



# The Concept of the Political

*Carl Schmitt, George Schwab (Translator)*

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## **The Concept of the Political** Carl Schmitt , George Schwab (Translator)

In this, his most influential work, legal theorist and political philosopher Carl Schmitt argues that liberalism's basis in individual rights cannot provide a reasonable justification for sacrificing oneself for the state. This edition of the 1932 work includes the translator's introduction (by George Schwab) which highlights Schmitt's intellectual journey through the turbulent period of German history leading to the Hitlerian one-party state. It also includes Leo Strauss's analysis of Schmitt's thesis and a foreword by Tracy B. Strong placing Schmitt's work into contemporary context.

## **The Concept of the Political Details**

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## Suzanne says

Schmitt suggests that the concept of the political is rooted in the "friend-enemy" distinction. Not a moral enemy, a business enemy...but an existential "other" that always implies the possibility of conflict and war. It's eerie how this book, written in the late 20's, speaks very much to the current political landscape - I mean, US and China? Yeah.

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## Victor says

A fantastic political piece of work on the nature of politics, or as Schmitt puts it; 'the political.'

Schmitt fundamentally describes politics as a realm whereby groups of people with shared characteristics compete for collective power over other groups with opposing characteristics. Schmitt is the political theorist who famously coined the 'friend/enemy' distinction, meaning that within the realm of politics, a group has allies and opponents. Schmitt argued that if your group had no enemies, then it was not truly political.

Interestingly, Schmitt also theorises that those political groups who argue they are 'fighting for humanity' must ultimately class their enemies as inhuman, and not worthy of human rights. He theorises that the more grandiose a political group claims it is fighting for morality, the more immoral they can class their political enemies, and the more worthy they are thus of being eliminated. This personally reminded me of the radical left of today, who claim to be fighting for humanity, but also classify their right wing opponents often as 'scum' 'evil' etc. and thus not deserving of belonging to the group they have coined 'humanity.'

Schmitt also criticises the ideology of liberalism, describing it fundamentally as an open vacuum whereby it allows political groups with strong beliefs to compete for power and social dominance. Liberalism is fundamentally an apolitical belief according to Schmitt and is an ideology that fundamentally remains opposed to the State having power. Schmitt thus argues that if a group of individuals choose to remain apolitical, they are destined to be dominated by another group that asserts its political right to rule.

This essay is well worth the read for anybody interested in politics. I will probably revisit it again in the future.

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### *Kindle Highlights:*

*"If a people no longer possess the energy or the will to maintain itself in the sphere of politics, the latter will not thereby vanish from the world. Only a weak people will disappear."*

*"The political enemy need not be morally evil or aesthetically ugly; he need not appear as an economic competitor, and it may even be advantageous to engage with him in business transactions. But he is, nevertheless, the other, the stranger; and it is sufficient for his nature that he is, in a specially intense way, existentially something different and alien, so that in the extreme case conflicts with him are possible."*

*'Liberalism in one of its typical dilemmas of intellect and economics has attempted to transform the enemy from the viewpoint of economics into a competitor and from the intellectual point into a debating adversary. In the domain of economics there are no enemies, only competitors, and in a thoroughly moral and ethical world perhaps only debating adversaries.'*

*'it cannot be denied that nations continue to group themselves according to the friend and enemy antithesis, that the distinction still remains actual today, and that this is an ever-present possibility for every people existing in the political sphere.'*

*'An enemy exists only when, at least potentially, one fighting collectivity of people confronts a similar collectivity.'*

*'War is the existential negation of the enemy. It is the most extreme consequence of enmity. It does not have to be common, normal, something ideal, or desirable. But it must nevertheless remain a real possibility for as long as the concept of the enemy remains valid.'*

*'A world in which the possibility of war is utterly eliminated, a completely pacified globe, would be a world without the distinction of friend and enemy and hence a world without politics.'*

*'Every religious, moral, economic, ethical, or other antithesis transforms into a political one if it is sufficiently strong to group human beings effectively according to friend and enemy.'*

*'The political entity is by its very nature the decisive entity, regardless of the sources from which it derives its last psychic motives.'*

*'If a part of the population declares that it no longer recognises enemies, then, depending on the circumstance, it joins their side and aids them. Such a declaration does not abolish the reality of the friend-and-enemy distinction.'*

*'If a people is afraid of the trials and risks implied by existing in the sphere of politics, then another people will appear which will assume these trials by protecting it against foreign enemies and thereby taking over political rule.'*

*'It would be ludicrous to believe that a defenceless people has nothing but friends, and it would be a deranged calculation to suppose that the enemy could perhaps be touched by the absence of a resistance. No one thinks it possible that the world could, for example, be transformed into a condition of pure morality by the renunciation of every aesthetic or economic productivity. Even less can a people hope to bring about a purely moral or purely economic condition of humanity by evading every political decision. If a people no longer possesses the energy or the will to maintain itself in the sphere of politics, the latter will not thereby vanish from the world. Only a weak people will disappear.'*

*'the word humanity, to invoke and monopolise such a term probably has certain incalculable effects, such as denying the enemy the quality of being human and declaring him to be an outlaw of humanity; and a war can thereby be driven to the most extreme inhumanity.'*

*'The Geneva League of Nations does not eliminate the possibility of wars, just as it does not abolish states. It introduces new possibilities for wars, permits wars to take place, sanctions coalition wars, and by legitimising and sanctioning certain wars it sweeps away many obstacles to war.'*

*'The radicalism vis-a-vis state and government grows in proportion to the radical belief in the goodness of man's nature.'*

*'Thus the political concept of battle in liberal thought becomes competition in the domain of economics and discussion in the intellectual realm. Instead of a clear distinction between the two different states, that of war and that of peace, there appears the dynamic of perpetual competition and perpetual discussion.'*

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## **Miles Maftean says**

I liked it, strictly for the critique it presents for a liberal constitutionalist democracy. I might not necessarily agree with the substance of his argument, but he has quite the realist outlook on politics and makes sure not to have too much intellectual hogwash in his conceptualization.

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## **Fred R says**

I think of Schmitt as like Heidegger, another highbrow Nazi whose intellectual work stands as the apotheosis of German cultural resistance to Manchester liberalism and Voltairean tolerance, to say nothing of American post-Puritan 'humanitarianism'. To that end, his fulminations against disingenuous value-neutral liberalism and the depoliticization of modern life are really assaults on the intellectual framework behind the Versailles treaty, and concomitant Allied propaganda about the Hunnish behavior of Germany during the First World War.

In a penetrating essay included in my edition, Leo Strauss points out that, emotionally, Schmitt doesn't seem to merely feel that politics (and the grounding of politics, war) is inescapable, but more so that life without the grand seriousness of politics is distasteful, mere 'entertainment'. This, again, is modern era German kultural chauvinism, albeit of an abstract kind, viewing with contempt the English merchants and French philosophes who have abandoned aristocratic (Prussian?) ideals of honor. This kind of contempt is, of course, not far removed from the 20th century megalomaniacal German struggle for lebensraum and continental domination.

All of this is not to say that Schmitt is entirely wrong. Again, like Heidegger, he scores a lot of telling points against the incoherent and even the dishonorable aspects of Liberalism. From another perspective, this book reminds me a great deal of Maurice Cowling's famous attack on Mill, as both work to demonstrate how much of Liberalism was and is really just pi jaw and humbug (i.e. empty propaganda) in service of distinct cultural/intellectual/social/economic groups' will to power. Schmitt seems to me entirely correct that politics is an inherent human activity, and that inherent in politics is the potential for violence. Furthermore, he may also be correct (though less so) in pointing out how, on an international level, humanitarian programs to end war and violence may paradoxically escalate violent conflict, while on a national level, Liberal programs to depoliticized life may end up exacerbating, or, at least, disingenuously reshaping, social conflict. To offer a concrete, contemporary example, I find it striking today how easily American resistance to politically (even existentially) significant immigration inflows is shunted off (depoliticized and neutered) by Schmitt's twin Liberal demons of 'economics' and 'ethics'.

To return to the issue Strauss raised: I would first say that Schmitt is unnecessarily vague on the inevitability of politics and war. Although prediction is a mugs game, I feel pretty confident that as long as there is life

there will be predation and parasitism, and that game-theoretical dynamics of cooperation and conflict are, in a certain sense, inescapable. On the other hand, I would not say it is so emotional or irrational of Schmitt to flinch in disgust from the vision of an Imaginary world where there is nothing to kill for, or at least to die for. Pondering this leads one close to theodicy, for if the possibility of violence elevates life above entertainment, does not the possibility of sin similarly elevate humanity above brute nature?

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### **Rui Coelho says**

When a social tension (be it moral, economic, religious, etc) intensifies, a clear line is drawn between friends and enemies. Schmitt considers this latent possibility of violent conflict the essence of politics. After defining politics as this game of alliances, he goes on to clarify the role of the State and revolutionary partisans. An essential read to understand Tiqqun (specially Civil War).

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### **Matthew W says**

Carl Schmitt, like Martin Heidegger, has the scary Nazi stain permanently covering his philosophical legacy. Despite his "tainted" reputation, "The Concept of the Political" is still regarded by those on the "right" and "left", as one of the best overviews on how politics work (or more like how they don't work).

Schmitt brings up such things as how whenever the leaders of a country want to go and mass murder a bunch of people in war, the leaders go on about protecting "humanity." Of course, the enemy of humanity (despite being part of humanity) is no longer part of humanity but something lower, something worthy of extermination. This tactic was used by "revolutionaries" like Lenin, but can be used by both ends of the political spectrum.

Schmitt spends most of the book critiquing liberalism and how it is at odds with the state. In fact, liberalism always attempts to ignore the state and politics and replaces them with two heterogeneous spheres such as: ethics and economics, intellect and trade, education and property, etc. People can no longer look past themselves and their feelings. With this kind of thinking, a truly successful state can never prosper. It makes one wonder what the future will hold, but it surely won't be good. One just has to look at all the imaginary "progress" that has taken place in our world since the book was written. We are no doubt headed towards some type of international chaotic (we already have the chaos) explosion. Whatever happened to good old organic kultur?

I guess intellectual abstractions aren't always so good. Poor Marx, he must be philosophizing in his grave. Someone will get Marxism right one day....

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### **Leopold Benedict says**

Carl Schmitt (1888-1985) is most recognised for his idea of friend-foe distinction. The ability of a group of people to define their enemies and friends constitutes the political. The ultimate consequence and litmus test of this process is war. I find it interesting, that the friend-foe distinction is not the result of his thought process, but its starting point. He postulates the friend-foe distinction as the axiom of the political sphere and develops his thinking on concepts such as liberalism, pacifism or the League of Nations (he does not think

much of any of these) from that point. He is deeply skeptical of waging war for normative reasons such as peace ('the last war of all wars'), democracy, liberty or international law because it blurs the real reasons underlying the conflict and escalates war into a totalitarian conflict. Notably, he admires Marxism for excelling in creating friend-foe distinction across the globe. Apart from that Schmitt still believes that the nation state is the core category of friend-foe distinctions. Schmitt's essay is short, precise and non-dull. I appreciate the clearness of his analytical framework and I will add it to my toolkit of analysing political conflict.

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### **Knarik Gasparyan says**

“The specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy”. A very interesting exploration of what the political and non-political realm encompasses, a detailed categorization of different types of conflicts, as well as a strong criticism of liberalism as a system which destroys democracy (the way Schmitt understood and accepted democracy). Asserts the need of having a strong state as the decision maker and the ultimate power.

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### **Ruben Klein says**

I read this philosophical work with the help of the book 'Carl Schmitt and Leo Strauss: The Hidden Dialogue' by Heinrich Meier and many other works of Carl Schmitt.

My objective in reading this book was to bring Carl's theological (political) worldview to the foreground.

All I can say is that this philosopher made me reconsider the unproblematic simplicity of my liberal democratic worldview. Challenging my naive intuition with biting ideas. Must read for those who want to underpin their political views with philosophy and like a challenge.

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### **Metodi Pachev says**

C. Schmitt does never cease to amaze me. This man did not only introduce a simple paradigm that remains unquestionably valid after almost 100 years, but also did other astonishing things, coining the term 'depoliticization', predicting the likeliness of the break of a (second) world war and many more.

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### **Hadrian says**

Schmitt was a Nazi, or at least closely associated with them. Let's get that ugly fact out in front of the bullet-speckled walls. He penned anti-Semitic articles and openly praised the Nazi government during the Night of the Long Knives. Why he did this is still up to historical debate.

But Schmitt survives as something a more than a historical curio or a naked apologist for terror because of the originality of his ideas and how they still matter. Just a few weeks ago, I read a paper by none other than

Eric Posner who said that Schmitt's ideas are still relevant in understanding the role of executive power and that they must be addressed by more people than just 'Schmitt specialists'.

The Concept of the Political recasts politics as the dynamics of conflict between groups. Classical liberalism has attempted to 'depoliticize' life and its other aspects, whereas Schmitt sees every aspect of life as becoming legitimate when it is political.

The most important idea that Schmitt describes is the 'friend-enemy' distinction in politics. Schmitt does not refer to individual grievances, but broad conflict between groups. When two groups are mutual enemies, he views their conflict as something that cannot be solved by classical liberal means of discussion or compromise, but conflict. The 'enemy', to Schmitt, can be based upon multiple characteristics - linguistic barriers, religious belief, and so on, so long as it is a marker of a collective identity. This state of conflict is not an exception to the state of international relations, but it is instead something normal. Schmitt differs from Hobbes in the sense that the world is not divided by individual conflict, but of groups in a world of All Against All.

Such a characterization lacks subtleties. Schmitt refuses to account for individual agency or the subjectivity of perceptions or even the role of the sovereign leader's actions - all of these are distractions. But I should add that his idea of friend-vs.-enemy oddly similar to the classical Marxist ideas of class struggle, where the individual is only part of broader competing forces.

This edition also has an additional essay against the 'depoliticization' of life which classical liberalism claims and a blind faith in technology to solve all problems. Technology is, after all, only a tool, and how it is used will determine its effects. But without a political understanding or at least another cause to motivate those in life, Schmitt views life as an exercise in continuous consumption or the gradual failure of the state to exist and its breakup into social disorder.

This volume also has three critical essays. One of these is by Leo Strauss, who applies Schmitt's ideas to a broader conception of history.

Schmitt is still with us. His idea of friends and enemies is one which resonates with many in politics, especially in the age of terrorism and Huntington's talk of the Clash of Civilizations. Schmitt's own terminology is different from ours, and it is a challenge to read as much as it is to grapple with. It is too contentious and too familiar to be ignored.

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## **Juan Pablo says**

De todos los libros que tuve que leer para Teoría Política, este fue lejos el mejor. Pero una precaución: no está recomendado para ilusos, utópicos, idealistas. Es para quien quiera llegar a "la esencia" de la política, que para Schmitt radica en el "conflicto", no verbal o económico, sino que "existencial", es decir, la oposición específicamente política es la de amigo-enemigo, y se define porque al menos existe la eventualidad de matarse mutuamente.

LA crítica al concepto de Estado tradicional, así como al weberiano, es implacable, y uno termina convencido de las tesis de este sujeto.

CApítulo aparte es su crítica al liberalismo, verdadera joya de un espíritu crítico que uno ya no ve.



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## Sebastian Schwark says

dangerous, yet brilliant.

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## John says

I read the bulk of *The Concept of the Political* quite rapidly, but I nonetheless got a few interesting though scattered reflections from Schmitt's influential essay. It's hard to talk about Schmitt without raising the fact of his unmitigated allegiance to the Nazi party, and while this piece was written prior to the full realisation of Hitler's nightmare, there's certainly elements of his argument that one can't help but think are called into question by their later influence. Nonetheless, Schmitt puts forward some interesting and relevant views that would appeal to fans of Hobbes and Machiavelli, and which I think have a particular endurance for International Relations (IR).

It seems Schmitt's basic premise is that the political is fundamentally defined by the dichotomy of collective friend and enemy. I quite liked his justification for defining 'political' in terms of a dichotomy like this, as he draws our attention to the fact that other categories are similarly defined by their consideration of dichotomies. For example, aesthetics as a consideration of beauty and vulgarity, ethics as a consideration of good and evil. He views the political distinction as the most powerful, in that in friend-enemy relations there exists the very real threat of mortal violence. To a significant extent I felt that there was a lot to be said for this view of the political at the level of international relations. It seems something of a precursor to the neorealist thought in IR. The only thing we as a nation have in common with each other is our supposed difference to other nations, and these relations are defined constantly in a militarised world by the underlying threat of conflict.

I couldn't help but feeling it was a negative and reductive view of the world, though. There's no doubt some truth to it but by splitting the world up in terms of such a harsh dichotomy Schmitt seems to miss a lot of nuance about the character of relations. He was writing in a period of significant enmity within Europe where allegiances seemed more transparent and conflict more imminent. The modern day, however, seems a little more complex. I think few Western states would explicitly identify any enemies beyond such nebulous terms as 'extremists'. Perhaps the analysis carries more resonance in regions such as the Middle East where conflict is more omnipresent and thus a friend-enemy conception more central to political considerations.

I felt in general that the argument fell apart because it was an attempt to attack liberalism. I'm not the biggest fan of liberalism but given the option of replacing war with economic and intellectual competition, I'll take it. He seems to bemoan the fact that a true liberal would never be willingly forced to die for his state. He even says things such as; "That art is a daughter of freedom, that aesthetic value judgment is absolutely autonomous, that artistic genius is sovereign - all this is axiomatic of liberalism". Is that supposed to be bad? I think the point he was trying to make is that with increasing individualism comes increasing isolation, while meaning comes from the collective. Thus in liberalism's push towards increasing individualism at the cost of community results in a loss of collective meaning. If this was his point, though, I personally felt that he made it poorly. Not to mention that his solution seems to be an undemocratic totalising state in which our meaning is defined for us from on high?

Schmitt does rescue his analysis of liberalism in the closing pages, however, when he attacks the liberal view of economics being an apolitical activity (because economic competitors are not the same as enemies). He argues in a sort of Platonic fashion that an ostensibly apolitical society ruled by economic considerations inevitably becomes political in its considerations. I think this is a profound point. Schmitt uses the example that was very much a sore spot for the Germans in the interwar years of punitive war reparations, and economic sanctions that essentially legitimise starvation for economic reasons. One thinks of more recent examples of US liberal imperialism in its conflicts abroad.

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## **Manolo says**

Schmitt comienza por intentar esclarecer la relación entre el Estado y lo político, estableciendo que identificar lo uno con lo otro no es más que una vuelta de tuerca inútil. Así, propone usar una dicotomía, un criterio que permita comprobar si un conflicto o una situación tiene contenido político. Pone como ejemplo las dicotomías bueno/malo (en moral), bello/feo (estética), rentable/no rentable (economía), y sugiere que en lo político se utilice la distinción amigo/enemigo. Esta distinción haría que lo político tuviese las siguientes propiedades:

—El concepto de amigo-enemigo no aplica a un observador externo. No son categorías absolutas, pues no es posible establecer quién es cada cual desde fuera. Sólo las partes involucradas son las que determinan desde sí y para sí quién es su enemigo, y por tanto el conflicto existente es, para ellas, político. Para un observador externo no se trata de un asunto político.

—Lo político entraña un potencial de violencia. No hay asunto político que no entrañe el peligro de que se desencadene la violencia, ya sea a nivel intra-estatal (una guerra civil, quizá el caso más "reducido" de conflicto que considera Schmitt) tanto inter-estatal (una guerra al uso). No es necesario que la violencia se materialice, pero un conflicto en el que sólo una de las partes puede ejercer la violencia (p.e.: Estado vs. individuo) no se trata de una guerra.

—Lo político es "existencialmente decisivo". Es decir, la violencia puede materializarse y la posibilidad de la muerte es real.

—La dualidad amigo-enemigo no puede reducirse a ninguna otra dualidad: no puede establecerse que dos grupos sean enemigos por motivos culturales, religiosos, morales o económicos. Sólo los grupos involucrados tienen la potestad para definirse como enemigos mutuos, y no es posible reducir ésto a una mera diferencia en su forma de pensar o proceder. Sin embargo, sí es posible que una diferencia cultural, religiosa, etc. cree un par amigo-enemigo, los cuales se han definido a sí mismos, creando un conflicto que entra en el terreno de lo político.

De aquí se desprenden otras definiciones, según Schmitt. Así, la soberanía es el poder de decidir el propio enemigo. Cuando un estado decide que otro estado es su enemigo, el conflicto desencadenado se trata de una guerra. Cuando el estado decide que el enemigo es uno, pero el pueblo decide que el enemigo es otro diferente, se trata de una revolución en la que la soberanía del Estado se ve amenazada.

Schmitt utiliza esta definición de lo político para atacar el liberalismo y sus pretensiones de despolitización. La asimilación de pares amigo-enemigo, la idea de que el liberalismo es apolítico, inofensivo, se cae rápidamente cuando se pretende atacar a sus pilares (la libertad "de" y no la libertad "para", la soberanía del individuo, el derecho a la propiedad privada y demás).

La crítica de Schmitt sigue siendo válida: cuando el orden establecido se presenta como lo neutro, lo

equidistante es posible evidenciar que esto no es el caso atacando sus propios fundamentos. La concepción política de Schmitt y Marx no estaba tan alejada, y de hecho diría que Schmitt entiende mejor la fundamentación hegeliana del marxismo que muchos marxistas. En "The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy" (lo estoy leyendo en inglés, no sé si estará por ahí traducido), Schmitt dice:

The proletarian becomes the social nonentity. It must also be true that the proletarian, in contrast to the bourgeois, is nothing but a person. From this it follows with dialectic necessity that in the period of transition he can be nothing but a member of his class; that is, he must realize himself precisely in something that is the contradiction of humanity—in the class. The class contradiction must become the absolute contradiction so that all contradictions can be absolutely overcome and disappear into pure humanity.

Schmitt afirmaba en un párrafo anterior que Marx no decía nada nuevo al hablar de la lucha de *clases* como el motor de la historia, sino que su aportación más decisiva fue establecer que la clase viene dada en función del papel ocupado en el proceso productivo. Pero además añade que, siendo el marxismo un hegelianismo, la lucha de clases es en realidad una lucha entre gente con identidad y gente sin identidad, entre poseedores y desposeídos; luego el proletariado debe negar su humanidad (en el sentido hegeliano) para alzarse como negación total de la burguesía. Schmitt se toma más en serio que Marx la negación como esencia del proletariado: no se puede definir de forma positiva, sino como antítesis. Así, el proletariado post-revolución (no en el sentido leninista, sino como cualquier suceso que lo sitúe por encima de la burguesía, siquiera provisionalmente) estaría formado por una casta de ácratas, hijos de nadie y antagonistas de nada. Supongo que es lo que pasa cuando llevas el idealismo a sus últimas consecuencias, pero me parece que (si se sigue una línea de razonamiento puramente hegeliana) quedarían por explicar varios asuntos de gran importancia práctica: ¿mediante qué mecanismo se desvincula el proletariado de todas las instituciones que lo someten para unirse bajo la bandera de la clase? ¿Es esto posible, o se trata de un artefacto extraño surgido de aplicar el idealismo a un asunto que posiblemente tenga más que ver con "el análisis concreto de la realidad concreta"?

No sé muy bien cómo acabar esto, la verdad. Son un poco notas para mí mismo y no pretendo hacer un análisis comprensivo del libro (no sería capaz), sólo un bosquejo de lo que he entendido. Así se queda.

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### **Barron says**

You'd think a "Nazi philosopher" would be on the outs, but serious, modern, liberal people are more into him than ever. Eric Posner and Adrian Vermeule are really into him, and they make his work the basis for their new theory of the American Constitution in "The Executive Unbound." Apparently you cannot dismiss him--perhaps he is at bottom incoherent and ultimately a very bad guy--but you cannot dismiss some of his concerns. I'm still trying to figure out what to think.

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### **TR says**

A frank explanation of politics, and the fact of an ever-present adversary in some form. No 'political science' is really science, and most 'political theory' is nonsense, but Schmitt seems to be saying things that match up with reality here.

I need to read this again.

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## **Justin Evans says**

Two ways to make a big deal of a book: make sure its author was momentarily a Nazi, and, by the logical principle of contagion, follow the logic: author was a nazi --> book is certainly nazified; reader reader book -> reader becomes a nazi. Bam! This is the most dangerous book you'll ever read!

Except it's barely 'political' in that sense at all, and is more of an essay than a book. The thought process is clear and not unreasonable: if there's something called politics, it must have certain characteristics. If we purify our concept of 'politics' from such extraneous concepts as morality, aesthetics, economics and so on, what are we left with? For Schmitt, at least, you're left with the opposition between friends and enemies, where enemies are people in the world who threaten the sovereignty of your (political) state. QED. Sure there's an odd suspicion that Schmitt really wishes there was more war between friends and enemies. His critique of liberalism as a theory which leaves no room for fighting people who undermine liberal state sovereignty might look icky, but only if you've drunk the pacifist cool-aid and think nothing's worth fighting for. Otherwise it just looks like a reasonable complaint against people who want to rid the world and our lives of all meaning.

So don't worry. You can let little Sammy read this book without fear that he'll suddenly goose-step his way over your face.

Otherwise, there are three commentators here, Strong, Schwab and Strauss. Strong is the most contemporary, and spends a bit of time talking about how Schmitt is the golden boy of the New Left Review types, as well as various reactionary lunatics. Schwab sets CP in its historical setting. Strauss, you will be surprised to learn, over-reads the text; makes wild and implausible assumptions about its argument really being about 'culture' and human nature; doesn't really say anything particularly concretely and does so in a rambling, repetitive and turgid manner. IT IS TO UNDERSTAND SOCRATES indeed.

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## **Daniel Atzori says**

By defining 'the concept of the political' as the friend-enemy grouping, Schmitt articulates an incisive critique of liberalism and of its alleged attempt of 'neutralizing the political' by depoliticizing the economy. Schmitt affirms the importance of reviving the political which, in his view, has been concealed by liberalism. Leo Strauss' notes are important to understand the distance between Hobbes and Schmitt, since the former is seen as the father of liberalism, and the latter as his most original opponent.

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## **Pat Blanchfield says**

What a wham-bam shazzam tour-de-force! After finishing it, I'm not sure if I'm leaning more left or rightwards.

"It is a manifest fraud to condemn war as homicide and then demand of men that they wage war, kill and be killed, so that there will never again be war. War, the readiness of combatants to die, the physical killing of human beings who belong on the side of the enemy - all this has no normative meaning but an existential

meaning only, particularly in a real combat situation with a real enemy. There exists no rational purpose, no norm no matter how true, no program no matter how exemplary, no social ideal no matter how beautiful, no legitimacy nor legality which could justify men killing each other for this reason."

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