

## Research Article

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# Weak Decisionism and Political Polytheology: The Neutralization of Carl Schmitt's Political Theology by Hans Blumenberg and the Ritter School

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**Abstract:** In this article, I explore the liberal–conservative reception of Carl Schmitt's political theology in post-war West-Germany. By focusing on the work of prominent members of the Ritter School – Hermann Lübbe, Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde, and Odo Marquard – and on the contributions of Hans Blumenberg, I will demonstrate how Schmitt's thought was appropriated and critically inverted, in order to provide theoretical support to liberalism. This project of liberalizing Schmitt involved developing a “weak decisionism,” which avoids the state of exception, providing a liberalist reading of Schmitt's Hobbes-inspired narrative on the origin of the modern state and even formulating a “political polytheology.” Finally, this article offers a reflection on “political theology” as a conceptual field. I argue that the liberal–conservative, “neutralizing” reading of Schmitt is to some extent already available as an option within this framework, and I conclude that this finding problematizes Schmitt's own dualistic antagonism.

**Keywords:** Carl Schmitt, Hans Blumenberg, Hermann Lübbe, Odo Marquard, Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde, political theology, Ritter School, liberal conservatism, neutralization, political polytheism

## 1 Introduction

Within the contemporary discourse on the political theology of Carl Schmitt, it is well-known that there is a close conceptual link between his theory and a rich tradition of Leftist, revolutionary thought. Jacob Taubes was one of the first to draw attention to the “hidden dialogue” between Carl Schmitt and Walter Benjamin, suggesting that the former's decisionism and the latter's messianism are in fact two sides of the same political–theological coin.<sup>1</sup> This would entail that Schmitt's political theology – despite his own authoritarian or absolutist motives – contains within itself the possibility for a *revolutionary inversion*, which means that it can be mobilized in support of Leftist, emancipatory ends. This possibility has been explored to a great extent in recent decades, e.g., in the work of Giorgio Agamben, Chantal Mouffe, Michael Hardt, and Antonio Negri.<sup>2</sup> In this context, the argument goes that “Schmittianism” of both the Right and Left share not only a

1 Taubes, *To Carl Schmitt*, 16; Taubes, *Political Theology of Paul*, 98; Cf. De Wilde, *Verwantschap in Extremen*; Faber, “Erledigung,” 90.

2 Agamben, *State of Exception*; Mouffe, *On the Political*; Hardt and Negri, *Empire*; Cf. Specter, “What's ‘Left’ in Schmitt?,” 426–54; Bradley and Cerella, “Future of Political Theology,” 1–12; Müller, *Dangerous Mind*, 169–80.

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political–theological framework but also a common enemy: liberalism. However, a dominant focus on this Leftist inversion tends to occlude *another* political possibility that resides within Schmitt’s political theology: its liberal–conservative “neutralization.” In this article, I will argue that a liberal neutralization is also a theoretical possibility that is in a sense already available within a Schmittian framework, just like the possibility of its revolutionary inversion, and I will furthermore demonstrate that precisely such a liberalizing Schmitt reception has been undertaken in post-war West-Germany by members of – or thinkers who are associated with – the so-called “Ritter School.”

The Ritter School is characterized by a liberal–conservative position that, historically, tended toward (Left-)centrism in the restoration era, but which shifted more toward conservatism in reaction to the rise of the New-Left, after 1968.<sup>3</sup> The various members of this school – in this article, I will focus on Hermann Lübbe, Ernst-Wolfgang Böckenförde, and Odo Marquard, likely the most well-known representatives – have attempted, in more or less direct ways, a “neutralizing” appropriation of some of Schmitt’s key ideas.<sup>4</sup> They assumed that despite, or precisely because of Schmitt’s role as the mortal enemy of liberalism, he provided indispensable insights into its nature and its weaknesses. Rather than succumbing to his critique, they sought to use his insights to buttress liberalism. This meant that they agreed with some of Schmitt’s central pre-suppositions, while critically adjusting or tactically deflecting other ideas, predispositions, or thought patterns. In short, they advocated a “weak decisionism” that prioritizes the “state of normalcy,” one which must be maintained to the benefit of individual liberty and/or societal pluralism. In fact, Marquard would even go so far as to formulate a liberal–conservative political polytheology, in direct reference to and as a critique of Schmitt’s autocratic political theology.

In discussing the liberal–conservative Schmitt reception, I will also involve the work of Hans Blumenberg, who is not regarded as a member of the Ritter School, but who was closely affiliated with some of its members, especially Marquard.<sup>5</sup> There are two main reasons why it will prove expedient to discuss Blumenberg alongside the Ritterians in the context of this article: firstly, as for instance Martin Ingenfeld argues, Blumenberg played an indispensable role in the Ritter School’s liberalizing reception of Schmitt’s thought.<sup>6</sup> Blumenberg’s extensive debate with Schmitt disclosed to the members of the Ritter School the possibility of occupying a position – *within* a Schmittian conceptual framework – that was substantially opposed to the latter’s authoritarian political theology. Marquard is an especially good example of Blumenberg’s mediating role in this respect, as his political polytheology was explicitly formulated as a Blumenberg-inspired countertheory to Schmitt’s.<sup>7</sup> Secondly, the involvement of Blumenberg in this context allows for a modest contribution to a recent scholarly trend, which is an increased focus on the political dimension of Blumenberg’s work, occurring in the wake of the so-called “Blumenberg-renaissance” in Anglophone philosophy.<sup>8</sup> However, rather than focusing on Blumenberg’s political philosophy, or on his debate with Schmitt, in isolation, this current analysis

<sup>3</sup> Lübbe, “Schmitt Liberal Rezipiert,” 427–40; Marquard, *Farewell*, 3–21; Van Laak, *Gespräche*, 279; Hacke, *Die Bundesrepublik*, 33–45, 75–9; Hacke, *Philosophie der Bürgerlichkeit*, 25, 94–122.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Hacke, *Philosophie der Bürgerlichkeit*, 174–215. Schweda (“Die ‘nicht selbstverständliche’ Begegnung,” 216) in fact identifies three different strands within the Ritter School, the “rittersche Rechte” (e.g. Bernard Willms), the “rittersche Linke” (e.g. Jürgen Seifert), and a middle position that is occupied by Lübbe, Böckenförde, Marquard and Robert Spaemann. This middle position is the most influential and prominent one (cf. Müller, *Dangerous Mind*, 116–32; Hacke, *Philosophie der Bürgerlichkeit*), which arguably justifies my sole focus on these more “moderate” authors. While Spaemann is also commonly identified as a key member of the liberal–conservative Ritter School, I will however exclude him from my research scope because his work testifies less to an active reception of Schmitt’s political theology (cf. Ingenfeld, *Fortschritt und Verfall*, 276).

<sup>5</sup> Marquard, “Entlastung vom Absoluten,” 17–27; Keller, “Philosophisch-Politische Sympraxis,” 87–104.

<sup>6</sup> Ingenfeld, *Fortschritt und Verfall*, 275–6.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.; Marquard, “Aufgeklärter Polytheismus,” 77–84; Marquard, “Gnostische Rezidiv,” 31–6; Marquard, *Farewell*, 87–110; Marquard, “Aufgeklärter Polytheismus,” 77–84; Marquard, “Gnostische Rezidiv,” 31–6; Marquard, *Farewell*, 87–110.

<sup>8</sup> Fleming, “Verfehlungen,” 119; Cf. Gordon, “Introduction,” 67–73. On Blumenberg’s political philosophy, see e.g.: Nicholls, *Myth and Human Sciences*; Nicholls and Heidenreich, “Nachwort,” 83–146; Bajohr, “Vanishing Reality,” 131–61; Griffioen, *Contesting Modernity*, 147–94.

aims to increase our understanding of Blumenberg by contextualizing his attitude towards Schmitt or more generally his political inclinations.<sup>9</sup> This will indeed show that there are striking parallels and decisive lines of influence to be discerned between Blumenberg on the one hand and the Ritterians on the other. Evidently, my decision to exhibit the “liberal–conservative position” as one which comprises the accounts of Blumenberg, Böckenförde, Lübke, and Marquard should not be interpreted as an attempt to simply lump them together; divergences, nuanced distinctions, and disagreements do exist between the various accounts.<sup>10</sup> However, I would suggest that if situated over against the extreme position represented by Schmitt, these differences do tend to be outweighed by shared proclivities, and certainly shared aversions.

By reconstructing the liberal–conservative reception of Schmitt’s theory, it will be possible to obtain a more complete, and nuanced, understanding of the historical–philosophical “afterlife” of political theology in the twentieth century. In doing so, I seek to compensate for an arguable lack of attention to the liberal–conservative reception of Schmitt’s political theology that is noticeable in Anglophone Schmitt scholarship, especially with regard to its immediate (West-)German historical context. Jan-Werner Müller’s chapter “Melancholy Modernism: the Ritter School,” in his extensive study *A Dangerous Mind: Carl Schmitt in Post-War European Thought* (2003), forms a notable exception.<sup>11</sup> In German scholarship, on the other hand, there are various studies to be found of the liberal–conservative reception of Schmitt by the Ritter School, e.g., by Dirk Van Laak, Jens Hacke, Mark Schweda, and Martin Ingenfeld.<sup>12</sup> What my present analysis adds to the existing literature is that, as indicated, I will focus more extensively on the links that exist between the *Ritter School* and *Blumenberg* in the liberal–conservative Schmitt reception, and specifically on how this results in a critical adaptation of “political theology.” While the connection between Blumenberg and the Ritterians is not investigated in detail by Van Laak, Hacke, and Schweda, it has been explored in Ingenfeld’s recent *Fortschritt und Verfall* (2016).<sup>13</sup> However, in contrast to Ingenfeld, I intend to devote more attention to Marquard’s political polytheology as a serious – albeit inherently ironic – alternative to Schmitt’s own political theology and to how it can be seen to build on Blumenberg’s theory of *polytheism*, which was in part developed through a critical dialogue with Schmitt. Finally, this current study concludes with a meta-analysis of political theology as a conceptual field, which might further the recent understanding of the nature of “political theology,” and the extent to which it remains intertwined with Schmitt’s own political position.

This article is structured as follows: first, after a general introduction to the Ritter School I discuss its particular variety of decisionism and prioritization of “normalcy,” primarily (but not exclusively) taking my cue from Lübke’s work. Second, I will explain how the liberal–conservatives – as mainly exemplified by Böckenförde in this instance – accepted and accommodated Schmitt’s theory of secularization, neutralization, and his narrative on the origin of the modern (liberal) state. Third, I shall expound on Schmitt’s “stasiology” and on Blumenberg’s rejection of its inherent dualism in favor of a pluralistic framework, which Marquard in turn would develop into a “political polytheology.” Finally, I return to Schmitt’s stasiology via a critical analysis provided by Richard Faber. On the basis of this analysis, I will provide a sketch of “political theology” as a conceptual field that potentially comprises various different positions that can be occupied within it. Following this sketch, I offer some reflections on how this particular outlook, of political theology as a multivalent field, problematizes some of Schmitt’s basic assumptions pertaining to enmity, opposition, and identity.

<sup>9</sup> On the Schmitt–Blumenberg debate, cf.: Nicholls and Heidenreich, “Nachwort,” 83–146; Ifergan, “Cutting to the Chase,” 149–71; Griffioen, *Contesting Modernity*, 147–94; Meier, *Die Lehre Schmitts*, 269–300.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Ingenfeld, *Fortschritt und Verfall*, 284–5.

<sup>11</sup> Müller, *Dangerous Mind*, 116–32.

<sup>12</sup> Van Laak, *Gespräche*; Hacke, *Philosophie der Bürgerlichkeit*, 174–215; Schweda, “Ritters Begriff des Politischen;” Schweda, “Die ‘nicht selbstverständliche’ Begegnung;” Ingenfeld, *Fortschritt und Verfall*, 247–300; Cf. Mehring, *Carl Schmitt*, 513–32; Seifert, “Ritters ‘Collegium philosophicum’,” 189–98.

<sup>13</sup> Ingenfeld, *Fortschritt und Verfall*, 206–300; Müller (*Dangerous Mind*, 116–32, 156–68) discusses the Schmitt–Blumenberg debate and the Schmitt reception by the Ritter School separately, which means that he does not expound (at least not extensively) on the interconnectedness of both topics.

## 2 Joachim Ritter and the Collegium Philosophicum's Reception of Schmitt

The Ritter School originated in the “Collegium Philosophicum,” a study group formed by Joachim Ritter out of his (former) students. Commentators suggest that Ritter's large impact on the intellectual history of post-war Germany is not primarily or directly the result of his writings, but, if we are to believe his students, was due to his inspired teaching, and the stimulating platform that the Collegium Philosophicum provided. Lübke for instance argues that Ritter's own intellectual position – a liberal, Aristotelian–Hegelian modest-progressivism – determined his attitude as a mentor and teacher, as this fostered a collective spirit of eclectic, albeit critical, openness, and intellectual tolerance. Lübke summarized this spirit with the Paulinian phrase “that everything was to be examined, while holding fast to the good.”<sup>14</sup>

The study group would develop into a broader network of intellectuals that eventually came to be seen – as, e.g., Jan-Werner Müller stipulates – as the liberal-conservative counterpart of the Frankfurt School.<sup>15</sup> Multiple commentators have noted that the political affinities of the members of the Collegium, which were initially rather diverse, gradually converged on a single political position, that of liberal conservatism.<sup>16</sup> Two reasons for this convergence are identified. First, the Ritter School members' youthful experiences of Nazism and the Second World War supposedly engendered a profound skepticism *vis-à-vis* political utopianism or grand political narratives. Second, while initially this skepticism was aimed at the absolutist claims of the authoritarian Right, after 1968 – or generally speaking, with the rise of the New-Left in the 1960s and 1970s – it was also directed against the emancipatory or revolutionary program of the Left. Eventually, these representatives of the “skeptical generation” – a term coined by sociologist Helmut Schelsky – would come to reject any kind of political absolutism, of both the Left and Right. However, this “skepticism” did not entail a full-blown cynicism with regard to all political affairs, on the contrary: members of the school placed great value on the relative stability, liberty and peace that was provided by the Federal Republic of West-Germany, and they were particularly cognizant of the inherent vulnerability of this young political order. As such, a general emphasis was placed on the supposed need for pragmatism, moderation, and a sensitivity for what “is needed” in politics, as opposed to political idealism or an “all-or-nothing” mentality.<sup>17</sup>

Hence, the members of the Ritter School affirmed a moderate-conservative variety of liberalism, taking this to be a necessary bulwark against both authoritarianism and revolution. In formulating their defense of liberalism they drew inspiration from the most prominent *enemy of liberalism*: Carl Schmitt. Müller writes:

Schmitt's thought left a deep impression on some of Ritter's pupils. They made it their task to work on a set of identifiably Schmittian problems – and to take a hard look at liberalism in the mirror of its enemy. More importantly, they tried to liberalize parts of his thought in the service of making liberal democracy more robust and better equipped to deal with antiliberal challenges.<sup>18</sup>

The purpose of “liberalizing” Schmitt was to strengthen liberalism by accommodating his critique, which meant that members of the Ritter School – Böckenförde, Lübke and Marquard – appropriated his conceptual framework, or significant parts of it, while inverting his valuations or consciously redirecting the force of his arguments.

Böckenförde was the first member of the “Collegium Philosophicum” to initiate contact with Schmitt, in 1953. They would develop especially close ties, with Böckenförde reciprocating Schmitt's intellectual

<sup>14</sup> “daß alles zu prüfen und das Gute zu behalten sei.” Lübke, “Schmitt Liberal Rezipiert,” 429; Cf. Ritter, *Metaphysik und Politik*; Lübke, *Philosophie in Geschichten*, 152–68; Marquard, *Farewell*, 6–8; Van Laak, *Gespräche*, 192–3; Hacke, *Philosophie der Bürgerlichkeit*, 10–2, 161–5.

<sup>15</sup> Müller, *Dangerous Mind*, 116; Cf. Van Laak, *Gespräche*, 192–200; Hacke, *Philosophie der Bürgerlichkeit*, 12–25.

<sup>16</sup> Marquard, *Farewell*, 4–18; Marquard, *Schwierigkeiten*, 13–33; Lübke, “Schmitt Liberal Rezipiert,” 427–40; Keller, “Philosophisch-Politische Sympraxis,” 88–93; Van Laak, *Gespräche*, 192–200.

<sup>17</sup> Lübke, “Schmitt Liberal Rezipiert,” 429–37; Müller, *Dangerous Mind*, 116–32; Marquard, *Farewell*, 4–18.

<sup>18</sup> Müller, *Dangerous Mind*, 118–9; Cf. Van Laak, *Gespräche*, 192–200.

mentorship by functioning as an intermediary and, after 1958, as an academic editor.<sup>19</sup> Soon after this initial contact, Böckenförde sought to establish a relationship between both of his teachers. This attempt bore fruit after Johannes Winckelmann, a shared acquaintance, had sent Ritter Schmitt's contribution to a *Festschrift* in honor of Ernst Jünger's 60th birthday.<sup>20</sup> In Ritter's first letter, of January 7, 1956, he writes that for several years he had been "indebted" to Schmitt's work "in the field of historical and political theory," especially upon reading *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes* (1938) and *Land and Sea* (1942).<sup>21</sup> Schmitt responded enthusiastically to this rapprochement, resulting in a personal correspondence that would span almost two decades. Schweda notes that, through this correspondence, both authors explored their commonalities and attempted to draw the other onto their own respective terrains: Schmitt, for instance, highlighted a shared aversion to what he calls the "subaltern normativism of the last century," a critique that he would elaborate on in his *Tyranny of Values* (1959/1967), while Ritter proposed a Hegelian interpretation of Schmitt's thought, arguing that the latter's "real concern" is to understand "the political, the historical reality as – as Hegel calls it – the 'existing reality of Reason, the Idea'."<sup>22</sup>

Schmitt and Ritter did indeed touch upon significant points of agreement, notwithstanding their vastly different philosophical backgrounds and intellectual attitudes. Both philosophers agreed on a shared concern with the mediation between the "real" and "ideal" within concrete historical realities, as opposed to either Kantian idealism, "technocratic conservatism," or ahistorical scientism. In political terms, this concern translated into a joint rejection of "normativism."<sup>23</sup> Schmitt's *Tyranny of Values*, a text that was initially written for one of Ernst Forsthoff's famous Erbacher seminars, in 1959, is the clearest testimony of the overlap between his and Ritter's interests. The "tyranny of values" signifies the hegemony of a-historicized and, from the perspective of Ritter's Aristotelianism, denaturalized, seemingly apolitical values over political discourse.<sup>24</sup> Schmitt writes: "Ritter stated that the notion of value becomes manifest as modern natural science demolishes the notion of nature; value would occupy the emptied nature and impose itself upon the latter."<sup>25</sup> The apolitical nature of values is however mere appearance: "Whoever sets a value, takes position against a disvalue by that very action. The boundless tolerance and the neutrality of the standpoints turn themselves very quickly into their opposite, into enmity."<sup>26</sup> However, while *Tyranny of Values* signifies points of overlap between Schmitt and Ritter, it also illustrates their differences. Indeed, Ritter's own critique of denaturalized political normativism did not amount to a wholesale rejection of the post-war political constellation of the Federal Republic, let alone of liberalism or modernity itself.<sup>27</sup> Instead, his position of centrist Hegelianism amounted to a positive appreciation of the relative freedom and pluralism that the new Republic provided.<sup>28</sup>

Schmitt not only left an impression on Ritter, but evidently also on his students. After Schmitt's first live appearance at the Colloquium Philosophicum in 1957 (his first performance at a German university after the Second World War), Ritter would write to him: "what you have said and presented, lives on and continues to have an effect in many thoughts and conversations that have followed. You have encouraged me as well as my

<sup>19</sup> Mehring, *Carl Schmitt*, 513–4, 531–2.

<sup>20</sup> Schmitt, "Die Geschichtliche Struktur," 135–67; Schweda, "Die 'nicht selbstverständliche' Begegnung," 205.

<sup>21</sup> "Ich würde dann froh sein, Ihnen für alles das persönlich danken zu können, was ich Ihnen geistig im Felde der geschichtlichen und politischen Theorie in langen Jahren schuldig geworden bin." Ritter to Schmitt, in: "Die 'nicht selbstverständliche' Begegnung," 219.

<sup>22</sup> "subaltern Normativismus." Schmitt to Ritter, in: 'Die 'nicht selbstverständliche' Begegnung', 221; "Auf Tiefste berührt mich Ihr eigentliches Anliegen, das Politische, die geschichtliche Wirklichkeit als – wie Hegel es sagt – 'vorhandene Wirklichkeit der Vernunft, die Idee' zu begreifen." Ritter to Schmitt, in: 'Die 'nicht selbstverständliche' Begegnung', 224; Cf. Schweda, "Ritters Begriff des Politischen," 95–6.

<sup>23</sup> Schweda, "Ritters Begriff des Politischen," 92–111; Ingenfeld, *Fortschritt und Verfall*, 247–64.

<sup>24</sup> Ingenfeld, *Fortschritt und Verfall*, 247–64; "Die 'nicht selbstverständliche' Begegnung," 210; Ritter, *Metaphysik und Politik*, 133–79.

<sup>25</sup> Schmitt, *Tyranny of Values*, 14.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>27</sup> Ingenfeld, *Fortschritt und Verfall*, 261; cf. Ritter, *Metaphysik und Politik*, 133–79.

<sup>28</sup> Ingenfeld, *Fortschritt und Verfall*, 261; cf. Van Laak, *Gespräche*, 194–195.

young friends in what we are trying to do, more than you can know.”<sup>29</sup> Schmitt’s impact on Ritter’s students however did not amount to a homogenous, uncritical reception.<sup>30</sup> Böckenförde was the only prominent Ritterian who – as a legal scholar – would present himself as a loyal student of Schmitt, whereas Lübke was upfront about the selective and critical manner in which he appropriated some of Schmitt’s ideas, especially with regard to “decisionism.” Marquard, in turn, was overtly critical of Schmitt, but would also use some of his key concepts, such as “neutralization.”<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, Ingenfeld has argued that the Ritter School’s Schmitt reception was not only the result of Ritter’s own interests, but that it was in part mediated by Blumenberg’s debate with Schmitt.<sup>32</sup> This is evinced particularly clearly by Marquard, who would eventually formulate a position on political theology that constituted a critical inversion of Schmitt’s, be it (as I will discuss below) through the mediation of Blumenberg’s defense of polytheism.<sup>33</sup> In fact, Ingenfeld states that Blumenberg facilitated Lübke’s and Marquard’s gradual move away from the background of Ritter’s Hegelian metaphysics, toward a more metaphysically austere position, which Marquard himself would label as “skepticism.” It is suggested that Blumenberg’s philosophical account of modernity provided Lübke and Marquard with a way of vindicating “liberal modernity” against political absolutism, without needing to resort to Ritter’s Hegelian conception of progress.<sup>34</sup>

### 3 Liberal Decisionism in Defense of the State of Normalcy

Hermann Lübke played a key role in conceptualizing the Ritter School’s relationship with Schmitt in terms of a “liberal Schmitt-reception.” In “Carl Schmitt liberal rezipiert” (1988), he claimed that the Collegium Philosophicum’s so-called “Left-Schmittianism” – of which it was quickly noted that it stands in stark contrast with the *far*-Leftist reception of Schmitt – was contingent on the essential insight “that the political theory of the anti-liberal Schmitt could also be used for *liberal* purposes.”<sup>35</sup> An important task in this endeavor to “liberalize” Schmitt was to come up with a liberal response to his authoritarian decisionism. In “Zur Theorie der Entscheidung” (1965) and “Dezisionismus – eine kompromittierte Philosophische Theorie” (1976), Lübke acknowledged that the concept of “the decision” has been “compromised,” or rendered “suspect,” by the 1930’s Nazi pathos of unbridled decisionism – of which Schmitt was a prime representative – but that it is nonetheless indispensable for a viable theory of liberal–democratic politics.<sup>36</sup>

Lübke implores that while it is evidently imperative to reject authoritarian decisionism, it would be dangerous to thereby also lose sight of the necessity of decision-making in the political democratic process. In this respect, Lübke positions his decisionism over against both the “technocratic conservatism” of Arnold Gehlen and Helmut Schelsky, on the one hand, and the discourse theory of Jürgen Habermas on the other; while the former position neglects the personalistic element in favor of the immanent logic of technological–economic processes, the latter’s sole focus on argumentation assumedly leads one to ignore the need for

<sup>29</sup> “was Sie gesagt und vorgetragen haben, lebt und wirkt fort in vielen Gedanken und in manchem Gespräch, das sich daran anknüpft hat. Sie haben mir und ebenso den jungen Freunden Mut gemacht und uns in dem, was wir versuchen, mehr als Sie es wissen können, bestätigt.” Ritter to Schmitt, in: ‘Die ‘nicht selbstverständliche’ Begegnung’, 236–7; Cf. Ingenfeld, *Fortschritt und Verfall*, 249; Van Laak, *Gespräche*, 197–8.

<sup>30</sup> Ingenfeld, *Fortschritt und Verfall*, 285.

<sup>31</sup> Hacke, *Philosophie der Bürgerlichkeit*, 181–4; Ingenfeld, *Fortschritt und Verfall*, 276–300; Lübke, “Schmitt Liberal Rezipiert,” 427–40; Mehring, *Carl Schmitt*, 513–32; Marquard, “Aufgeklärter Polytheismus,” 82–3; Marquard, “Neutralisierungen,” 781–2.

<sup>32</sup> Ingenfeld, *Fortschritt und Verfall*, 252, 275–6.

<sup>33</sup> Marquard, “Aufgeklärter Polytheismus,” 77–84; Marquard, “Gnostische Rezidiv,” 31–6; Marquard, *Farewell*, 87–110.

<sup>34</sup> Ingenfeld, *Fortschritt und Verfall*, 252, 275–6.

<sup>35</sup> “daß die politische Theorie des Liberalismus-Kritikers Schmitt sich auch in liberaler Absicht nutzen ließ.” (emphasis added) Lübke, “Schmitt Liberal Rezipiert,” 428; Cf. Ingenfeld, *Fortschritt und Verfall*, 284–5; Van Laak, *Gespräche*, 277–81; Mehring, *Schmitts Gegenrevolution*, 189–91.

<sup>36</sup> In: Lübke, *Theorie und Entscheidung*, 7–31; Lübke, *Praxis der Philosophie*, 61–77; cf. Lübke, “Schmitt Liberal Rezipiert,” 429–35; Müller, *Dangerous Mind*, 124–5.

decisive action in real-life situations, when a dialogical exchange of reasons, i.e., “communicative reason,” falters.<sup>37</sup> Lübbe writes that the concept of “the decision” requires rehabilitation, despite its tainted reputation: “In contrast, it should be ... recommended, not to declare truths hostile because the enemy represents them. On the contrary, one must make an effort to poach them away from him.”<sup>38</sup> Lübbe thereby consciously engaged in a kind of politics of ideas (“Ideenpolitik”), which itself is a Schmittian theme, assuming the relative openness and essential contestedness of certain concepts. The presupposition was that if concepts such as “the decision” – or “secularization,” to use another famous example – can be claimed by one political-ideological camp, they can also be reclaimed and made to serve different political ends.<sup>39</sup>

Lübbe’s attempt at “poaching” decisionism from the authoritarian Right, i.e., Schmitt, was motivated by an understanding – a common theme in the Ritter School – of “insufficient reason.” The political order cannot be based on pre-given, unproblematic “truths” that are available to all (e.g., regarding human nature or the cosmos), nor is it possible to avoid political decisions by simply orienting the polis toward these truths.<sup>40</sup> Blumenberg can also be seen to endorse a “weak decisionism,” as he formulated the predicament sketched by Lübbe as one of “Evidenzmangel” (lack of evidence) and “Handlungszwang” (need for action): i.e., often political situations call for action, for a decision to be made, while reason or truth cannot simply point the way toward the most prudent option in a given context.<sup>41</sup> Lübbe writes that a decision must be made *in the absence* of “rational determinants for action” (“rationale Bestimmungsgründen des Handelns”): “It is therefore not irrational. The rationality of the situation in which decisions are made exists precisely in determining oneself to act, while sufficient reasons to act one way or another, are absent.”<sup>42</sup> What is more, the “Handlungszwang” indicates that decisions need to be made because time is short, as Marquard also often emphasizes.<sup>43</sup> The situation in which a decision must be made is necessarily limited, according to Lübbe, not only because of situation-dependent time pressures, but ultimately also because of the brevity of the human life-span.<sup>44</sup> Blumenberg, Lübbe, and Marquard thereby emphasize the need for what Descartes called a *morale par provision*, a provisional morality that favors customary practices, habits, and traditions in the absence of absolute certainties or self-evident truths.<sup>45</sup>

The recourse to Descartes’ provisional morality requires some elaboration, as it will indicate the distinction between Schmitt’s authoritarian decisionism and (what I will refer to as) the “weak decisionism” of the members of the Ritter School. Lübbe argues that Descartes’ notion stemmed from an awareness of a crucial difference between everyday practice and the scientific method. Whereas in science every aspect of a theory can be subjected to incessant critique, and a theory itself can be torn down and rebuilt from the ground up, this destructive attitude tends to be impractical if not impossible to apply in daily life. Instead, we must rely on traditions or transmitted truths that are scientifically speaking insufficiently grounded, if at all.<sup>46</sup> Descartes thus legitimates the validity of tradition – customs, habits – in a decisionistic fashion, according to Lübbe:

37 Hacke, *Philosophie der Bürgerlichkeit*, 100, 140–57, 176–9; Ingenfeld, *Fortschritt und Verfall*, 288–9; Lübbe, *Praxis der Philosophie*, 61–77.

38 “Demgegenüber sollte es sich ... empfehlen, sich Wahrheiten nicht deswegen zu verfeinden, weil sie der Feind vertritt. Man sollte im Gegenteil sich bemühen, sie ihm abzuwerben.” Lübbe, *Theorie und Entscheidung*, 11; Cf. Lübbe, “Schmitt Liberal Rezipiert,” 429–30.

39 Lübbe, *Theorie und Entscheidung*, 11; Lübbe, *Säkularisierung*; Müller, “Schmitt’s Method,” 61–85; Schmitt, *Positionen und Begriffe*, 198; Schmitt, *Leviathan*, 18.

40 Blumenberg, “Anthropological Approach,” 447; Lübbe, *Praxis der Philosophie*, 63–70; Lübbe, *Theorie und Entscheidung*, 14–28.

41 Blumenberg, “Anthropological Approach,” 441; Blumenberg, “Staatstheorie,” 121–46.

42 “Die Entscheidung überspringt einen Mangel an rationalen Bestimmungsgründen des Handelns. Sie ist deswegen nicht irrational. Die Vernunft der Entscheidungssituation besteht gerade darin, sich zum Handeln zu bestimmen, obwohl ausreichende Gründe, so und nicht anders zu handeln, fehlen.” Lübbe, *Theorie und Entscheidung*, 21.

43 Marquard, *Zukunft Braucht Herkunft*, 238–42; Marquard, “Entlastung vom Absoluten,” 24–7; Marquard, *Farewell*, 64–86.

44 “Die Entscheidungssituation ist befristet.” Lübbe, *Theorie und Entscheidung*, 20; Cf. Müller, *Dangerous Mind*, 117.

45 Lübbe, *Praxis der Philosophie*, 68–9; Lübbe, *Theorie und Entscheidung*, 26–7; Marquard, *Defense of the Accidental*, 115; Blumenberg, “Anthropological Approach,” 434; cf. Keller, “Philosophisch-Politische Sympraxis,” 97–9.

46 Lübbe, *Praxis der Philosophie*, 68–70; Cf. Spaemann, *Kritik der Politischen Utopie*, 41–56.

With this legitimation it must be recognized and presupposed, that we indeed have various reasons to presume that the moral and political traditions, which determine our life practice, are imperfect and in need of revision. However, this revision can only ever be carried out in detail, while in other respects we cannot avoid to rely on tradition, regardless of how far we have come in this general revision. Tradition is not valid because of the evidence of its [foundation in] good reasons, but because of the evidence of the impossibility of doing without it.<sup>47</sup>

This entails, as Blumenberg and Marquard emphasize along similar lines as Lübbe, that positive change, or modest progress, is only possible if it occurs gradually and especially piecemeal. This would imply accepting – albeit provisionally – the imperfect and rationally unfounded nature of everything that thereby has to be left intact, in order to facilitate the viability of minor changes. The “burden of proof” should therefore lie with advocates of change rather than with advocates of conservation.<sup>48</sup>

The positive valuation of tradition, custom, and the *status quo* inherent to this “weak decisionism” illuminates the key difference with Schmitt’s authoritarian decisionism. After all, Schmitt’s notion of “the decision,” as it is presented in *Political Theology* (1922), is meant to signify the God-like power of the sovereign. The famous formula “[s]overeign is he who decides on the exception” does not simply suggest that the sovereign has to decide *once* the state of emergency comes about. It entails that the sovereign has the power to suspend the legal order in order to *create* the “state of exception” – the priority of the sovereign decision over the legal order is analogous to the precedence of God’s will over his creation.<sup>49</sup> While Schmitt is oriented toward the state of exception, which can be brought about by a single quasi-divine gesture, “weak decisionism” on the other hand emphasizes the need for making a variety of smaller, pragmatic decisions, precisely in order to *prevent* the “state of emergency” from occurring in the first place.<sup>50</sup> Blumenberg writes in this respect that modern political practice, by which he means a conservative–liberal variety, implies a rejection of “the state of exception as the normality of the political.” It means that decisions in modern politics are embedded in a practice of deliberation, rhetoric, compromise and governance, and that these decisions no longer resemble “the lightning strikes of Zeus and the decrees of predestination.”<sup>51</sup> Rather than the state of exception, we see a prioritization of the “state of normalcy.” In order to maintain it, small, pragmatist, imperfect decisions have to be made in the course of everyday political praxis, so that a situation can be avoided in which a Schmittian “pure” decision in the face of nothingness is necessary.<sup>52</sup> Or in the words of Marquard: “rational is who avoids the state of exception.”<sup>53</sup>

## 4 Secularization and Neutralization

The liberalization of political theology by the members of the Ritter School also involves a reinterpretation of Schmitt’s narrative on the origin of the modern state. This narrative, which likely receives its clearest

47 “Bei dieser Legitimation wird anerkannt und vorausgesetzt, daß wir in der Tat mancherlei Gründe haben anzunehmen, daß die Traditionen moralischer und politischer Art, die unsere Lebenspraxis bestimmen, mangelhaft und revisionsbedürftig sind. Aber die Revision kann stets nur im Detail erfolgen, während wir im übrigen nicht umhin können, uns auf die Tradition zu verlassen, und zwar unabhängig davon, wie weit wir mit dem Unternehmen ihrer Generalrevision bereits gelangt sind. Tradition gilt nicht aus der Evidenz ihrer guten Gründe, sondern aus der Evidenz der Unmöglichkeit, ohne sie auszukommen.” Lübbe, *Praxis der Philosophie*, 69.

48 Lübbe, *Theorie und Entscheidung*, 25–8; Marquard, *Farewell*, 14–6, 74, 117; Blumenberg, “Anthropological Approach,” 447; Blumenberg, *Selbsterhaltung*, 39; cf. Nicholls, *Myth and Human Sciences*, 189–96; Hacking, *Philosophie der Bürgerlichkeit*, 170–4, 180.

49 Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 5, cf. 1–15, 36–52.

50 Keller, “Philosophisch-Politische Sympraxis,” 97; cf. Lübbe, “Schmitt Liberal Rezipiert,” 433–40; Blumenberg, *Legitimität*, 60; Blumenberg, “Staatstheorie,” 129–39.

51 “des Ausnahmezustandes als der Normalität des Politischen”; “den Blitzen des Zeus und den Dekreten der Prädestination.” Blumenberg, *Legitimität*, 60; Cf. Blumenberg, “Staatstheorie,” 121–1145.

52 Keller, “Philosophisch-Politische Sympraxis,” 97; Lübbe, *Theorie und Entscheidung*, 28–31; Van Laak, *Gespräche*, 280.

53 “[v]ernünftig ist, wer die Ausnahmezustand vermeidet.” Marquard, *Individuum und Gewaltenteilung*, 91; Cf. Marquard, *Schwierigkeiten*, 163 fn.47; Keller, “Philosophisch-Politische Sympraxis,” 97.

formulation in Schmitt's *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes* (*Leviathan in der Staatslehre des Thomas Hobbes*, originally published in 1938), centers on Hobbes' attempt – and more generally, the early-modern endeavor – to pacify the sphere of politics after the era of religious and civil wars. This meant establishing an all-powerful absolute political force, the secular state or the worldly sovereign, whose power would trump that of the rivaling churches and religious sects. Sovereignty thus no longer derives from divine law or revelation, but it becomes contingent on the state's ability to impose peace, order, and stability. To Schmitt, this involves that “the laws of the state must become independent of subjective content, including religious tenets ... and should be accorded validity only as the result of the positive determination of the state's decision-making apparatus in the form of command norms.”<sup>54</sup> The phrase that encapsulates this, “*auctoritas non veritas facit legem*” (“authority, not truth makes law”) implies that “the religious and metaphysical standards of truth,” which had legitimized pre-modern claims to power, are now relegated to beyond the purview of politics altogether.<sup>55</sup>

Although Schmitt primarily reads Hobbes' theory as an endorsement of his own authoritarian decisionism, he did suggest that it might also form a point of departure for a *liberalist* conception of the state. The “Leviathan” – the all-powerful state that “brings about the unity of religion and politics” – contains an inherent weakness, according to Schmitt, because Hobbes allowed for a distinction between “inner faith and outer confession,” i.e., private belief and public compliance.<sup>56</sup> While Hobbes' concession is still outweighed by the fact that he prioritized the political over the private, it did enable a liberalist reception that would further draw the two spheres apart and that would eventually reverse this order of prioritization.<sup>57</sup>

This is precisely the route that is taken by the Ritterians and Blumenberg. Böckenförde, Lübke, and Blumenberg concur that the Hobbesian state that refrains from intruding in the private sphere should be regarded as the paradigm for the liberal state.<sup>58</sup> Böckenförde, in his famous article “Die Entstehung des Staates als Vorgang der Säkularisation” (1967), testifies to the aforementioned inversion of the priority between politics and the private.<sup>59</sup> While initially the genesis of the modern state meant an “emancipation” of politics from religion – affirming the “primacy and supremacy of politics” – it actually enabled a freedom of conscience, according to Böckenförde, that should be regarded as a realization of the Christian message.<sup>60</sup> This entails that “Christians must recognize the worldliness of this state not as something alien, or hostile to their faith, but as an opportunity for liberty, of which it is their task to preserve and realize it.”<sup>61</sup> In other words, Böckenförde suggests, what appeared to be an emancipation of politics from religion in fact turned out to entail a possible emancipation of religion from politics. To Schmitt, this would of course entail a disastrous “detheologization” of politics, because it denies the essential and “natural unity of spiritual and secular power.”<sup>62</sup>

Notwithstanding the supposedly fatal distinction between “inner faith and outer confession,” Schmitt nonetheless interprets Hobbes' theory as an affirmation of the political sovereign's power over secular *and spiritual* affairs. For instance, the sovereign, not the church, decides when something must be seen as a “miracle.” The creed that “authority, not truth makes law” simply entails that the sovereign decides what is true, or rather, because there is no pre-given truth, this gives the sovereign absolute power: “*Auctoritas, non Veritas*. Nothing here is true: everything is command. A miracle is what the sovereign state authority

<sup>54</sup> Schmitt, *Leviathan*, 44.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., *Political Theology*, 33; Schmitt, *Begriff des Politischen*, 122.

<sup>56</sup> Schmitt, *Leviathan*, 55–56; Cf. Schmitt, “Vollendete Reformation,” 58–62.

<sup>57</sup> Schmitt, *Leviathan*, 57–86. On the antisemitic dimension of Schmitt's Hobbes-reception, cf.: Motschenbacher, *Katechon*, 286–308; Groh, *Heillosigkeit der Welt*, 29–30.

<sup>58</sup> Böckenförde, “Entstehung des Staates,” 75–94; Lübke, “Schmitt Liberal Rezipiert,” 430–1; Blumenberg, *Legitimität*, 58–61.

<sup>59</sup> Böckenförde, “Entstehung des Staates,” 75–94; cf. Böckenförde, “Begriff des Politischen,” 283–300; Böckenförde, “Politische Theorie,” 16–25.

<sup>60</sup> “Primat und die Suprematie der Politik.” Böckenförde, “Entstehung des Staates,” 83, 91.

<sup>61</sup> “die Christen diesen Staat in seiner Weltlichkeit nicht länger als etwas Fremdes, ihrem Glauben Feindliches erkennen, sondern als die Chance der Freiheit, die zu erhalten und zu realisieren auch ihre Aufgabe ist.” Böckenförde, “Entstehung des Staates,” 94; Cf. Böckenförde, “Das Ethos,” 4–19.

<sup>62</sup> Schmitt, *Leviathan*, 83, cf. 10–1.

commands its subjects to believe to be a miracle [...].”<sup>63</sup> This motto is interpreted very differently by for instance Böckenförde and Lübbe: in their theories it implies that the modern state concedes that it has no jurisdiction over metaphysical truth claims, that it retreats from the domain of truth and metaphysics, and that this concession is a precondition for the pacification of politics. Böckenförde writes: “the king must ensure that his subjects do not destroy each other in bloody and insidious stubbornness; he cannot and should not decide on the question of truth itself.”<sup>64</sup>

Lübbe agrees that this concession should be viewed positively, the “auctoritas” formula “is a formula of peace”: it constitutes a political decision to forgo any claims on truth for the purpose of achieving peace. “In it, the political will to peace triumphs over the will to the political triumph of truth.”<sup>65</sup> Böckenförde and Lübbe thus conclude that the modern state itself should indeed retreat from the sphere of (metaphysical) “truth,” and instead derive its sole legitimacy from its ability to provide the freedom for individual citizens to believe in a plurality of different “truths.”<sup>66</sup> The detheologization of politics hence implies the freedom of religion, as Böckenförde emphasizes, as well as the freedom from religion, as is asserted by Lübbe.<sup>67</sup> They thereby affirm a Schmittian “truth-free” political decisionism, but without Schmitt’s own stipulation that the sovereign’s command should ideally substitute any truth claim, whether public or private.

Lübbe and Böckenförde concur that modern politics should above all be aimed at *pacification*, forming a necessary precondition for individual freedom. Böckenförde takes this one step further, as he reads not only Schmitt’s *Leviathan* in this vein, but also his *Concept of the Political* (1932/1933).<sup>68</sup> In this text, Schmitt famously claims that “the political,” the essence of politics, is the friend-enemy distinction: “[t]he specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy.”<sup>69</sup> This characterization has often resulted in the objection that Schmitt reduces politics to war and enmity.<sup>70</sup> However, in “Der Begriff des Politischen als Schlüssel zum staatsrechtlichen Werk Carl Schmitts” (1988), Böckenförde argues to the contrary that Schmitt’s concept of the political has a much more peaceful purpose, as it points toward the need for political unity. Once this unity has been established, once the borders are drawn, it becomes possible to resolve and pacify antagonisms that occur within. “The achievement of the state as a political unity is precisely to relativize everything that emerges within it, in terms of oppositions, tensions, and conflicts.”<sup>71</sup> Böckenförde furthermore argues, in “Die Teilung Deutschlands und die deutsche Staatsangehörigkeit” (1968), that because Schmitt offers a *limited* concept of politics, as a sphere that is distinct from morality or esthetics, this also implies a limited conception of “the enemy.” If a state recognizes another state – his example is the relationship between the BRD and the DDR – as an “enemy” rather than as a “foe,” i.e., if it refrains from demonization, then this might leave open the possibility of future rapprochement (or in this case, reunification).<sup>72</sup>

In Schmitt’s political theology, the concepts of pacification and secularization are closely related to the assumedly harmful process of *neutralization*. “Neutralization” would imply that the powers of the sovereign are curtailed or that sovereignty is denied altogether (e.g., in favor of a “rule of law”), once it is no longer

<sup>63</sup> Schmitt, *Leviathan*, 55. On the analogy between “miracle” and “exception,” cf. Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 5–15, 36–52.

<sup>64</sup> “Der König habe darauf zu achten, daß seine Untertanen sich nicht in blutigem und heimtückischem Starrsinn zu vernichten suchten; die Wahrheitsfrage selbst könne und solle er nicht entscheiden.” Böckenförde, “Entstehung des Staates,” 84–5; Cf. Böckenförde, “Das Ethos,” 14–5; Blumenberg, *Legitimität*, 60.

<sup>65</sup> “ist eine Friedesformel”; “In ihr triumphiert der politische Wille zum Frieden über den Willen zum politischen Triumph der Wahrheit.” Lübbe, “Politische Theologie,” 51; Cf. Lübbe, *Praxis der Philosophie*, 63–8, 73; Lübbe, “Schmitt Liberal Rezipiert,” 430–1.

<sup>66</sup> Böckenförde, “Entstehung des Staates,” 82–94; Böckenförde, “Das Ethos,” 12–9; Lübbe, *Praxis der Philosophie*, 63–8; Cf. Blumenberg, “Staatstheorie,” 121–45.

<sup>67</sup> Lübbe, “Politische Theologie,” 52–5; Böckenförde, “Entstehung des Staates,” 82–94.

<sup>68</sup> Böckenförde, “Begriff des Politischen,” 283–300.

<sup>69</sup> Schmitt, *Concept of the Political*, 26.

<sup>70</sup> E.g. Löwith, *European Nihilism*, 140–59; cf. Griffioen, *Contesting Modernity*, 112–32.

<sup>71</sup> “Die Leistung des Staates als politische Einheit ist somit gerade, alles, was in seinem Innern an Gegensätzen, Spannungen und Konflikten aufbricht, in dieser Weise zu relativieren ...” Böckenförde, “Begriff des Politischen,” 285; Cf. Ingenfeld, *Fortschritt und Verfall*, 293.

<sup>72</sup> Böckenförde, “Teilung Deutschlands,” 462–3. On the enemy/foe distinction, cf.: De Wit, *Onontkoombaarheid van de politiek*, 475.

confirmed that the sovereign acts under a divine mandate, i.e., in God's stead.<sup>73</sup> Schmitt admitted in *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes*, as well as in the later "Die vollendete Reformation" (1965), that this possibility already resides in a decisionist theory of state in which power no longer derives from any pre-given moral, divine, or cosmic order. That is, the constructivist nature of the (early)modern conception of the state can engender an image of the state as a self-sufficient order that, *after* the initial decision has been made that establishes this order, no longer requires a strong will to guide it or to create exceptions.<sup>74</sup> Likewise, Schmitt suggests, e.g., in the 1963 edition of the *Concept of the Political*, that while Hobbes' sovereign *pacifies* religious struggle by creating a new religious (in this case, Christian) unity, his theory also points a way towards *neutralization*, i.e., a liberal–secularist state neutrality toward all religions or worldviews.<sup>75</sup> His fears are indeed realized in Böckenförde's and Lübbe's theories: here, the abandonment of divine truths as a foundation for sovereignty is championed, not as an excuse for the sovereign to decide in God's stead, but rather as an opportunity to leave the belief or disbelief in those truths up to the discretion of individual citizens. Lübbe writes: "Carl Schmitt ... has offered a plausible description of the genesis of liberalism; all that is left is to affirm this genesis."<sup>76</sup> While these authors acknowledge that decisions still have to be made in the political sphere, namely in order to protect individual liberties in the face of unforeseen circumstances and antagonistic forces, these decisions are not God-like acts, but managerial measures to maintain the state of normalcy.

## 5 Political Polytheology

Thus far, I have shown that Lübbe and Böckenförde have developed their theories on decisionism and the secular state through a critical exchange with Schmitt, resulting in neutralized, liberalized versions of his ideas and concepts. However, the theme of "political theology," taken in this instance as a delineated subfield of Schmitt's thought, received a different treatment by these two authors.<sup>77</sup> That is, Lübbe and Böckenförde appeared to be more hesitant in this respect, in that they refrained from developing something like a liberal variety of political theology. The reason for this appears to be that Lübbe and Böckenförde assumed that "political theology" only serves, or is only meant to serve, a descriptive function.<sup>78</sup> In this respect, they have both taken Schmitt at his word when he claimed – in *Political Theology* (1922) and in *Political Theology II* (1970) – that "political theology" merely amounts to an objectivist, descriptive research program that highlights a "systematic analogy between theological and juristic concepts."<sup>79</sup> This assumption was reiterated when Lübbe and Böckenförde were invited to contribute to a 1980 conference on Carl Schmitt, which was organized by Jacob Taubes, and originally carried the working title *Political Theology III*.<sup>80</sup> On this occasion, especially Lübbe was insistent that the sole purpose of Schmitt's political theology is to objectively trace "analytically discernible and historical explainable structural analogies between key theological concepts on the one hand,

<sup>73</sup> Schmitt, *Begriff des Politischen*, 121–3; Schmitt, *Leviathan*, 41–74; Schmitt, "Age of Neutralizations," 130–42.

<sup>74</sup> Schmitt, *Leviathan*, 41–74; Schmitt, "Vollendete Reformation," 59–63; cf. Blumenberg, *Legitimacy*, 89–101; Faber, "Erledigung," 86.

<sup>75</sup> Schmitt, *Begriff des Politischen*, 121–3; Schmitt, "Vollendete Reformation," 59–63; cf. Groh, *Heillosigkeit der Welt*, 57–61.

<sup>76</sup> "Carl Schmitt ... hatte die Genesis des Liberalismus plausibel beschrieben; es blieb lediglich nachzuholen, diese Genesis zu bejahen." Lübbe, "Schmitt Liberal Rezipiert," 432; Cf. Van Laak, *Gespräche*, 278.

<sup>77</sup> That is to say, "political theology" can also be taken to signify (*pars pro toto*) the *entirety* of Schmitt's thought, assuming that it constitutes its "core." This "theologizing" reading has been put forward, for instance, by Meier (*Die Lehre Schmitts*), Groh (*Heillosigkeit der Welt*) and Motschenbacher (*Katechon*), and it is one to which my own interpretation is also inclined (cf. *Contesting Modernity*, 71–194). See Müller, *Dangerous Mind*, 202–5.

<sup>78</sup> Ingenfeld, *Fortschritt und Verfall*, 295–7; Groh, *Heillosigkeit der Welt*, 13–6, 178.

<sup>79</sup> Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 42; Cf. Schmitt, *Political Theology II*, 117.

<sup>80</sup> Lübbe, "Politische Theologie," 45–56; Böckenförde, "Politische Theorie," 16–25; Cf. Blumenberg and Schmitt, *Briefwechsel*, 167–74.

and key juridical concepts on the other.”<sup>81</sup> He then takes aim at the New Leftist variety of political theology – which had in the meantime gained prominence through the work of Johann-Baptist Metz, Jürgen Moltmann, and Dorothee Sölle – arguing that this new attempt to “repoliticize” religion threatens to undo one of the great accomplishments of the modern age: the neutralization, i.e., depoliticization, of religion. The only thing that this brand of political theology has in common with Schmitt’s, Lübbe argues, is its name.<sup>82</sup>

Many commentators, however, concur that political theology has a significant “appellative” or normative function not only for the New Left, but also for Schmitt himself.<sup>83</sup> Ruth Groh for instance argues that Schmitt tends to dress his “political-theological mythos” in the “camouflage of science,” i.e., that he expressly disguises the normative contents of his political theology with scientific-objectivist language.<sup>84</sup> In contrast with Lübbe and Böckenförde, Marquard was well aware of the normative dimension of Schmitt’s political theology. Furthermore, it appears that Marquard was especially alarmed by the rise of political theology, or the tendency to “retheologize” politics, in Leftist thought after 1968. He regarded progressive “grand historical narratives” of redemption and emancipation as reoccurrences of *eschatological* thought, and he viewed the Leftist inclination toward critique and negation as a reiteration of *gnostic* dualism.<sup>85</sup> This urged Marquard to develop his own liberal-conservative variety of political theology. However, rather than directly responding to Schmitt’s ideas in this respect, Marquard rather took his cue from *Blumenberg’s* counter-position to Schmitt.<sup>86</sup>

First, some background on the Schmitt–Blumenberg debate itself: Blumenberg’s *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (*Die Legitimität der Neuzeit*, 1966) constitutes a critique of “the secularization theorem,” which he presents as a doctrine that subjects all secular, modern phenomena to religious ones, and thus robs them of their self-sufficiency and legitimacy.<sup>87</sup> Schmitt’s famous claim that “[a]ll significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts” also falls under this theorem.<sup>88</sup> The Postscript of Schmitt’s *Political Theory II* was meant as a response to Blumenberg’s initial attack. In it, Schmitt not only argues that Blumenberg’s depiction of his own use of the concept of “secularization” is unjustified, he also takes aim at the latter’s “autistic” conception of a fully neutralized, depoliticized modernity.<sup>89</sup> In Schmitt’s perspective, this image – of a fully self-sufficient sphere of immanence – ignores the fact that any unity contains within itself the possibility of a disunity, revolt or uproar. This serves as proof of the inescapability of “the political,” i.e., antagonism or enmity.<sup>90</sup>

The argumentative core of the Postscript is Schmitt’s “stasiology,” as it was meant to provide an ontological-metaphysical ground for the principle of enmity. Schmitt claims that the concept of “stasis,” while carrying connotations of “quiescence, tranquility,” also involves, more importantly, “(political) unrest, movement, uproar and civil war.” A formula on the nature of the divinity, from a patristic text by Gregory of Nazianzus, forms Schmitt’s point of departure: “The One – *to Hen* – is always in uproar – *stasiazon* – against itself – *pros heauton*.” This assumedly means that, at “the heart of the doctrine of Trinity we encounter a genuine politico-theological *stasiology*. Thus the problem of enmity and of the enemy cannot be ignored.”<sup>91</sup> Schmitt hereby suggests that the Christian conception of God already contains a duality, even an enmity,

<sup>81</sup> “analytisch erhebbarer und dann historisch erklärbarer strukturelle Analogien zwischen zentralen theologischen Begriffen einerseits und zentralen juristischen Begriffen andererseits.” Lübbe, “Politische Theologie,” 47.

<sup>82</sup> Lübbe, “Politische Theologie,” 48; Böckenförde, “Politische Theorie,” 16–21; Ingenfeld, *Fortschritt und Verfall*, 295–7; Cf. Spaemann, *Kritik der Politischen Utopie*, 57–76; Metz, *Zur Theologie der Welt*.

<sup>83</sup> The term “appellative” political theology is derived from Böckenförde, “Politische Theorie,” 16–25; Cf. Groh, *Heillosigkeit der Welt*, 12–19; Meier, *Die Lehre Schmitts*; Ingenfeld, *Fortschritt und Verfall*, 296.

<sup>84</sup> “politisch-theologischer Mythos”; “im Tarnkleid der Wissenschaft.” Groh, *Heillosigkeit der Welt*, 22.

<sup>85</sup> Marquard, *Farewell*, 87–110; Marquard, “Aufgeklärter Polytheismus,” 77–84; Marquard, “Gnostische Rezidiv,” 31–6.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Styfhals, *No Spiritual Investment*, 197–245; Ingenfeld, *Fortschritt und Verfall*, 252, 264–76, 298–300; Griffioen, *Contesting Modernity*, 350–79.

<sup>87</sup> Blumenberg, *Legitimacy*, 3–120; Cf. Griffioen, *Contesting Modernity*, 13–68.

<sup>88</sup> Schmitt, *Political Theory*, 36; Blumenberg, *Legitimität*, 60; Blumenberg, *Legitimacy*, 89–101.

<sup>89</sup> Schmitt, *Political Theory II*, 116–30; cf. Müller, *Dangerous Mind*, 156–68. Schmitt (116–8) argues that his concept of secularization signifies a legitimate reoccupation (*Umsetzung*) rather than an illegitimate expropriation.

<sup>90</sup> Schmitt, *Political Theory II*, 120–30; cf. De Wit, *Onontkoombaarheid van de Politiek*, 445–52.

<sup>91</sup> Schmitt, *Political Theory II*, 122–3.

between two principles: the principle of redemption and creation. Goethe's phrase "*nemo contra deum nisi ipse deus*" is interpreted by Schmitt as a demonstration of this rift within the divine unity.<sup>92</sup> The implication is that this Manichean dualism is not only irreducibly present within Christian theology, as Blumenberg acknowledges, but in any *political unity*:

The main structural problem with Gnostic dualism, that is, with the problem of the God of creation and the God of salvation, dominates not only every religion of salvation and redemption. *It exists inescapably in every world in need of change and renewal*, and it is both immanent and ineradicable. One cannot get rid of the enmity between human beings by prohibiting wars between states in the traditional sense, by advocating a world revolution and by transforming world politics into world policing. Revolution ... is a hostile struggle. Friendship is hardly possible between the lord of a world in need of change ... – a lord who is deemed guilty of this need for change because he does not support but rather opposes it – and the liberator, the creator of a transformed new world. They are, so to speak, *by definition* enemies.<sup>93</sup>

Blumenberg countered this critique in his *Work on Myth* (*Arbeit am Mythos*, 1979), in a chapter called "Ways of reading 'The Extraordinary Saying'," proposing a radically different interpretation of Goethe's formula.<sup>94</sup> The phrase "*nemo contra deum nisi ipse deus*" does not signify an antagonism *within* the divinity, according to Blumenberg: it is rather an affirmation of *polytheism*. It means "only a god against [another] god," rather than "only God against God."<sup>95</sup> Blumenberg summarized his contention in a letter to Schmitt from 1975: "Goethe's apophthegma grasps the general meaning of polytheism in terms of its division of powers, its prevention of absolute power, and of any religion as the feeling of absolute dependence on it."<sup>96</sup> So, instead of Schmitt's suggestion that Goethe pits a savior God against a creator God, Blumenberg explains that this formula refers to a polytheistic "separation of powers" that safeguards individual liberty because the multiple gods of antiquity keep each other in check. "Gods, because there are many, always stand in opposition against others. Only another god can limit a god."<sup>97</sup>

In *Work on Myth*, Blumenberg writes that polytheism, as indicated by Goethe, thus provides a paradigm situation in which individual liberty is obtained through a separation of powers. Polytheism forms "the original schema of man's liberation from anxiety in the face of all the powers that he cannot comprehend, insofar as these seem to stand only against man, and must consequently be thought of as being turned aside by opposition to one another."<sup>98</sup> Blumenberg writes in "Wirklichkeitsbegriff und Wirkunspotential des Mythos" (1971) that the polytheistic world is characterized by a fundamental "humanity" and "liberality" because it neutralizes the power of the absolute by dissipating it into a plurality of smaller forces.<sup>99</sup> In that sense, there is an essential isomorphism between classical antiquity and modernity, because both epochs are characterized by a *resistance* against the absolutism that is represented by Schmitt's all-powerful political sovereign and by the voluntarist God of Christianity.

Blumenberg refrained from explicitly arguing that ancient polytheism forms a prototype for modern liberalism, even though this is clearly hinted at, nor did he expressly state that his own account constitutes a *political polytheology* – as a pluralist and liberalist inversion of Schmitt's political monotheology.<sup>100</sup> Marquard however was not as hesitant in this respect. In "Aufgeklärter Polytheismus" (1983) – an article presented at the aforementioned 1980 conference on Carl Schmitt – and in "Praise of Polytheism" ("Lob des

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 125 (translation modified, emphasis added); Schmitt, *Politische Theologie II*, 120–1.

<sup>94</sup> Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, 523–56; Cf. Blumenberg, *Legitimacy*, 89–101; Nicholls, *Myth and Human Sciences*, 183–216.

<sup>95</sup> Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, 528–31.

<sup>96</sup> "Goethes Apophthegma ergreift die Allgemeinheit der Bedeutung des Polytheismus als seine Gewaltenteilung, seine Verhinderung der absoluten Macht und jeder Religion als Gefühls der schlechthinnigen Abhängigkeit von ihr." Blumenberg and Schmitt, *Briefwechsel*, 133.

<sup>97</sup> "Götter, indem es viele sind, stehen immer schon einer gegen den andern. Begrenzen kann einen Gott immer nur wiederum ein Gott." Blumenberg and Schmitt, *Briefwechsel*, 133; Cf. Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, 524–55.

<sup>98</sup> Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, 550.

<sup>99</sup> "Humanität"; "Liberalität." Blumenberg, "Wirklichkeitsbegriff des Mythos," 21, 33, 43; Cf. Blumenberg and Schmitt, *Briefwechsel*, 168–9.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. Blumenberg and Schmitt, *Briefwechsel*, 168–71; Nicholls, *Myth and Human Sciences*, 190.

Polytheismus,” first published in 1978), Marquard formulated a political polytheology that was explicitly modeled after Schmitt’s, albeit with a crucial inversion, in that it was substantively determined by Blumenberg’s liberal pluralism.<sup>101</sup> Significantly, this political polytheism was not only meant to form a critical counterpoint to Schmitt’s authoritarian political *monotheism*, it was also formulated in opposition to the New Left’s revolutionary political *messianism*, represented in this context by Jacob Taubes. Indeed, both Lübke and Böckenförde agreed that the recent appropriation of political theology by the New Left, especially after 1968, could be dangerous, as it creates new friend–enemy distinctions and threatens the essential precondition for peace and liberty: the detheologization of politics.<sup>102</sup> Marquard, however, suggested that it is not theology per se that forms the most significant threat; it is rather Schmitt’s stasiological or dualistic scheme, a scheme that is inherent to all kinds of monotheistic – or “mono-mythic” – thinking.

Marquard argues that both monotheistic religion and contemporary (Leftist) narratives of progress and emancipation harbor an essential intolerance, due to their “mono-mythic” nature. This means that they permit a belief in only one myth, to the detriment of others: “this myth commands: I am your only story, you shall have no other stories besides me.”<sup>103</sup> Marquard notes that emancipatory philosophy of history, such as Marx’, simulates religious eschatology in its production of speculative historical narratives that differentiate between heroes and villains, and which only promise happy endings to those who belong to “the right side of history”: i.e., they engender and consolidate friend–enemy distinctions.<sup>104</sup> Marquard asserts thus that currently, the Leftist idea of progress has assumed the same role as religious eschatology: “the revolutionary philosophy is – monomythic – the current political monotheism.”<sup>105</sup> It is over against this “political monotheism” that he presents his own political polytheism, or “Polymythie”:

Polymyth – originating from polytheism – implies for all people and for every individual: everyone is allowed to have many different stories and is – divide et impera or divide et fuge – free towards them, and [remains] an individual through the division of powers as the separation of stories. Polymyth is good, monomyth is bad.<sup>106</sup>

Marquard not only seeks to rehabilitate ancient polytheism in line with Blumenberg over against both Schmitt’s and the Leftist variety of political theology. He also confirms that contemporary society already contains a beneficial “polytheistic” structure. Marquard thereby draws on Max Weber, who regarded the process of differentiation – a fracturing of society into different “value spheres” – as a recurrence of polytheism, in disenchanted form. However, while Weber valued this negatively, Marquard himself asserts that this is a positive feature of contemporary society, because modern pluralism provides individual freedom through the “separation of powers.”<sup>107</sup> In other words, the Weberian theory of social differentiation serves as a concrete illustration of Blumenberg’s notion of a “separation of powers within the absolute.”<sup>108</sup> This signifies a condition in which multiple powers keep each other in check, or cancel each other out, which leaves the individual free from being completely dominated by a single power.<sup>109</sup>

From “Aufgeklärter Polytheismus,” it becomes clear that Marquard takes aim at Schmitt. He alludes to the gnostic dualism that Schmitt situates within the core of monotheism, which would prove the inescapability of

<sup>101</sup> In: Marquard, *Farewell*, 87–110; Marquard, “Aufgeklärter Polytheismus,” 77–84; cf. Marquard, “Gnostische Rezidiv,” 31–6; Styfals, *No Spiritual Investment*, 197–245.

<sup>102</sup> Lübke, “Politische Theologie,” 48–56; Böckenförde, “Politische Theorie,” 21.

<sup>103</sup> Marquard, *Farewell*, 94.

<sup>104</sup> Marquard, *Schwierigkeiten*, 13–33, 52–82.

<sup>105</sup> “die revolutionäre Geschichtsphilosophie ist – monomythisch – der heutige politische Monotheismus.” Marquard, “Aufgeklärter Polytheismus,” 82.

<sup>106</sup> “Polymythie – aus dem Polytheismus kommend – bedeutet für alle Menschen und jeden einzelnen: jeder darf viele verschiedene Geschichten haben und ist – divide et impera bzw. divide et fuge – ihnen gegenüber frei und ein einzelner durch Gewaltenteilung als Geschichtsteilung. Polymythie ist bekömmlich, Monomythie ist schlimm.” Marquard, “Aufgeklärter Polytheismus,” 82; Cf. Marquard, *Farewell*, 17–8, 92–105; Nicholls, *Myth and Human Sciences*, 214.

<sup>107</sup> Marquard, *Farewell*, 93–103; Marquard, *Defense of the Accidental*, 123–6.

<sup>108</sup> “Gewaltenteilung im Absoluten.” Marquard, “Aufgeklärter Polytheismus,” 84; Cf. Blumenberg, “Wirklichkeitsbegriff des Mythos,” 11–66.

<sup>109</sup> Marquard, *Individuum und Gewaltenteilung*, 76–8, 114–23.

antagonism, i.e., that “the One is always in uproar against itself.” While Marquard admits that gnostic dualism indeed lies at the heart of monotheism, he rejects the idea that enmity is inescapable in any kind of political unity. If this political unity is to be conceived of as internally divided against itself, it should not be regarded in terms of two incompatible principles (redemption/revolution versus creation/order), but as a *plurality* instead, which means that the antagonism that dualism harbors can be avoided.<sup>110</sup> The recourse to political polytheism – as a form of *poly-theology* – is subsequently presented as a strategy to buttress societal pluralism against infringements by either the authoritarian Right or the revolutionary Left. The usage of a theological language is not necessarily problematic (as Lübke and Böckenförde indicate), because it can form an instrument of neutralization:

Many modern positions constitute themselves along the path of an anti-Christian theology: in the affirmation of the immanent world, the path of nature led to the objective world via pantheism (Spinoza); in the affirmation of the secular-neutral capacity of people to maintain peace, the path of the state in its modern form led via the “Leviathan” (Hobbes): apparently, neutralization requires self-apotheosis, at least as a transitory phenomenon ... When worldliness can only protect its neutralization against theology in a theological fashion, then it makes sense for it to seek an alliance, against the eschatological monomyth, with a political polymyth, according to the motto: *nemo contra Deum nisi plures Dei*.<sup>111</sup>

## 6 Reflection: Sketch of Political Theology as a Conceptual Field

After this exposition of the different ways in which Ritterians and Blumenberg have critically received Schmitt's ideas, it has become appropriate to reflect on the nature of the conceptual link between them and on how they can be perceived as occupying different positions in a multivalent conceptual field. For instance, looking at the reception of Schmitt by the Left, we can indeed recognize that his political theology contains certain key elements that have a range of application and multivalency, which cannot be simply reduced to its usage by, or to the intention of, Schmitt himself. In other words, this theory contains within itself the possibility of its own in- or subversion. The most famous example of this is provided by Benjamin, who refers to Schmitt's theory on the “state of exception” and to the 1933 Reichstag Fire decree in his “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” arguing that “the ‘state of exception’ in which we live is not the exception but the rule,” and that “it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency.”<sup>112</sup> Surveying Schmitt's work, it does however appear that he was mostly aware of these possibilities for inversion, and he occasionally hints at them, or explores them more fully – as, e.g., how the Leviathan already contained within itself “the seed of death” that destroyed it.<sup>113</sup> This shows that he often understood the essential equivocity and potential volatility of the ideas and concepts he employed, which is why the “*ideenpolitische*” struggle over them is deemed especially serious. After all, the open-ended nature of these concepts made it possible for ideological enemies to seize them for their own ends.<sup>114</sup> And indeed, this is also what Lübke acknowledges when it comes to concepts such as “secularization” or “the decision.”<sup>115</sup>

<sup>110</sup> Marquard, “Aufgeklärter Polytheismus,” 83.

<sup>111</sup> “Viele Neuzeitpositionen konstituierten sich auf dem Weg über einen Antichristentum-Theologie: bei der Bekräftigung der Diesseitswelt führte der Weg der Natur zur Objektwelt über den Pantheismus (Spinoza); bei der Bekräftigung der konfessionsneutralen Friedensfähigkeit der Menschen führte der Weg des Staates in seine moderne Gestalt über den “Leviathan” (Hobbes): offenbar braucht die Neutralisierung die Selbstapotheose zumindest als transitorisches Phänomen. ... Wenn die Profanität ihre Neutralisierung gegen die Theologie so nur theologisch retten könnte, läge es für sie nahe, gegen den eschatologischen Monomythos das Bündnis mit einem politischen Polytheismus zu suchen nach dem Motto: *nemo contra Deum nisi plures Dei*.” Marquard, “Aufgeklärter Polytheismus,” 83 (emphasis added).

<sup>112</sup> Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 257.

<sup>113</sup> Schmitt, *Leviathan*, 57, 79–86; Schmitt, “Vollendete Reformation,” 53–4.

<sup>114</sup> Cf. Müller, “Schmitt's Method,” 61–85; Schmitt, *Positionen und Begriffe*, 198.

<sup>115</sup> Lübke, *Theorie und Entscheidung*, 11; Lübke, *Säkularisierung*.

Schmitt's stasiology is perhaps the clearest example of how one element in his theory provides room for multiple positions that can be occupied within it. He sketches the political–theological condition as one in which one can either side with order, or the principle of creation, or with revolution, the principle of redemption.<sup>116</sup> On the basis of another text, “Three Possibilities for a Christian Conception of History” (“Drei Stufen historischer Sinngebung,” 1950), it becomes evident why he sides with order against “redemption”: it is because he associates the *eschaton* – or the eschatological form that narratives of redemption assume – not with the second coming of Christ, but rather with the victory of the Antichrist.<sup>117</sup> This is the reason why Schmitt occupies a “*katechontic*” position; that is, he identifies himself with “the kat-echon,” a restraining, conservative force that “defers the end and suppresses the evil one,” i.e., the Antichrist.<sup>118</sup> The existence of the katechontic position is significant in the context of this article, because it provides insight into how Schmitt's stasiology can be widened even further, so that it contains not only an autocratic and a revolutionary position, but also a liberal–conservative one. That is, the liberal–conservative stance takes the form of a *neutralized* katechontic position. This illustrates that the liberal–conservative appropriation of Schmitt's political theology by Blumenberg and members of the Ritter School was to some extent also already *available* as a conceptual possibility.

The contention that the liberal–conservative position was in a sense available and should be situated *within* Schmitt's framework alongside the autocratic and the revolutionary positions, has been hinted at by Richard Faber, in his “Von der ‘Erledigung jeder Politischen Theologie’ zur Konstitution Politischer Polytheologie” (1983).<sup>119</sup> Faber outlines the field of political theology as comprising these three positions: on the Left the revolutionary political messianism of Benjamin (and Taubes), at the center the liberal–conservative political polytheism of Blumenberg and Marquard, and on the Right the authoritarian political monotheism of Schmitt.<sup>120</sup> Faber notes: “Schmitt's quality is demonstrated not least by the fact that he can be read against the grain.”<sup>121</sup> That is, by reading against the grain, it is possible to turn Schmitt against himself. This means that Schmitt has thereby not only opened up room for a Benjaminian, revolutionary political theology, but, by invoking Goethe's formula, he has also opened up conceptual space in his own framework for a political polytheism along the lines of Blumenberg and Marquard.<sup>122</sup>

Following Faber's analysis, we can discover multiple lines of convergence and divergence between the three positions: Schmitt and Benjamin adhere to a *dualistic*, stasiological framework, in which order and authority are posited over against revolution and redemption, while Marquard's and Blumenberg's pluralism is ultimately subsumed under a *monistic* framework, where the multiple gods – or secular institutions – are placed under a single pantheon, cosmos or unifying “law.”<sup>123</sup> Conversely, Faber also emphasizes the essentially conservative nature of this monism, as it endeavors to neutralize the antagonism within the dualistic framework through its “dissipation” into a plurality of forces. He therefore also situates Schmitt, Marquard and Blumenberg on the one hand over against Benjamin and Taubes on the other, in that the former assume an essentially *katechontic* stance, while the latter hold out hope for the *eschaton*.<sup>124</sup> Indeed, this categorization also applies in a sense to Böckenförde and Lübke, even if they have not ventured to formulate a political polytheology themselves. After all, their pleas for a detheologization of politics is meant to strengthen the stability of a unified societal-political order, within which a modest pluralism can be maintained, over against

<sup>116</sup> Schmitt, *Political Theology II*, 123–6; Schmitt, *Leviathan*, 21–2; cf. Taubes, *Political Theology of Paul*, 103.

<sup>117</sup> Schmitt, “Three Possibilities,” 167–70; cf. Schmitt, *Frieden oder Pazifismus?*, 841.

<sup>118</sup> Schmitt, “Three Possibilities,” 169; Cf. Schmitt, *Nomos of the Earth*, 59–66.

<sup>119</sup> Presented at the same 1980 conference mentioned earlier, *Der Fürst dieser Welt*, organized by Taubes, which Böckenförde and Lübke also attended.

<sup>120</sup> Faber, “Erledigung,” 85–99. For a critical reading of Faber's analysis, cf.: Kroll, *Human End*, 292–4.

<sup>121</sup> “Schmitts Qualität erweist sich nicht zuletzt darin, daß er gegen den Strich gelesen werden kann.” Faber, “Erledigung,” 90; Cf. Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 257.

<sup>122</sup> Faber, “Erledigung,” 92–9.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.; Cf. Blumenberg, “Wirklichkeitsbegriff des Mythos,” 14–27; Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, 523–55; Marquard, “Gnostische Rezidiv,” 31–6.

<sup>124</sup> Faber, “Erledigung,” 85–99.

re-theologized calls for a radical upheaval.<sup>125</sup> This characterization is not to suggest, as Faber appears to do, that Blumenberg and Marquard (and for that matter, Böckenförde and Lübke) are rendered suspect because they can be seen to side with Schmitt against a radical revolutionary messianism.<sup>126</sup> The outlining of these three positions within the one political–theological framework merely indicates that Schmitt can be “read against the grain” not only for the purpose of its revolutionary *subversion*, but also for the purpose of its liberal–conservative *neutralization*.

One of Schmitt’s favorite dictums is “der Feind ist unsere eigene Frage als Gestalt” (“the enemy is our own question taken shape”).<sup>127</sup> He takes this phrase from Theodor Däubler to imply that the image of “the Enemy” – one’s own radical antithesis – provides a negative mirror image within which one can identify oneself. This “positive” evaluation of enmity, as an opportunity for self-identification, is one explanation why Schmitt was eager to engage with intellectual opponents, such as Taubes or Blumenberg. However, what this fixation with enmity tends to ignore is precisely what my own sketch of the conceptual field of political theology, based on Faber’s analysis, is meant to reveal. That is, I would suggest that this exposition shows that a meaningful opposition requires a *shared* conceptual framework or at least some agreement on which terms are up for debate. The outline of the three positions within the framework of political theology shows multiple non-exhaustive lines of convergence. For instance, it has become apparent that Schmitt and Benjamin, or Taubes, share a similar stasiological framework, within which they occupy opposite positions. But something similar applies to the liberal–conservative position, as Böckenförde, Lübke, Marquard, and Blumenberg can be seen to share Schmitt’s decisionist framework – while opting for a weak version instead of his own authoritarian variety. Concomitantly, they affirm Schmitt’s theory of the state of exception even though they prioritize “normalcy.” And while they thereby seek to oppose Schmitt, this simultaneously means that from a *revolutionary* standpoint, they can be seen to join his *katechontic* resistance against political messianism. All four liberal–conservative authors are moreover essentially in agreement with Schmitt that politics and theology are intrinsically connected, which leads Marquard – in line with Blumenberg – toward the formulation of his own political (poly)theology.

In other words, a focus on intellectual opposition as a manifestation of enmity can be misleading in that it ignores the prior agreement that is often necessary for meaningful opposition to be possible in the first place. This also implies that an intellectual opponent cannot simply be reduced to a negative mirror image, as the liberal–conservative reception of Schmitt demonstrates.<sup>128</sup> For example: the Postscript of *Political Theology II* shows that Schmitt regarded Blumenberg as an enemy, as the one who attempted to provide the final death blow to his political theology.<sup>129</sup> Subsequently, Schmitt drew a caricature of Blumenberg’s conception of modernity as a “de-theologised counter-image” to his own position, namely as a purely scientific-technocratic, immanent, autonomous order, from which there is no escape, and within which there is no room for exceptions.<sup>130</sup> However, this “counter-image” ignores the fact that Blumenberg and the students of Ritter did acknowledge the precarity of any stable societal order, including a liberal–conservative one. In other words, they emphatically realized that it can easily be overturned, in the name of either a God-like sovereign or a Messiah-like emancipatory movement. They also did not fully negate the purported necessity of “the decision” in favor of an affirmation of either “endless discussion” or a self-sufficient societal order, as Schmitt suggests. Rather, they regarded this order as being inherently unstable and therefore emphasized the need for making small, managerial decisions to maintain it, precisely so that the apparent need for *large* decisions (divine or messianic) can be suppressed.<sup>131</sup>

<sup>125</sup> Cf. Lübke, “Schmitt Liberal Rezipiert,” 432, 438–40; Böckenförde, “Das Ethos,” 4–19; Van Laak, *Gespräche*, 278–9.

<sup>126</sup> Cf. Kroll, *Human End*, 292–4.

<sup>127</sup> Schmitt, *Glossarium*, 243.

<sup>128</sup> Lübke, “Schmitt Liberal Rezipiert,” 428–33; Lübke, *Theorie und Entscheidung*, 11.

<sup>129</sup> Cf. Schmitz and Lepper, “Logik der Differenzen,” 285–93.

<sup>130</sup> Schmitt, *Political Theology II*, 127–30.

<sup>131</sup> Lübke, “Schmitt Liberal Rezipiert,” 435–40; Lübke, *Theorie und Entscheidung*, 11–2, 29–30; Blumenberg, “Staatstheorie,” 121–45.

## 7 Conclusion

The liberal–conservative Schmitt reception is often ignored in Anglophone literature on political theology.<sup>132</sup> Mostly, emphasis is placed on either Schmitt's own political leanings and how they pertain to his political theology, or on the Leftist appropriation of his theory by for instance Benjamin and Taubes, or, more recently, Negri and Agamben. On the basis of my analysis and reflection, I would suggest that this dual focus is itself inherently Schmittian. It is inherently Schmittian, because such a conception regards political theology through a lens that only permits an either/or decision, whether this be for the Leviathan or the Behemoth, the *katechon* or the *eschaton*, Christ or the Antichrist, the creator or the redeemer. However, upon closer inspection of Schmitt's work and its reception, it becomes clear that the third option, namely towards neutralization, liberalization or pluralization, also presents itself from within this framework. In this article, I have explained how this possibility was then seized by prominent members of the Ritter School, i.e., Lübke, Böckenförde, and Marquard, and also, albeit occasionally in a more indirect manner, by Blumenberg.

To summarize this brief sketch of the liberal–conservative Schmitt reception, we have first of all seen that, as especially Lübke has emphasized, decisionism can also be employed in the service of liberal–democratic ends. A liberal–conservative decisionism admits that decisions must be made, Lübke argues, but it consciously rejects the romanticist-fascist proclivity for “great decisions,” characteristic of “high politics.” Instead, it emphasizes the need to make smaller, managerial decisions, in order to *avoid* “the state of exception.” Second, Böckenförde has shown that Schmitt's Hobbes reception can also be read against the grain, namely by simply affirming that which the latter lamented, i.e., the fact that notwithstanding Hobbes' absolutism there is a clear continuity between this project of political pacification and the liberal de-theologization of politics. Third, we have seen that Blumenberg provided the groundwork for Marquard's pluralization of Schmitt's political theology, in that both agreed that preservation of order fares best through “a dissipation of the Absolute.”

Finally, I contend that my reflection on political theology as a conceptual field in which multiple positions can be occupied problematizes certain assumptions in Schmitt's antagonism, at least the belief that, for instance, intellectual debates should be understood in terms of either/or decisions or that they are solely waged between “enemies” that appear as negative mirror images of each other. I would suggest that not everything can be placed within such a rigid dualistic framework. In fact, this exposition of the liberal–conservative Schmitt reception has provided insight into how (intellectual) opponents cannot always simply be reduced to antitheses or negative mirror images. This applies both to Schmitt's New Left readers and to the Ritter scholars: they could only meaningfully and critically engage with Schmitt from within a shared conceptual framework or at least on the basis of certain theoretical–conceptual points of convergence. Meaningful opposition requires at least *some* prior agreement.

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<sup>132</sup> To reemphasize, this does not apply to German scholarship, cf.: Van Laak, *Gespräche*, 192–200, 276–81; Hacke, *Philosophie der Bürgerlichkeit*, 174–215; Schweda, “Ritters Begriff des Politischen;” Schweda, “Die ‘nicht selbstverständliche’ Begegnung;” Ingenfeld, *Fortschritt und Verfall*, 247–300; Mehring, *Carl Schmitt*, 513–32; Seifert, “Ritters ‘Collegium Philosophicum,’” 189–98.

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