

Carl Schmitt in the Age of Immanence: A Critical Reading

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Abstract : This paper aims to uncover the ideological aspects in the political thought of Carl Schmitt, who is enjoying an ever-increasing popularity in various academic fields, following in the wake of rising interest in questions of sovereignty and legitimacy. Given Schmitt's biography, i.e. his role as the 'Crown Jurist of the Third Reich' (Gurian), an extraordinarily thorough examination is necessary; however, instead of merely 'deconstructing' his works, certain ontological truths he might have attained, shall be taken seriously. To this end, his notions of politics and the state of exception are scrutinized, which are indeed considered intriguing, yet prove to be enigmatic and impalpable at the core when read closely. In order to explain this conjuncture, both Schmitt's philosophy of history and his 'secret discussion' (Agamben) with Walter Benjamin are depicted. As it turns out - it is argued - his concept of the Political has to be conceived of as embedded in a much broader context: In a post-transcendental, immanent age, he regards traditional modes of representation as no longer feasible and clings to authoritarianism as a surrogate - his Catholicism plays a decisive role here, forcing him to inject normatively biased assumptions into his political writings. Seeing Schmitt perform 'rearguard action' not only serves to disarm his work of most of its menacing aura, it also allows drawing conclusions about ways of legitimatizing democratic rule in modern times, as the paper tries to outline in its last section.

Keywords : Benjamin, history, immanence, Schmitt, sovereignty

Conference Title : ICPSIR 2016 : International Conference on Political Science and International Relations

Conference Location : Prague, Czechia

Conference Dates : July 07-08, 2016