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## Democratic Chimeras And Unceasing Discord

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**Carl Schmitt: Politics and Theory**, by Paul Edward Gottfried. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1990. 160 pp. \$39.95.

The relation between the particular and the general in social organization has long preoccupied political thinkers. Much of their attention in this century has focused on particularistic claims to national self-determination or rights of autonomy for ethnic, racial, and cultural groups. Such claims endanger the real or imagined unity of established sovereign states. Particularisms of a different sort, *viz.*, those masquerading as demands for the realization of allegedly universal values, threaten peaceful international relations. Paul Edward Gottfried, professor of political science at Elizabethtown College, addresses both issues in his latest book. Although it may be profitably read as a study of the life, thought, and influence of German political theorist Carl Schmitt (1888-1985), it is also and more importantly the author's effort to inform his own theorizing from a Schmittian perspective.

Gottfried acknowledges that he is

outside the mainstream of American political science whose "tyranny of values," in Schmitt's language, he consciously scorns. Like Schmitt and unlike legions of democratic pluralists, Gottfried is a qualified antipluralist and, hence, an opponent of the academic fad for "multiculturalism." Also like Schmitt and unlike most of his colleagues, Gottfried rejects "internationalism" as the route to a more peaceful world. This latter issue receives the bulk of his attention.

Those who appeal to putatively universal values, argues Gottfried, either advance "the national interests of countries other than [their] own" or else support "globalist ideologies that advocate . . . violence in the short run . . . to banish political conflict forever." Although published before the Persian Gulf war, Gottfried's book contends that efforts such as that of President Bush to inaugurate a peaceful "new world order" are ill conceived. The

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problem is that would-be institutionalizers of global peace are “fraught with hostility to the human condition” and, more pointedly, do not understand politics. Schmitt offers an antidote to such confused thinking. He “presents ‘the political’ not as an ideal, but as a fate that overtakes those who seek to escape it.” He rightly posits “the criterion of the political” as intense struggle involving friend-enemy distinctions sufficiently severe that people are willing to fight over differences. President Bush might say, and American journalist Morton Kondracke effectively does say (*The New Republic*, Nov. 6, 1989), that this perspective is all wrong. Gottfried castigates Kondracke. While the latter rejoices that American foreign policy is now controlled by a “Democracy Gang” whose initiatives optimists expect to engender democratic governments everywhere and global peace, Gottfried foresees that Schmittian politics will vitiate such hopes. Democratic ideologues like Kondracke are *at least* as dangerous to peace as are dictators; indeed, it is blatantly incendiary to pursue global harmony through ideological confrontations “presented as quests for peace and consensus.”

Pessimistic about international politics, Gottfried considers how domestic affairs in many countries can be conducted without degenerating into Schmittian antagonisms. He addresses this question by introducing the notion of “erotic politics.” “The term ‘erotic politics’ is being used,” he writes, “to characterize the Platonic and, to a lesser extent, Aristotelian ideal of a community held together by the

mutual attraction of its parts.” Gottfried doubts whether political unity can ultimately rest on any other basis. Schmitt makes much the same point by arguing that, “without a culturally and socially cohesive base,” a government probably would not enjoy the “minimal consensus about the exercise of power” necessary to maintain public order. Gottfried rues that modern government’s capacity to maintain order declines even as the state, paradoxically, looms ever larger in civil society. Criticizing democratic pluralism, he questions the durability of a fragile consensus rooted in “procedural guidelines and civility on the part of losing interests.” In some societies, *e.g.*, Canada, smoldering erotic politics already undermines proceduralism’s contrived unity. And, even if this fate does not await the United States, Gottfried fears that government’s “pervasive therapeutic controls,” instituted to counter the factious nature of “multicultural or atomized modern society,” threaten civil liberty. Referring to American racial policies, and writing as a classical liberal, Gottfried inveighs against “government coercion directed against people held to be discriminating.”

Like Schmitt, Gottfried audaciously questions the contemporary so-called liberalism implicit in democratic pluralism. He writes: “The unity of Plato’s republic is partly defined by its nature as a Greek society which stands over against an alien and strange race (*genos allotrion, othneion*). It may be an entirely modern dream that erotic politics is possible without a unity that excludes.” Although other writers, notably Ber-

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trand de Jouvenel, have raised this issue more eloquently, I am aware of no one who has done it more succinctly than Gottfried. The "tyranny of values" in American political science should not prevent this matter from being discussed.

Gottfried's perspectives on both international and domestic politics will likely elicit sharp criticisms. Perhaps, though, the critics will remain fair. Regarding international politics, even hostile readers should recognize that Gottfried does not glorify war. He merely argues that the "self-limiting" politics of a system of sovereign nation-states offers the best prospects for keeping wars restricted in scope. Europeans moderated their bellicosity in just this way for more than a century after the Peace of Westphalia. Wars then were "limited struggles fought over negotiable issues by professional armies" rather than ferocious "just wars" catalyzed by ideological differences. Gottfried may be naïve to ex-

pect relative peace from a revitalized system of accommodating nation-states; he very wisely, however, distrusts the unavoidably militant pursuit of "universal" values.

More problematical is Gottfried's perspective on domestic politics. Although he hardly excuses crude racism, he is sympathetic to what may be called the politics of ethnocentrism. This may be fine and good for nationalities that either already enjoy or can likely attain sovereign statehood. It offers nothing, however, to minorities such as American blacks and Soviet Jews who are more or less "condemned" to be perpetual minorities in states from which secession is virtually impossible. Perhaps Gottfried will, in a future book, discuss politics from the viewpoint of such minorities.

In the meantime, the present work is worthy of attention. Readers will appreciate an extensive bibliography of English-language publications by and about Schmitt.