

The Aesthetic and Critiques of Weimar Democracy: The Counter and Complement to Carl Schmitt's Political Myth

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Abstract : Ever since the recent resurgence of interest in political theorist Carl Schmitt's work, much of the current analysis on Schmitt has fo-cused on evaluating Schmitt's legacy by exposing contradictions in his rationale. Rather than condemn such contradictions, this paper instead seeks to analyze these contradictions in an effort to better understand the radical shift in Schmitt's intellectual trajectory from an astute critic of liberal democracy to a fascist apologist towards the end of the Weimar period. An essential part of this change is his interest in what Schmitt called 'the emergence of aesthetics.' Schmitt diagnosed the underlying issue with the aesthetic in the political sphere to be its irrationalism, indifference, and indeci-siveness. For Schmitt, the latter two of these were especially prob-lematic for two of his key concepts: the 'political' and 'the shared historical reality.' Schmitt's radical depiction of 'the political' as an existential opposition of allegiances that necessitated a state of emergency and a decisionist sovereign political struggle required an equally radical justification, or Schmitt's call for 'a shared his-torical reality' not based in historical fact yet able to mobilize the masses. In this way, Schmitt clearly condemns the indifferent, indecisive aesthetic that runs against his decisionist, action-oriented political theory. Yet despite his firm stance against aestheticism, Schmitt himself used the evocative and irrational power of aesthet-icism as a tool to present his own 'political myth' that compelled believers to join in decisive unity against a common enemy. In short, Schmitt's contradictions on aestheticism and his creation of a 'political myth' suggest that Schmitt's underlying conflict with aestheticism was not as much of an issue of irrationality as it was a chronic preoccupation with coercing concrete action at the expense of rational deliberation.

Keywords : aesthetics of the political, Carl Schmitt, political myth, Weimar democracy

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