Acheron flow on its own natural course. As the theorist of *Katechon*, Schmitt is the *theorist Katechon* that will restrain any disorderly fluctuations of the political.

How does Schmitt’s theory direct the acherontic flow into the channels of order? How does it restrain the exceptionally irrepressible deluge of Acheron? The notion of ‘the interested third party’ is Schmitt’s answer.<sup>45</sup> Because “the partisan is always dependent in some way, as an irregular fighter, on a regular power,”<sup>46</sup> an interested third party

“delivers not only weapons and munitions, money, material assistance, and medicines of every description, he offers also the sort of political recognition of which the irregularly fighting partisan is in need, in order to avoid falling like the thief and the pirate into the unpolitical, which means here the criminal sphere. In the longer view of things the irregular must legitimize itself through the regular, and for this only two possibilities stand open: recognition by an existing regular, or establishment of a new regularity by its own force. This is a tough alternative.”<sup>47</sup>

The exception that is the irregular partisan can maintain its existence only by way of appealing to the rule of a regular sovereign. The familiar Schmittian method is applied

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39. Carl Schmitt, *The Theory of the Partisan*, p.28.

40. Carl Schmitt, *The Theory of the Partisan*, p.30.

41. Carl Schmitt, *The Theory of the Partisan*, p.33.

42. Carl Schmitt, *The Theory of the Partisan*, p.50.

43. Carl Schmitt, *The Theory of the Partisan*, p.65.

44. Carl Schmitt, *The Theory of the Partisan*, p.55.

45. Carl Schmitt, *The Theory of the Partisan*, p.53.

46. Carl Schmitt, *The Theory of the Partisan*, p.52.

47. Carl Schmitt, *The Theory of the Partisan*, p.53.

on the partisan as well: The exception calls for the rule, and this is the only reason why the exception, hence the partisan, is of any value. But ambivalence is destined to conquer Schmitt's political universe, precisely because it is based on the fact that real life always breaks through and the ultimate sovereignty is bound to belong to the exception. So, why is the establishment of a new regularity by an irregular force *a tougher alternative*? Simply because Schmitt the Katechon will not concede that there is a much tougher alternative involved. It is true that the dog does not disappear from the autobahn. But what Schmitt, blinded by his love of order, would not choose to conceive is that the dog will come back to bite the hand that feeds him.

The *tougher* alternative that Schmitt did not want to face was the partisan's direct and irreversible fall into the so-called unpolitical, his being pulled down by an acherontic undertow; putting in motion nothing less than the politicization of the unpolitical, that is, the *criminalization of politics* to the extent that the well-known public-private—hence, partisan versus pirate/thief—distinction vanishes into thin air. The political is so personal today that the recognition by an interested third party takes the form of either violent criminalization (the absolute inhuman enemy of the US) or crude universalization (the US-led coalition of humanity). In this way, the notorious *war against terror* motto 'either with us or with them' signifies the lack of—hence the ever more urgent need for—a new conception of the political that is not only beyond friendship and enmity but also able to acknowledge that both 'we' and 'they' are criminals whose sovereignties must be revoked, precisely because when the exception becomes the rule, there is nothing exceptional for the sovereign to decide. At this stage, decision has to become a singular matter that disavows any katechonic restraint and reactivates the notion of utopia which is perhaps nothing more than the effort of learning to flow with Acheron.

The well-known story of the dog that survived the autobahn and came back to bite his owner is indeed recent history. When the US decided to play the role of Katechon with the sole aim of holding back the evil Soviet empire and restraining any geopolitical drawback to the American supremacy, it was forced to utilize the acherontic dynamic of mercenaries like Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden. This figure of the mercenary—successfully elucidated in Hardt and Negri's *Multitude*<sup>48</sup>—is indeed the equivalent of Schmitt's 'industrial partisan' who became acquainted with the 'modern means of destruction' and "adapted to its new technical-industrial environment,"<sup>49</sup> and whom I

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48. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude* (London: Penguin, 2006), pp.47-51

49. Carl Schmitt, *The Theory of the Partisan*, p.56.

simply relate to the contemporary figure of the terrorist. On the whole, what “Saddam Hussein did [...] after having served as Swiss Guard against the threats of Islamic Iran” and what “Osama bin Laden did [...] after having liberated Afghanistan from the Soviets” can be summarized as the ‘revolt of mercenaries,’ or, in today’s much popular lexicon, ‘terrorism.’<sup>50</sup> For the purpose of this essay, these figures (partisan/mercenary/terrorist) are the representatives of Acheron that were released yet did not recede peacefully into the channels of restrained order; Acheron crushing Katechon with its furious waves.

This is also the point where Schmitt’s friend-enemy distinction collapses. One of the most disturbing aspects of *The Concept of the Political* is the way Schmitt, more or less explicitly, prioritizes and privileges the conception of the enemy *vis-à-vis* the friend,<sup>51</sup> which is most probably another manifestation of his position that sees ‘fear and insecurity’—two human conditions that hold the upper hand in the face of an enemy—as the ‘preconditions of political virtue.’<sup>52</sup> Conceptualizing the enemy is more important in understanding the friend-enemy distinction that is constitutive of the concept of the political. Only in the face of a clearly identified public enemy, the political friendship constitutive of a sovereign nation-state gains its true meaning. Nevertheless, in *The Theory of the Partisan: A Commentary/Remark on the Concept of the Political*, Schmitt desperately tries to work his way out of this prioritization of enmity, involuntarily revealing the friend-enemy *indistinction* that characterizes the central ambivalence of situating Katechon over Acheron, of claiming sovereignty over the sovereignty of exception:

“[T]he *interested third party* played an essential function in providing the link for the irregularity of the partisan to a regular so that he remains within the realm of the political. The heart of the political is not enmity *per se* but the distinction of friend and enemy; it presupposes *both* friend *and* enemy. The powerful third party who is interested in the partisan may think and deal in an entirely egoistic way, but with his interest he stands politically on the side of the partisan. This functions as political friendship and is a kind of political recognition, even if it is not expressed in terms of public and formal recognition as a warring party or as a government.”<sup>53</sup>

The US, the interested third party, which mobilized the acherontic dynamic of partisans and mercenaries yet could not restrain its terrorism that now threatens to drown Katechon is the perfect example of how Schmitt failed to conceptualize a political friend-

50. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude*, pp.48-49.

51. See Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, pp.26-29, where he puts greater emphasis on the enemy in his explanation of the friend-enemy distinction.

52. Gopal Balakrishnan, *The Enemy*, p.223.

53. Carl Schmitt, *The Theory of the Partisan*, p.65.

ship that does not give way to an absolute enmity, or, equally, how Schmitt succeeded in prophesying the coming danger of an absolute war waged in the name of the depoliticized concept of humanity in which case the most horrific political Hell breaks loose, that is, the very criminality of politics.<sup>54</sup> All in all, the political friendship that Schmitt recklessly theorizes brings its own demise when that strategic-pragmatic friendship gives way to a condition of absolute enmity. Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden—yesterday's friends—are now the servants of the Satan against which the US is *spectacularly* fighting in the name of humanity.

Although Schmitt lucidly explains the inadequacy of the liberal-rationalist mindset in coming to terms with the question of how the terrorism of the partisan “transform[s] the darkness into a space of combat [*Kampfraum*], where the traditional theater of the empire and the great stage of the official public sphere can be lifted off their hinges,” his final warning in this regard is equally inadequate: “There is no telling where the Acheron may have to be crossed,” says Schmitt.<sup>55</sup> However, the swift transformation of an instrumental friendship into the absolute enmity casts light on the partisan/mercenary/terrorist as the borderline concept that pertains to the outermost sphere of the world of clear-cut friend-enemy distinctions. *And when friend is enemy and politics is paranoia, there is no telling when Acheron may carry Hell across to the world, drowning in its torrent every sovereign Katechon, only to yield an acherontic sovereignty in the shape of an infinite war.*

“The insistence on localizing a putatively logically necessary exception”—the enemy being a part of this exception that defines the sovereign friend—“is, in Agamben's view, what drives modernity. Indeed, it is what has driven us all straight to hell, because for Agamben the telos, or logical consequence of such localization, is, quite simply if melodramatically, Auschwitz.”<sup>56</sup> In a nutshell, damming Acheron only intensifies the power of an inescapable torrent. Consequently, the localized enemy finds its final destination at “the most extreme figure of the camp inhabitant [...] who in camp jargon was called ‘the Muslim,’ *der Muselmann*—a being from whom humiliation, horror, and fear had so taken away all consciousness and all personality as to make him absolutely

54. Indeed, the final paragraph of *The Concept of the Political* displays a prophetic register: “The adversary is thus no longer called an enemy but a disturber of peace and is thereby designated to be an outlaw of humanity. A war waged to protect or expand economic power must, with the aid of propaganda, turn into a crusade and into the last war of humanity” (Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, p.79).

55. Carl Schmitt, *The Theory of the Partisan*, p.58.

56. William Rasch, “Human Rights as Geopolitics,” p.129.

apathetic (hence the ironical name given to him),” whereas the sovereign friend’s intrinsic design unfolds itself as the Führer.<sup>57</sup>

The worst-case scenario is that, in the age of global war against terror, the road to Hell is already paved, with all the good intentions being totally consumed. However, the bright side of the ambivalent story of *Katechon Over Acheron* is that the privatization of politics in the form of criminalization comes with a price to be paid by none other than the Katechon sovereigns. As heralded by Giorgio Agamben:

“What the heads of state, who rushed to criminalize the enemy with such zeal, have not yet realized is that this criminalization can at any moment be turned against them. *There is no head of state on Earth today who, in this sense, is not virtually a criminal.* Today, those who should happen to wear the sad redingote of sovereignty know that they may be treated as criminals one day by their colleagues. And certainly we will not be the ones to pity them.”<sup>58</sup>

So, if a flooding Acheron is to drown the criminals of the sovereign states, the primary civil right of the coming community will have to be negatively defined: the right not to pity. Yet as Katechon is being slowly washed out of the way, what will subsequently reveal itself is the lawless one. At a point where the rule becomes the exception and the sovereign state goes to pieces, one should not hesitate to name another criminal enemy: the stateless terrorist who knows no restraint and claims sovereignty over the dislocating acherontic flow.

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57. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, pp.184-185.

58. Giorgio Agamben, *Means Without End: Notes on Politics* (Minneapolis: University Minnesota Press, 2000), p.107 (original emphasis).