Carl Schmitt and Martin Buber on the 'realization' of political form

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Abstract • This article discusses the Austrian-Jewish philosopher Martin Buber's theopolitical challenge to the German jurist Carl Schmitt's political theology of sovereignty, an until recently largely overlooked contribution to the long array of critical twentieth-century engagements with the Schmittean secularization theorem. Departing from Schmitt's own distinction between formative spirit and substantive form, offered in his early writings on the Roman Catholic Church as a political form, this article argues that Buber's critical engagement with Schmitt's political doctrine of sin reveals the unorthodoxy of the latter's theological analysis, as well as providing a more fruitful way to bring a theologically informed reflection on human nature into dialogue with political thought. It concludes by suggesting that Buber's theopolitical vision of the self-forming community allows us to imagine human association beyond the narrow confines of theories of state sovereignty.

The German jurist Carl Schmitt's *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty (Politische Theologie: Vier Kapitel zur Lehre von der Souveränität)* from 1922, which presented the now-familiar thesis that 'all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts' (Schmitt [1922] 2005, 36), has to a large degree dominated the debates on political theology in the past century, and received a remarkably eclectic set of interlocutors.[1] Amongst the many prominent names often mentioned amongst these responses (Karl Löwith, Hans Blumenberg, Jacob Taubes etc.), the intervention of Martin Buber has earned less attention, although it offers what, in my view, represents one of the more suggestive challenges to Schmitt (esp. Buber [1932] 1967 and [1944] 1960).[2] Not only does Buber demonstrate that the theopolitical tradition of early Judaism offers an alternative to Schmitt's politico-theological apology for authoritarianism, but his contribution also impels us to ask whether the theological underpinning of

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1 For an exhaustive overview, see Miguel Vatter's excellent study *Divine Democracy: Political Theology after Carl Schmitt* (2020).

2 Vatter's subsequent study on 'Jewish political theology' (2021, 1–2) meritoriously establishes Buber's relevance for the 'post-Schmittean' century. In the works of Buber and several other Jewish thinkers, including Hermann Cohen, Hannah Arendt, Franz Rosenzweig, Leo Strauss and Gershom Scholem, Vatter retrieves resources to further develop 'the civil religion of anarchic republicanism' that the previous study offers in the place of Schmitt's political theology.

Schmitt's analysis of sovereignty was not, in fact, overdetermined by a political anthropology foreign to Christian doctrine. Thus, it paves the way for a critical assessment of the theological analysis inherent in Schmitt's thesis that does not risk succumbing to the implicit anti-Judaism of Erik Peterson's paradigmatic Trinitarian critique (see Peterson [1935] 2011 and Rosenstock 2013). More than that—and as I intend to show by placing my discussion of Buber after a more expansive, 'scholastic', analysis of Schmitt's work than might seem warranted—what could initially appear as purely methodological weaknesses in Schmitt's analysis do, in the illumination of Buber's writings, suddenly reveal themselves as inseparable from his antisemitism.

Yet, Buber's contribution to the debate concerning political theology should not be seen as 'merely' a Jewish critique of quasi-Christian antisemitism disguised as 'a sociology of juristic concepts' (Schmitt [1922] 2005, 46). His analysis demonstrates that alternative ways of conceptualizing the political condition demand an alternative understanding of human nature, allowing us in addition, I would argue, to see how far the supposedly rebutted Schmittean premise – according to which enmity is as constitutive of politics as of the properly human – continues to haunt our present (Strauss [1932] 2007, 110). As I will suggest in this article, Buber's theopolitics consequently might be seen as a seminal, and tragically relevant, instance of politico-theological thinking *against* a political theology of antagonism.[3]

3 The paradox of this suggestion is acknowledged. Although Elad Lapidot does not draw from Martin Buber's work, his suggestion that Schmitt's 'war on polemics' should be replaced with a 'polemics on war' might be seen as a work in this vein (Lapidot 2020, 52).

Buber and Schmitt: a hidden dialogue?

The last decade has witnessed a rise in studies dedicated to Buber's theopolitical writings (see e.g. Schmidt 2009; Brody 2018; Lesch 2022; Schaefer 2017; Kaplan 2013; Vatter 2021). This belated acknowledgment may in part be due to a certain tendency, hitherto dominant, to view his political writings as subordinate to his dialogical philosophy, brought to the public by the widely acclaimed *I and Thou* (*Ich und Du*, 1923, first translated into English in 1937). It is, as Samuel Hayim Brody phrases it in his recent monograph on Buber's theopolitical writings, not uncommon to stumble upon the assumption that 'the political utopia Buber sought logically ensues from his existential meditations on the I–Thou relation' (Brody 2018, 3). In what follows, I will argue that such a suggestion, which gives precedence to Buber's dialogical philosophy, ought to be scrutinized. More precisely, it will be shown that a proper understanding of Buber's existential philosophy, what I shall prefer to think of as his *religious anthropology* demands that we also pay attention to his politico-theological reflections. Finally, I will suggest that it is solely by establishing the intimate relationship between Buber's religious anthropology and his writings on theopolitics that it becomes possible to fully appreciate the radicality of his challenge to Schmitt.

Although Buber never explicitly stated that he had Carl Schmitt's political theology of sovereignty in mind as he embarked on his tripartite work on biblical politics, initiated with *Kingship of God* (*Königtum Gottes*, 1932), most of the recent commentators mentioned above assume that Schmitt's shadow most probably lurked in the background of this project. Buber's discussion of Israel's pre-state existence departs from the passage in Book of Judges (*Sefer Shoftim*) where Gideon, returning to the people after a victorious battle, refuses

to give in to their wish to appoint him their king, since it is 'God himself' who is ruler of Israel (Buber [1932] 1967, 59). In this rejection, Buber retrieves the essence of the 'theopolitical' way that was staked out for the people of Israel, summarized in this exhortation to refuse the institution of human rulership out of a commitment to God's singular sovereignty (Buber [1932] 1967, 136). Notwithstanding that the name of Schmitt remains unmentioned, I would suggest that the noun itself, 'theopolitics', bears witness to a thorough-going transvaluation of Schmitt's compound term (which situated political sovereignty at the heart of the politico-theological nexus) performed by Buber through his biblical exegesis.

A similar opinion can be traced in several recent analyses of Buber's biblical writings. The exact nature of of Buber's critical transformation of Schmitt's core term remains nonetheless a matter for debate. It has alternatively been viewed as the 'anarchic antipode' to Schmitt (Brody 2018, 4), the liberal alternative to Schmitt (Lesch 2022) or as an enduring prophetical resistance against unrighteous or self-asserting political institutions (Svenungsson 2014, 250). In what follows, I will take a somewhat different stance, arguing that Buber's theopolitics should rather be understood as an implicit critique of the theological anthropology inherent to Schmitt's understanding of 'political form'.[4] More precisely, I will suggest that Buber's religious anthropology allows him to develop a theopolitical understanding of the 'self-forming' of a political community. As will be shown, this amounts to a claim that any human community carries within itself the capacity to *realize* itself as a political association. This conviction, it will be argued, allows Buber to reject Schmitt's insistence that an enduring political form (which, as shall be seen, is perceived as both less and more than a 'mere' association of individuals) demands a formative principle *apart* from itself.

The seminal role that the notion of 'realization' (*Realisierung/Verwirklichung*) plays in the discussion to come demands a preliminary definition.[5] It is a recurring term in Buber's writings prior to 1923, and the publication of *Ich und Du*, after which it is largely abandoned (Horwitz 1978, 214).[6] According to Rivka Horwitz, the decisive explanation of the term is to be retrieved from *Daniel*, published in 1913, where it represents 'a mystical notion of unification', later to be replaced by Buber's I–Thou encounter (Horwitz 1978, 158). My focus will not be on the path towards I-and-Thou, but on another part of Buber's early works, the 'addresses on Judaism' (*Reden über das Judentum*), lectures delivered between 1909 and 1918, where the idea of 'realization' is situated within a social and political context (see e.g. Buber [1911] 1967b, 33). My interpretation of the meaning ascribed to 'realization' in this context motivates my use of it in a discussion of Buber's mature works on theopolitics, even if it is more sparsely used by Buber himself in these writings. It thus serves as a conceptual, rather than purely terminological, tool for understanding Buber's developing thought.

As will be seen below, I would argue that the delineation implicit in Horwitz's definition, between what we may, in a reference to

4 An explanation of this central Schmittean concept follows below.

5 These are the two German words that hide behind the notion of 'realization' in the English translations of Buber's as well as Schmitt's works (including different conjugations and variants, such as 'realized (*verwirklicht wirden*)'. I have worked from the assumption that the meaning carried by these two German terms is similar enough to allow me to only specify the original term when I have found it relevant.

6 As Rivka Horwitz notes, this follows not least from Franz Rosenzweig's resistance to the term (Horwitz 1978, 224).

the Catholic theologian Henri de Lubac's seminal work, term the 'natural' and the 'supernatural', is a better fit for Schmitt's use of the notion of 'realization' (Lubac [1965] 1998). It is in so far as 'nature' is perceived as suffering from a constitutive lack of transcendence that Schmitt must have recourse to an external supplement[7] by means of which the political and legal products of human nature may transcend their own limitations; as will be seen below, this is what is most fundamentally implied by 'realization' in his reoccurring usages of the notion.[8] More remarkable is the fact, I will argue, that the opposite also holds true for Schmitt: an observation with dire consequences for his own secularization thesis.[9] To scrutinize the wider implications of his understanding of 'realization' thus emerges as a central task in my assessment of his thought.

Political form versus formative spirit

The notion of 'political form' is put forward by Schmitt in his early writings on the Catholic Church, where it represents the foremost expression for political *unity*, realized and made publicly visible in and by an institutional form. As Schmitt's translator G. Ulmen points out in his introduction to the essay *Roman Catholicism and Political Form* (*Römischer Katholizismus und Politische Form*, 1923), one way to understand Schmitt's notion of political form, which is equivalent to 'substantive form', is to contrast it with 'formative spirit', which is identified with Protestantism (Schmitt [1923] 1996b, xix). The beginning of *Roman Catholicism and Political Form* mirrors Max Weber's analysis of the intimate relation between Protestant religiousness, which privileges private spirituality over institutional mediation, and the rise of the atomizing rationality of capitalism. However, in order to challenge, or possibly complement, Weber's analysis, Schmitt points out that one single institution has remained capable of resisting the dominance of the economical paradigm. This is the Roman Catholic Church, which Schmitt views as the last standing example of political, or substantive, form. Unlike the invisible Church of the *corpus mysticum* of Protestantism, the Roman Catholic Church, headed by the pope, who serves as the vicar of Christ, has the capacity to *realize* the eucharistic community in an institutional form (Schmitt [1917] 1996c, 52). This capacity of *realization*, which, as was clarified above, denotes a supplementary power, force or principle through which a given association becomes capable of transcending its inherent limitations, has two sources. On the one hand, it relates specifically to the pope, who, by virtue of his office, stands in direct descent from Christ, the second Adam, and thus can make a claim to represent mankind *in general*.[10] Remarkably, however, this spiritual authority is not considered by Schmitt as sufficient by itself. On the contrary, the unique nature of the Roman Catholic Church, the reason that it is more than 'formative spirit', i.e. private religiosity,

7 My use of the notion of 'supplement' draws from Derrida's analysis of original supplementarity in *Of Grammatology*.

8 Notably, this assumption is retained in one of the most substantial challenges to Schmitt's thesis, the works of Ernst Kantorowicz. As noted by Jennifer Rust, recent engagements with Kantorowicz's political theology of parliamentary democracy (e.g. Kahn 2009) overlook the fact that he uncritically adopts Schmitt's conviction that human associations cannot survive without the aid of political fictions (Rust 2012, 104).

9 As also noted by György Geréby in a recent, excellent study of Schmitt's 'unorthodox' Catholicism (Géreby 2021, 28–9).

10 As Raphael Gross notes, the unique capacity of representation ascribed to the papal office has supercessionist implications; 'Erst durch die Überwindung des auf die göttliche Transcendenz gerichteten, in diesem Sinne abstrakten jüdischen Gesetzes ensteht Repräsentation' (Gross 2000, 169).

stems from the fact that it is the true inheritor of Roman jurisprudence. This includes the capacity to sanction juridical fictions, a capacity that allows it to give the eucharistic community, the *corpus Christi*, an enduring institutional form as a *corporation* (Schmitt [1923] 1996b, 19; Schmitt [1917] 1996c, 52). The formative capacity of jurisprudence conjoined with the representative authority invested in the papal head provides the condition for the Church to serve as a *complexio oppositorum*, a unity of opposites (Schmitt [1923] 1996b, 14).

As observed by several scholars, including the influential political theorist Carlo Galli, Schmitt's Catholic writings shed new light on some of his subsequent writings on political theology, and are therefore well worth considering alongside the better-known works, such as *Political Theology I* and the late sequel, *Political Theology II: The Myth of the Closure of any Political Theology II (Politische Theologie II. Die Legende von der Erledigung jeder Politischen Theologie*, 1970) and *The Concept of the Political* (*Der Begriff des Politischen*, 1932) (see Galli 2015; Cooney 2015). Contrary to what has been suggested by influential commentators, such as Heinrich Meier, this attention to Schmitt's 'confessional classification' does not result in a reductive critique of his political theology from the standpoint of whether it adheres to 'this or that doctrinal edifice' (Meier [1994] 1998, xii). As Schmitt himself acknowledges in *Political Theology II*, such a critique is misguided, since he is only a layman. Responding to Hans Barion's critique of *Roman Catholicism and Political Form*, he remarks that it is 'of course anything but an official church statement', and Peterson's theological analysis of *Political Theology I* is discarded on the basis of it being a 'purely juridical book' (Schmitt [1979] 2008, 47, 49). However dubious such self-declarations appear in view of Schmitt's own subsequent observation (apropos Blumenberg's defence of the 'legitimacy of the modern age') that any insistence on such disciplinary boundaries must dissolve in the face of the question of 'justification' (Schmitt [1970] 2008, 120–1), they do, more importantly, avert attention from the fact that it is precisely the eccentricity of Schmitt's Catholic writings that enable us to view Schmitt's mature political theology as an outcome of a rather peculiar 'jurisprudential theology'.[11]

Although, undoubtedly, 'there are many political theologies because there are . . . many different religions', as Schmitt himself pointed out (Schmitt [1970] 2008, 66), his own definition of political theology, as presented in *Political Theology I* and *II*, is, as will be demonstrated, simultaneously overdetermined by his own analysis of Christian doctrine and undone by it. This explains the relevance of his early writing on Catholicism, regardless of whether his biography gives us reason to doubt his own allegiance to the authority of the Roman Catholic Church and papal supremacy.[12] Brought into dialogue with Schmitt's political writings, *Roman Catholicism and Political Form* and 'The visibility of the church' (*Die Sichtbarkeit der Kirche: Eine scholastische Erwagung*, 1917) demonstrates that his politico-theological analysis of sovereignty stems from a prior violation of his own secularization theorem, according to which political concepts are analogous to theological concepts because of both 'their historical development – in which they were transferred from theology to

11 This expression has not been used in the context of Schmitt's work, as far as I have been able to tell. However, in *Glossarium*, his intellectual 'diary' from 1947 to 1958, Schmitt refers to himself as a 'theologian of jurisprudence' ('ein Theologe der Jurisprudenz') (Schmitt, Giesler & Tielke 2015, 18).

12 Reinhard Mehring's observation that 'not every theologian has to be a devout Christian' (Mehring 2014, 74) seems misguided in the case of Schmitt's own work since Christian dogma has this conceptual centrality in Schmitt's political theology.

the theory of the state' and 'their systematic structure, the recognition of which is necessary for a sociological consideration of these concepts' (Schmitt [1922] 2005, 36). It is when the Catholic writings are allowed to illuminate Schmitt's political and legal writings that we are able to see that his analysis fails on both a historical and structural basis.

Jurisprudential theology between law and grace

Notwithstanding St Paul's declaration that Christ signified the end of the law, the place of law within Christian tradition is, as recently discussed by Jayne Svenungsson, a complex affair, not least given its multiple meanings and registers (Svenungsson 2024, 3–4). Relying on a massive but hopefully productive simplification, the place and status of human, positive, law within Catholic tradition could be separated into a Thomist position and an Augustinian one. According to the former, inspired by Aristotelianism, government and legal order existed in the state of original innocence, and political authority is thus not essentially related to the exercise of force. According to the latter, the state and its legal apparatus is a yoke man carries owing to original sin (Weithman 1992, 373).

Where to place Schmitt's theory of law in this schema? Is it ante-Lapsarian or post-Lapsarian? Thomist or Augustinian? In 'The visibility of the church' Schmitt establishes that 'The juridical regulation of human relations existed before evil and sin and was not its result' (Schmitt [1917] 1996c, 56). This is reminiscent of a Thomist position, which holds that law and government are not intrinsically associated with the Fall. When placing 'The visibility of the church' next to *Roman Catholicism and Political Form*, it is nevertheless possible to see that Schmitt, on the face of it, passes beyond the 'redemption' of positive law represented by Aquinas. What is specific, and remarkable, about Schmitt's analysis of Church as a *complexio oppositorum* is the relationship of dependency established between the eucharistic community and positive law. By establishing that the Church is *realized* solely through jurisprudence, Schmitt would seem to suggest that positive law not only regulates the relationship between men but is granted a power *superseding* that of the Triune God himself (Schmitt [1923] 1996b, 56). Such are also the implications of the suggestion in 'The visibility of the church' that 'the dualism that came into the world through the sin of man also affected the Word', a statement which supports the impression that the Fall has made the persons of the Trinity dependent on institutional mediation (Schmitt [1917] 1996c, 53). The elevation of 'substantive form' on behalf of 'formative spirit' seemingly not merely acknowledges positive law as equivalent to grace, but rather as superior to it; it suggests that the effectiveness of grace too has been impaired by sin. How else should one interpret Schmitt's endorsement of a 'limitation of the pneumatic in the juridical' (Schmitt [1917] 1996c, 56)? Here jurisprudence is not merely analogous to theology, as was stated in *Political Theology I*, but presented as an originary supplement to it, a necessary supplement for 'a failing origin', to use Jacques Derrida's formulation (Derrida [1967] 1997, 313).

Turning from 'The visibility of the church' back to *Political Theology I* and *Roman Catholicism and Political Form*, published only one year apart (five and six years after 'The visibility of the church') this picture becomes complicated. Further disrupting the unidirectionality of the analogical model which structures Schmitt's secularization theorem, and challenging his previous suggestion of the self-sufficiency of jurisprudence, the latter essay insists on the absolute need for a *personal* (one might even read *incarnate*) functionary of the law. Indeed, the rejection of personalism is

stated by Schmitt to be synonymous with the anti-Roman temper of modernity and heretics of all ages (Schmitt [1923] 1996b, 33). In *Political Theology I* he brings this argument into the strictly politico-legal register, by establishing that positive law demands the *auctoritatis interpositio*, the authority assumed by a person *or* a concrete body, to be brought into actuality (Schmitt [1922] 2005, 31). It is on this basis that Schmitt rejects the contemporaary legal philosopher Hans Kelsen's influential idea of 'pure jurisprudence', or legal *self-forming* (Schmitt [1922] 2005 19–20). To evade the problem of sovereignty by negating it or transposing it to law itself is to neglect the real problem concerning the 'realization of law (*des selbständigen Problems der Rechtsverwirklichung*)' (Schmitt [1922] 2005, 21; Schmitt 1922, 22). Just as the papal head of the Church needs law to establish the ecclesiastical community as a *real* corporate body, so does the corpus of law need an animate head to vitalize it.

At this point, it seems evident that the analogical model must give way to a symbiotic or chiasmatic one, if one wants to understand the reciprocal determination taking place between the two sides of the compound term, 'political theology'. This suggestion sheds further doubt on Schmitt's own claim that his analysis represents the neutral 'statement of a jurist', the motivation he offers for refusing to delve deeper into trinitarian dimensions of Peterson's theological critique (Schmitt [1932] 2007, 148). What becomes particularly evident in his analysis of the Roman Catholic Church as a political form is, I would argue, that Schmitt's 'jurisprudential theology' is equivalent to what I shall call a 'hamartiological jurisprudence'.[13] This term I will use to designate an interpretation of positive law which regards it as an *originary* supplement to, and restrainer of, created man. This logic of supplementarity is necessary due to an assumption of an originary lack, or radical deficiency, *inherent* in human nature. In Schmitt's opinion, voiced in *Concept of the Political*, this originary deficiency must be taken for granted by any political theory worthy of its name (Schmitt [1932] 2007, 58). As he himself notices when discussing the counter-Reformationists, this represents a 'radicalized' dogma of original sin which transcends Catholic theology, although it certainly departs from it (Schmitt, [1922] 2005, 57). Nonetheless, as his own analysis demonstrates, 'the doctrine of the absolute sinfulness and depravity of human nature' radicalizes dogma to a point beyond recognition. Ultimately, it subjects God himself to jurisprudence (Schmitt [1932] 2007, 58; Schmitt [1917] 1996c, 53). Schmitt's claim for the jurisprudential basis of 'substantive form', or political unity, is not only inseparable from a prior rejection of the sufficiency of formative spirit, but, I would insist, indirectly poses a challenge to the sovereignty of God. In other words, Schmitt's radicalized doctrine of sin undermines the archetype of sovereignty upon which political theology is structurally modelled. His political theology thus undoes itself methodologically.

13 Hamartiology is the study/doctrine of sin in Christian theology.

The politics of the supplement

In my view, Schmitt's jurisprudential theology of originary lack is most pervasively expressed in the 1933 essay *State, Movement, People. The Triadic Structure of the Political Unity* (*Staat, Bewegung, Volk. Die Dreigliederung der politischen Einheit*); Schmitt's own piece of trinitarian doctrine (Rosenstock 2013, 324). In this essay, which largely reads like an apologetic for National Socialism, Schmitt proposes his 'concrete theory of the State' (Schmitt & Draghici [1933] 2001, 14–15). In this analysis, we gain an appreciation of the most infernal variants of a logic of the supplement. In the liberal state (i.e. the state of the Weimar constitution),

law merely appears as 'the functioning mode of the State administrative machinery', and 'identifies as little with the law of the people as does the State machinery with the political unity of the people' (Schmitt & Draghici [1933] 2001, 14–15). In order for the law of the state to coincide with the law of the people, i.e. for the order of law to become representative of the will of the people, it must mimic the logic of the last truly political form, the Roman Catholic Church. Just as the pope could claim to represent the Christian community by virtue of his direct lineage from Christ, the unity of the triadic state is guaranteed by the concept of leadership retrieved from National Socialism. In Schmitt's interpretation, the notion of leadership that carries forward the Third Reich must be understood as 'a concept of the immediately present and of real presence', which derives its capacity for unification from 'the absolute ethnic identity between leader and following' (Schmitt & Draghici[1933] 2001, 48). Only this 'absolute identity' can serve as a guarantee that the will of the leader remains the will of the people, that the principle of representation is preserved and that the law that is effected remains 'the law of the people'. It is ethnic identity which revives the law, and this ethnic identity must 'pervade and dominate' all public law if it is not to become reduced again to empty legality (Schmitt & Draghici [1933] 2001, 50).

It seems worthwhile to underline the ethnicist dimension of Schmitt's political theology, which sometimes gets reduced to a personalist decisionism where the race-supremacist elements are seen as secondary, or at least circumstantial, rather than essential.[14] If such a view might be sustained on the basis of *Political Theology I*, it is invalidated by the triadic theory of State–Movement–People from 1933, which presents ethnic identity as the condition of possibility for political form (although this term is not utilized in the essay) (Schmitt & Draghici [1933] 2001, 52).[15] Juxtaposing this analysis with *Roman Catholicism and Political Form*, written a decade earlier, it is possible to discern an interesting inversion of sorts taking place. In *Roman Catholicism and Political Form*, Schmitt establishes that the *corpus Christi* of the Church could *realize* itself institutionally through the aid of Roman jurisprudence. In *State, Movement, People* law is *realized*, or, rather, revitalized, through the ethnic unity of people and leader. Although Schmitt does not have open recourse to the blood mysticism of *blot und boden* in the context of this essay, it does not seem entirely far-fetched to establish a parallel between the sacramental unity of the eucharistic offering of bread and wine, body and blood, and the unity achieved on the sole basis of common 'blood'.[16] If the unity of the Church, conceived as the *corpus Christi*, was previously guaranteed through Christ's, the Head's, sacrifice, commemorated in the eucharistic offering, it is now the head of the body,

14 For a correction of this view, see Raphael Gross's seminal study *Carl Schmitt und die Juden. Eine deutsche Rechtslehre* (2000) which convincingly argues that antisemitism is an intrinsic conceptual element of Schmitt's entire corpus, including the constitutional writings (see also Gross 2013). In view of Gross's systematic inventory of Schmitt's entire *œuvre*, continuous attempts to insist that Schmitt's antisemitism is an expendable element that may be bracketed from his general political and legal thought (see e.g. Brännström 2020, 27, footnote, 27) seem counter-productive. As Elad Lapidot remarks, Gross's findings should not put a halt to engaging with Schmitt's work but rather inspire further critical reflection on antisemitism as a constitutive element of Western thought as such (Lapidot 2020, 39).

15 As Rosenstock notes, Schmitt also included this 'correction' in his 1934 preface to *Political Theology I* (Rosenstock 2013, 324).

16 For Schmitt and 'blut und boden', see Koonz [2003] 2005, 207.

the leader, who is imbued with power through the submission performed by the members of the body politic. As Schmitt underlines in *Concept of the Political*, the political entity is characterized by its right to demand 'the sacrifice of life' (Schmitt & Draghici [1932] 2007, 71). If Schmitt, in the early essay, had been dismissive of those (i.e. Protestants) who were satisfied with reducing the Church to a 'mere mystical' body, denying it an institutional form, his 1933 essay bears witness to his own politico-theological blood mysticism, apart from which the state remains a mere legal, lifeless, machine.

The myth of/and the state

Schmitt's ambivalence regarding the mythical, as well as the mystical, returns in the uncanny discussion of the Leviathan myth retrieved from the first chapter of his 1938 study *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes: Meaning and Failure of a Political Symbol (Der Leviathan in der Staatslehre des Thomas Hobbes: Sinn und Fehlschlag eines politischen Symbols)*. This discussion also sheds light on the antisemitism inherent in his analysis of the political. Having dealt with the origins of the myth of the Leviathan, moving from the Old Testament and the beastly creatures depicted in Babylonian mythology to the Christian Middle Ages and on to Luther, Schmitt finally remarks that 'the Jewish representations of Leviathan were of another kind' (Schmitt [1938] 1996a, 8). It is, he suggests, commonly known that Leviathan always represented the 'heathen' within Jewish lore. However, he continues, 'less well known are the interpretations that arose in the Middle Ages, in which the unique, totally abnormal condition and attitude of the Jewish people toward all other peoples became discernible' (Schmitt [1938] 1996a, 8). In these accounts, allegedly gathered from medieval Kabbalist writings, the battle between Leviathan and Behemoth represents the battle between heathen peoples, witnessed and interpreted by 'the Jews' as a ritual slaughter, after which they 'eat the flesh of the slaughtered peoples and are sustained by it' (Schmitt [1938] 1996a, 9). In the appendix, Schmitt observes that this end-times banquet, at which the Jews would feast on the flesh of Leviathan, appears to him as a possible 'mythical prototype of some communist theory of state and of the stateless and classless condition that are supposed to emerge after the abolition of the state' (Schmitt [1938] 1996a, 95).

The final statement makes it possible to situate Schmitt's strange and disturbing discussion of the figure of Leviathan within his own mythic-political construction. As Agamben notes, Schmitt's account represents an intentionally 'anti-Semitic falsification of a traditional Talmudic (and not Kabbalistic!) tradition' (Agamben 2017, 283). One cannot fail to notice that the discussion of the 'Kabbalist' myth comes immediately before a remark on Hobbes's influence on Spinoza (Schmitt [1938] 1996a, 10), who later in the study is accused of having torn open the 'barely visible crack' in the former's theory of state by elevating 'individual freedom of thought' to 'the form-giving principle' (Schmitt [1938] 1996a, 58). Between the lines, it is possible to discern the relationship established between the Jew (if, as in Spinoza's case, the excommunicated Jew) and the denial of a formative (i.e. form-giving) supplement of state-sovereignty (cf. Gross 2000, 282). A comparison is suggested between Spinoza's 'consumption', and consequent destruction, of Hobbes's theory of the state, on the one hand, and the Jewish feast on Leviathan, a 'mythological' description of the abolition of the state which at the same time is associated with Jews consuming non-Jews, on the other. The implication is that Jewish tradition is inherently irreconcilable, even hostile to, the state as a phenomenon.

Interestingly, the cannibalistic dimensions of Schmitt's description of the 'Kabbalistic'

myths are reminiscent of his own critique (!) of the means by which early colonizers legitimized their genocidal actions towards the indigenous peoples of America. By accusing the latter of cannibalism, the violence against them could be defended as a service in protection of humanity (Schmitt [1932] 2007, 54). Schmitt repeats this gesture in his discussion of how the Jews feasted on Leviathan, i.e. the heathen peoples, thus providing, without ever stating it openly, a reason for why it is the Jew that must serve as the redeeming sacrifice to provide the unification of the triadic state. The 'Jewish' rejection of the great beast is made synonymous with their cannibalistic devouring of gentiles. Schmitt does not draw his analogy so far as to compare it with the Jews' rejection of Christ, the mediator, but one can arguably read it between the lines. Jewish tradition is thereby not only placed alongside those ideologies (e.g. anarchism) that deny a permanent need for an ordering state-mechanism; it is presented as the original, or at least exemplary, 'theology of the anti-theologians', to use a phrase from *Political Theology I* (Schmitt [1922] 2005, 66). Judaism is posited as the negation of political theology defined as a theory of the state. As will be seen, this is paradoxically a verdict which Buber might have agreed to. However, he would arguably have held it to represent the unequalled virtue of Jewish tradition.

Schmitt's engagement with, and critique of, Hobbes's Leviathan is telling in more than one respect. In Schmitt's view, the reason that Hobbes's theory of state could transform into the seed of modern liberalism is to be found in the latter's elevation of the individual, which resulted in an individualism which precluded the unification of the members into a meaningful *totality*. Hobbes's Leviathan never became more than a great machine, made up of discrete units (Schmitt [1938] 1996a, 100). As Leo Strauss points out in his analysis of Schmitt's discussion of Hobbes, the critical point at which Schmitt faults Hobbes is the *conditional* nature of the latter's understanding of obedience. In Hobbes's view, the state cannot demand a readiness to die from its members, since this is in contradiction with the inalienable right of the individual (Strauss [1932] 2007, 111). Given that the essence of the political, according to Schmitt, resides in the power to demand this sacrifice, it is evident why this privileging of individual rights negates the political. As Schmitt states already in 'The visibility of the church', 'everything lawful in this world destroys everything individual' (Schmitt [1938] 1996c, 50). Yet there seems to be a paradox inherent in Schmitt's critique of Hobbes's individualism, a paradox which emerges in more detail when juxtaposed with Schmitt's jurisprudential hamartiology. The suggestion that an enduring and unified political form, 'a meaningful totality', relies on a supplement, i.e. jurisprudence mediated by an incarnated locus of sovereignty, is dependent on a prior assumption that the discrete units essentially *defy* unification. Form must only be *imposed* on matter that rejects formation. Returning to Schmitt's proposal that the sacramental body of Christ demanded the aid of Roman jurisprudence to realize itself as a juridical *fiction* – the proposition that Christ's redeeming sacrifice was insufficient to provide a condition for *real* unity – it seems to attest to a more *fundamental* individualism than ever Hobbes's theory of the state of nature did. Schmitt not only projects our post-Lapsarian atomization back to Eden, but his analysis of human nature seemingly denies both the creation and the Cross, the common essence of man as created and as redeemed. This was also Buber's precise observation.

The realization of unity through a will for form

One does not encounter the notion of 'political form' within the work of Martin Buber.

Nevertheless, I will argue that his writings do offer a more nuanced understanding of what might be implied by the notion of 'formative spirit'. In what follows, I will attempt to demonstrate that his unique understanding of the relationship between spirit and political form sheds critical light on the unorthodoxy of Schmitt's 'anthropological confession of faith', and in consequence also the political theory that grows out of it (Schmitt [1932] 2007, 58).

Although most studies that engage with Buber's 'answer' to Schmitt focus on the elaboration of theopolitics as articulated in *Kingship of God*, and the sequel, *The Prophetic Faith* (*Der Glaube der Propheten*, 1950), there is no actual mention of Schmitt in these works. He does however make an appearance in 'The question to the Single One' (*Die Frage an den Einzelnen* 1936). This essay, initially delivered as a series of lectures in 1933, begins with a critique of Søren Kierkegaard's theological individualism, expressed in the notion of 'the Single One', who must renounce human relations to approach God. In Buber's opinion, such a view fails to perceive that the relationship between man and God must involve the entirety of God's creation, and so also other human beings (Buber [1936] 2002, 66). This is why, Buber further suggests, Kierkegaard is mistaken in assuming that one can only become a Single One by exiting the realm of politics. Although Kierkegaard is right in viewing the politics of the modern era as radically severed from the authentic politics of the ancient *polis*, he is nevertheless wrong in insisting that the Single One should remain disjointed from the body politic (Buber [1936] 2002, 70). Even in its present, miserable, state, the political community carries a trace of its true being, in Buber's view; as he puts it, 'Every degeneration indicates its genus … as in a distorted face the distortion is related to the form persisting beneath it' (Buber [1936] 2002, 70). Consequently, the true body politic may be retrieved from the 'crowd' into which it has deteriorated, and where the Single One is reduced to 'a stick in a bundle'. Such a condition of unfreedom does not pertain to the authentic body politic, in which the member 'is not bundled, but bound' (Buber [1936] 2002, 74–5). The task of the Single One must be 'to make the crowd no longer a crowd', to render it into a proper body politic constituted of conscient members bound together by a common orientation (Buber [1936] 2002, 76).

Notably, this call for participation in a 'proper body politic' is entirely different from endorsing the individual in joining a political party, a political mode of organization characterized by the shedding of individual responsibility. It can be assumed that Buber, writing in 1933, had the rise of different incarnations of totalitarianism in mind, on both the political left and right, as he noted that 'the last generation's intoxication with freedom has been followed by the present generation's craze for bondage; the untruth of intoxication has been followed by the untruth of hysteria' (Buber [1936] 2002, 82). Against the moral desertion intimately associated with the hysteria of populist movements, the Single One must maintain his or her integrity, and individual conscience. Yet, Buber insists, this 'has nothing to do with "individualism". I do not consider the individual to be either the starting-point or the goal of the human world' (Buber [1936] 2002, 82). What is at stake is to reach a conception of political order which does not regard the integrity of the individual and the body politic as mutually exclusive, a notion of politics which, contrary to the Weberian conception, does not identify order with the use of force (*Gewalt*), and lack of force with anarchy (Lesch 2022, 157). This demands a notion of the human being that does not define him/her as *essentially* disordered.

The critique of excessive individualism that permeates 'The question to the Single One' is not too different from Schmitt's recurring

discussion of the same phenomena. What nevertheless separates Buber from Schmitt is the simultaneous caution he calls for with respect to the 'craze for bondage' that has followed upon 'the intoxication with freedom' (Buber [1936] 2002, 82). This becomes especially evident in the second part of the essay, which features a discussion of 'the conceptual definition of the political offered by a well-known Roman Catholic exponent of Constitutional Law, Carl Schmitt' (Buber [1936] 2002, 86). Rejecting the Schmittean idea that the distinction between friend and foe represents the essence of the political, Buber suggests that the dichotomy that characterizes the realm of the political might instead be named 'order and absence of order'. However, he immediately stresses, 'the concept of order must be freed of the depreciation which sometimes clings to it' (Buber [1936] 2002, 86).

> Right order is direction and form in the political realm. But these two concepts must not be allowed to petrify. They have their truth only from the conception of a homogeneous *dynamic of order* which is the real principle of the political. The true history of a commonwealth must be understood as its striving to reach the order suited to it. (Buber [1936] 2002, 88)

Suggesting that 'right order' amounts to a striving for form, a striving undertaken by the commonwealth itself, Buber also questions the doctrinal accuracy of Schmitt's political anthropology of sin, which, as seen above, informs his conceptual definition of the political. Does not this assertion of irredeemable evil ultimately pose a challenge to the sovereignty of God, asks Buber? Does it not elevate the treacherous snake, Satan, to the same rank as God, giving him a power of destruction superior to the Lord's redeeming grace (Buber [1936] 2002, 91)? For what it's worth, I would argue that Buber's analysis remains more faithful to the orthodox doctrine of sin, elaborated mainly by St Augustine, than Schmitt's pessimist anthropology of absolute sinfulness. For Augustine, and other Church Fathers, sin was a violation of human, created, nature, a violation that nevertheless failed to extinguish the traces of God within man (Bochet 1982, 138). Schmitt may very well be correct in stating that 'a theologian ceases to be a theologian when he no longer considers man to be sinful or in need of redemption' (Schmitt [1932] 2007, 64). If, however, Schmitt's own definition of political theology as structural analogy is to be honoured, a political theory which draws from the doctrine of sin but neglects the accompanying possibility of redemption implied by this doctrine ceases to be representative of a political theology in the strict sense. This is why, contrary to what Schmitt himself argued, Erik Peterson's theological critique is relevant outside the realm of dogma (Schmitt [1970] 2008, 35). If political theology is taken to refer to a political epistemology derived from any given theology, the question of doctrinal accuracy must be placed at the centre of any critical engagement.

Unlike Peterson's trinitarian rebuttal of Schmitt, which, as Bruce Rosenstock has noted, relies on a negative characterization of Judaism which continues to echo in contemporary Christian theology (Rosenstock 2013, 330), Buber's critique, which will be teased out through an engagement with his 'early addresses on Judaism' (published between 1911 and 1919), demonstrates that Schmitt's political theology can be contested from within Judaism *and* a non-anti-Jewish Christian position.[17] By drawing attention to the unorthodoxy of Schmitt's anthropological confession of faith, Buber unveils the thoroughly *political* presuppositions

17 For the respective years of publication, see 'Bibliography'.

of Schmitt's political theology (Schmidt 2009, 212–13). Against Schmitt's politicized theology Buber posits his own understanding of sin, which includes the excluded term of Schmitt's theology: the promise of redemption carried by humanity itself.

For Buber, 'sin' is 'the great symbol' for the inner dualism of man, and whilst Judaism is 'the author of this symbol, it has also taught, over and over, the overcoming of this separation' (Buber [1911] 1967b, 33).[18]

> conscious as is no other community of the primal dualism, knowing and typifying division more than any community, it proclaims a world in which dualism will be abolished, a world of God which needs to be realized [*verwirklicht wirden*] in both the life of individual man and the life of community: the world of unity. (Buber [1911] 1967b, 33; 238)

This messianic ideal of unity, is, unlike Schmitt's doctrine of Incarnation, sufficient by itself; its realization relies on no *external* supplement. The difference between 'the Jew Jesus' (the designation Buber insists on using) and Schmitt's papal vicar of Christ is that only the latter relies on the power of jurisprudence to realize the community of and in God (Buber [1911] 1967b, 28). In Buber's narration, the Fall itself provides the necessary impetus and condition for the striving for form which we earlier saw identified as 'right order'. This, Buber states, 'will continue to be Judaism's significance for mankind: that it confronts mankind with the demand for unity, a unity *born* out of one's own duality and the redemption from it' (Buber [1911] 1967b, 32). To further underline his absolute disagreement with Schmitt, Buber turns to Spinoza, the arch-enemy of the Leviathan, in order to give an image of this striving; 'when Spinoza created the most unified world structure man's mind had ever conceived, he, too, experienced unity not in nature but in the demand (*Forderung*), in the creative will in the unified I' (Buber [1911[1967b, 29). Since the will for (if not the actuality of) unity is immanent in human nature, it does not need to be forced upon us. As the reference to Spinoza shows, Buber does not view the individual I and the community as mutually exclusive entities; on the contrary, the one is regarded as the condition for the other. This is acutely communicated by his own reinterpretation of the 'Single One who stands over against all being which is present to him – and thus also over against the body politic' *at the same time* as he 'guarantees all being which is present to him – and thus also the body politic' (Buber [1936] 2002, 94). The human individual is realized in and through the body politic, and *vice versa*.

The unspoken supplement of blood?

Does Buber's anthropology allow him to produce a theory of community independent of 'mystical unification'? Opinions vary. Although Buber in 1933 acknowledged the dangers of populism specifically associated with the crypto-theological indictment of human nature put forward by Schmitt, his writings also have moments of biologism and blood mysticism, elements which cannot be neglected. In the earliest addresses on Judaism, from the years before and during the First World War, Buber suggests that the unity of the Jewish community can only be accomplished if the 'significance of the blood' is acknowledged (Buber [1911] 1967a, 18):

> blood is the deepest nurturing force within individual man … the deepest layers of

18 This provides a useful correction to Schmitt's identification of Judaism with the secular 'refusals' of the doctrine of original sin he discerns in political ideologies that refuse to view perpetual enmity as an anthropological fact (cf. Gross 2013, 109).

> our being are determined by blood … our innermost thinking and our will are colored by it … blood is the realm of a substance capable of being imprinted and influenced, a substance absorbing and assimilating all into its own form. (Buber [1911] 1967a, 15)

Daniel Biale argues in *Blood and Belief: The Circulation of a Symbol between Jews and Christians* that Buber's invocation of the community of blood might be seen as a conscious challenge to the racialized state ideologies of his present, and as Buber himself would note in a post-war Hebrew edition of the early writings on Judaism, he never intended it as a racial term, but as an expression of the bond created through the succession of generations (Biale 2012, 185, 205; Loentz 2007, 154). Nevertheless, as Biale's discussion convincingly shows, the metaphor remained highly material, for Buber as later for Rosenzweig. As Biale observes, this 'language of blood ran like a red thread' through modern Jewish thought and culture (Biale 2012, 205). Notwithstanding this seemingly undeniable fact, it might be possible to insist, together with Paul Mendes-Flohr, that 'for Buber, the mere bonds of blood alone were not sufficient in and of themselves' (Mendes-Flohr 2019, 88). I suggest that we draw a parallel to Buber's suggestion that the introduction of the sacrificial cult was not sufficient to stop the living religiosity of early Judaism from degenerating into formalistic religion, in so far as it too substituted the living practice of the community with ritual formalism, now officiated by a priesthood. 'Under the *leadership* of the priest … the symbol became a substitute' (Buber [1916] 1967e, 88). In raising their voice against 'the "abomination" of the sacrificial cult', the prophets ('Amos and Micah, Isaiah and Jeremiah') protested against the substitution of deed for symbol (Buber [1916] 1967e, 89). This was a critical task, since, as Buber asserts in *On Zion: The History of an Idea*, '[no] symbol has authentic existence in the spirit if it has no existence in the body' (Buber [1952] 1973, 8). Here, I believe, it is possible to find the means to re-evaluate Buber's invocation of blood. As an empty symbol it is insufficient; it must be brought to life through common endeavour.

The unity achieved through an inauthentic (or why not 'fictitious'?) symbol seems to be equivalent to a static understanding of form. And in Buber's view a political form which does not liberate but enslaves is synonymous with sin, which 'means nothing more than a divide, unfree existence' (Buber [1916] 1967d, 65). 'Sin means to live not in freedom, that is, decision-making, but in bondage, that is, being acted upon' (Buber [1916] 1967e, 82). Buber's critique of the 'directionless and subservient formalism' of the priest echoes Schmitt's critique of the civil servant reduced to a mere bureaucrat (Buber [1919] 1967g, 88, cf. Schmitt & Draghici [1933] 2001, 33–4). Similarly, his critique of dead, formalized, law shows obvious affinities with Schmitt's critique of the mechanistic application of law, law reduced to legality. Likewise present is Buber's voice in Schmitt's call for the exception, in which 'the power of real life [*die Kraft des wirklichen Lebens*] breaks through the crust of a mechanism that has become torpid by repetition' (Schmitt [1922] 2005, 15; Schmitt 1922, 15). The decisive difference between the two is that Schmitt cannot conceive of a *common decision* which gives form, nor a decision that does not ultimately rely on the (racially enhanced) distinction between friend or foe. In his critique of Rousseau's general will, we learn that 'the unity that a people represents does not possess … decisionist character; it is an organic unity' (Schmitt [1922] 2005, 49). As the people became sovereign, 'the decisionistic and personalistic element in the concept of sovereignty was thus lost' (Schmitt [1922] 2005, 48). As seen above, according to Schmitt the people can only participate in a political decision through the medium of the

ethnically identical leader. They can only cease to be a *mere* organic unity through the corporative role of the *Führer*. Against this strange 'realism', where representation is asserted through racial identity, Buber offers another take on the distinction between the fictitious and the real, which, as he remarked in 1928, applies to all sorts of institution, forms and parties, whether religious or socialist (Buber [1928] 1999, 112).[19] The real distinction lies in whether there exists a true 'will for a community of the human race' or not (Buber [1928] 1999, 112). In *Kingship of God*, we encounter no formative will imposed by a sovereign legislator apart from God (Buber [1932] 1967, 58). However, there is a real will for form, 'a will towards constitution (that is, to actualization) (*den Verfassungs-, d.i. Verwirklichungswillen*)' (Buber [1932] 1967, 64; 2020, 107). This 'will' is possessed by the community itself and is indistinguishable from its thoroughly voluntary character. In so far as the people of Israel, who have inherited the desire for independence from their 'Bedouin' ancestors, refuse to be ruled against their will, the theocratic order of Israel runs the constant risk of degenerating into disorder (Buber [1932] 1967, 138, 148).[20] In *Kingship of God*, Buber presents a people which refuses to be *subjected to* form because they themselves are in the process of self-formation, and thus always exposed to their own inner duality. This represents 'the universal human nature of the stubborn mass that resists with all its active and latent energy the commanding will to mould it'; the desire for freedom inherent in human nature that both impedes and distorts the will for community (Buber [1919] 1967g, 115). Ultimately, it is both a blessing and a curse. The rejection of a supplement exposes the community to the possibility of disorder, just as it serves at the same time as the guarantee of its dynamic character.

According to Buber's reinterpretation of sin, the Fall did not preclude unity without a supplement but provided the impulse for unification which informs the common will for form. The virtue of this analysis is that it is possible to translate it into a political theory that deals with the problematic nature of man while at the same time paying tribute to the notion of redemption inherent in the theological understanding of the Fall. The rejection of reliance on an external mediation, a supplement, is visible also in the change that Buber's view on war underwent after the First World War. Like many of his contemporaries he had greeted the war as the means by which to achieve national and spiritual unity, and in particular he viewed it as a long-sought catalyst for the final solidification of the relationship between the Jews of Germany and their fatherland (see Mendes-Flohr 2019, 97–9). In his mature writings, Buber ceased to rely on the mystical power of the war to sustain the formation of a people, and of a state. Instead, he argued that it must arise 'from within' (Buber [1919] 1967g, 146). This amounts to a rejection of the type of state that depends on authoritarian force and demands sacrificial obedience, but this is not a rejection of political form *tout court*. As Buber observes, the 'prophets do not fight the state as state', merely the degenerate version of it (Buber [1919] 1967g, 118). The Rome which Jesus saw as a lost state was 'a *forced* union that had supplanted all natural communion; it was legitimized arbitrariness, sanctioned sacrilege, a mechanism wearing the mask of an organism'

19 Discussed by Brody, who does not, however, draw the link to the 'fiction' theory of Schmitt (Brody 2018, 74–5).

20 The problematics of Buber's Orientalism demand a more thorough discussion than I am able to offer here, and since I do not think Buber's line of argument in this specific context relies on it in any intrinsic manner, it will be temporarily bracketed. On the broader implications of Buber's views on the 'Orient' see instead e.g. Raef Zreik, 'Foreword, 2024: A Palestinian Perspective', in the 2025 edition of Buber's *A Land of Two Peoples* (Zreik 2025).

(Buber [1919] 1967g, 124). The state which conflates statehood with sovereign force is lost. Equally lost, we could assume, is the state, or the nation, which exchanges the bonds of the common striving for form for the empty symbol of blood. Ultimately, Buber's theopolitics forwards a proposal 'that no people on earth is sovereign; only the spirit is … [and] the spirit, which gives shape to the nations that are but lumps of clay, is one and indivisible' (Buber [1919] 1967g, 135–6). Since spirit is one, the body of humanity is finally one as well.

The task then is to think of the political community *otherwise* than as a nation-state nourished by 'the cult of Realpolitik'; to become able to conceive of it as a human association unified through a collective will for form (Buber [1919] 1967g, 147, cf. with Brody 2018, 114). Buber's theopolitical realism represents another form of realism, where *realization* appears 'between man and man', and 'in-forming' is a common endeavour (cf. Buber [1919] 1967g, 168).

> multiplicity is given into our hands, to be transformed into unity; a vast formless mass, to be in-formed by us with the Divine [*in der wir die göttliche Gestalt ausprägen sollen*]. The community of men is as yet only a projected opus that is waiting for us, a chaos we must put in order … But this we can accomplish only if, in the natural context of a life shared with others, every one of us, each in his own place, will perform the just, the in-forming [*das Gestaltende*] deed. For God does not want to be believed in, to be debated and defended by us, but simply to be realized [*verwirtlicht*] through us. (Buber [1916] 1967e, 94; Buber 1916, 74)

This in-formation represents another conception of political form, a forming performed by the body politic itself, without the aid of a supplement. Here, communal spirit is realized through *in-formation*.[21] Such a possibility would have been unthinkable to Schmitt, who viewed the resistance of the raw material, the integrity of the discrete human entity, as an obstacle to overpower, rather than, as Buber, a simultaneous condition for, and constant vulnerability pertaining to, political order. Following his *political* pseudo-theology, Schmitt ultimately would not consider that the living principle of the form might be provided by the community itself. Against this anthropology of sin, Buber's theopolitical vision asserts itself as a decisively less mystical theory of the body politic, not to be defended, believed in or debated, but realized.[22]

Concluding remarks

To many, Buber remains known above all for his insistence on the dialogical nature of human existence, formulated in his thesis of the I and Thou relationship that constitutes our common world. In the society of today, torn apart by conflicts that seem to have transcended the realm of communication altogether, this

21 The German original *Gestaltende* does not suggest as an immediate association with political 'form', but I would argue that the fundamental meaning is the same.

22 I make this assertion on the basis of my introductory distinction between Schmitt's and Buber's usages of 'realization' (see above), which is directed towards the difference between a transcendendent source of authority that translates into a politic realism reliant on a sovereign supplement and one that establishes humankind's own capacity to realize the 'God-reality' of the world. For Buber, 'Gott die Welt zu einem Ort seiner Wirklichkeit bereiten; der Welt beistehen, dass sie gottwirklich werde' (Buber, 2007, 32). Vatter makes a similar claim with regards to what he perceives as a general transformation of charismatic authority discernable in modern Jewish political theology (Vatter 2021, 5–6).

legacy might place him amongst those philosophers viewed as naïve, at best, and dangerously removed from reality, at worst. In this article, I have attempted to show that the bringing together of Buber's writings on biblical politics and his philosophical anthropology illuminates his continuous relevance for political thought in the contemporary era. With his alternative vision of political community, beyond and against the confines of state sovereignty, he demonstrates that a new vision of political life must be accompanied by another understanding of human nature, and *vice versa*. If we adopt Buber's insistence on the social, and human, character of redemption, the conviction of our common capacity to build communities that subsist with and by each other, and not against each other, ceases to be a utopian revery. The sinister *Realpolitik* which has accompanied politico-theological discourse as a dark shadow since Schmitt may thus finally give way to a new political *realism*: Buber's theopolitical realism. ■

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