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Friend and Enemy

The humility that Sara Ruddick describes as essential for a critique of militarism is missing from the rhetoric in the war against terror. Such humility, she argues, would produce a politics that is decentred, open and non-doctrinal, instead we have what is best described as a clash of fundamentalisms (Ali, 2002) between two opponents eager to represent the other as the epitome of evil. Where the gesture of humility does appear in this rhetoric it is simply a veil for a politics of certainty and righteousness. George W. Bush is no doubt humbled by the fact that he is the chosen instrument of God, delivering His gift of freedom to the world, but this humility is anything but pacific, used as it is to support a massive military budget, pre-emptive strikes and the moulding of the world in accordance with US economic interests. While the identification of a new enemy is undoubtedly the cover for the expansion of these interests, something I will address in the final chapter, the naming of this new enemy has a number of other functions, not least the continuation of the existential struggle against the forces of darkness. These forces may be couched, as we shall see, in theological garb in which the enemy is quite literally Satan, or in more secular terms as the atropehe of the human spirit in the absence of a struggle.¹

In the light of this, it is important to consider the influence of Carl Schmitt’s work on the thinking of the architects of the war against terror. Schmitt’s famous definition of the political as the distinction between friend and enemy is the overriding model of international relations that informs the Bush administration. The vehicle for the transmission of this fundamental distinction to heart of the US government was the exiled German philosopher Leo Strauss, who while radically different to Schmitt in many respects, especially regarding the importance of reason over revelation, nevertheless believed that
the friend and enemy distinction was precisely what was at stake in the world. In a fascinating study of the influence of the ‘Straussians’ in the US, Anne Norton (2004) shows how Leo Strauss (and that other famous German exile, Hannah Arendt, both of whom were students of Martin Heidegger) reinvigorated the discipline of political theory against the sterile positivism of political science that had taken over the US academy. Aside from Straussians such as Robert Kagan, William Kristol and Gary Schmitt, all of whom are members of the Project for the New American Century, the most notable is Paul Wolfowitz, now head of the World Bank.

To give a sense of Carl Schmitt’s influence on the forces currently shaping the world, it is useful to see how Joseph Cropsey, who studied and worked with Strauss and taught Paul Wolfowitz, conceptualized the importance of the distinction between friend and enemy. In his foreword to Heinrich Meier’s book on the dialogue between Schmitt and Strauss, Cropsey writes:

It belongs only to human beings to make war, not only to kill but to die, for a high cause and ultimately for the highest cause, which is their faith. Schmitt can agree with those who have perceived the human record as a history of bloodshed, but far from interpreting the fact as a sign of God’s neglect or punishment, he sees it as evidence of God’s providence. By a dialectic of conflict, of ‘ideals’ that men take seriously enough to contend over, and not by any mere dialectic of reason, mankind is preserved from the lassitude of indifference that is the soul’s death. (in Meier, 1995: x)

In the course of this chapter, then, we will explore the war against terror in terms of this existential and theological struggle for the highest cause.

Before this is commenced, however, one further important factor needs to be introduced. Something that is integral to the naming of an enemy is the corresponding announcement of a state of emergency, or what Schmitt referred to as the state of exception, the quasi-legal condition in which the validity of the juridical order is itself suspended. In Britain, this is best known as the implementation of emergency powers or martial law; a period of time in which normal legal entitlements and civil liberties are suspended, or it can be understood as the expansion of the powers of the executive into the legislative sphere, something that happened during the military emergencies