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## EURO-EXCENTRISM: THEOLOGY AND/OR POLITICAL ANTHROPOLOGY OF THE “ENEMY” (FROM SCHMITT TO PLESSNER)<sup>1</sup>

**ABSTRACT** The text intends to investigate and clarify the salient aspects and limits of a possible and barely deepened relationship of proximity between H. Plessner and C. Schmitt regarding the interpretation and use of the friend/enemy dichotomy. One of the goals is to show that, although in his text of 1931 *Political Anthropology* Plessner tries to ground political anthropology by explicitly referring to the friend/enemy dichotomy as it was formulated by Schmitt, he develops this dualism in the light of the opposition between “familiar” and “foreign.” This development leads Plessner, beyond Schmitt’s aims, to the problematization of intersubjectivity and the possibility of “Euro-excentrism.”

**Keywords:** Plessner, Schmitt, friend/enemy-opposition, political theology, political anthropology, intersubjectivity

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<sup>1</sup> This text was originally published in French in *Bollettino Filosofico*, vol. 34 (2019), pp. 240-249.

In his short book *Political Anthropology*, published in 1931 under the title *Macht und menschliche Natur*, Helmuth Plessner sets out to develop [t]he principal question of political anthropology, namely, to what extent does politics – the struggle [Kampf] for power in human relations among individuals, groups and associations, nations and states – belong to the essence of the human? The philosophy that questions politics with regard to the human must in turn be questioned by politics: it is [o]ut of the spirit of politics that Plessner seeks to motivate philosophy in what is most its own in order to understand the human necessity of politics. From this perspective, anthropology is possible only if it is politically relevant and philosophy is possible only if it is politically relevant, that is to say, both are possible only if they are significant for politics and definable by politics. In this sense, [p]olitics is (...) an organon of philosophy, just as it is an organon of anthropology.<sup>2</sup>

In the prefatory note outlining the “purpose” of his book, Plessner, to present the objective of providing political anthropology with a philosophical foundation, explicitly refers to the friend–enemy distinction articulated by Carl Schmitt: *What I try to solve here is the question of whether the political sphere as such (which, according to Carl Schmitt, is given in the primeval life relationship of friend and enemy) belongs to the definition of the human or whether it belongs only to its contingent physical existential circumstances, which are external to its essence.* Schmitt’s distinction can serve as the conceptual matrix of political anthropology only insofar it speaks to the totality of the human condition. And it is in this sense that politics, as expression of the state of human life, can and must be defined as the necessity, springing from the basic constitution of what is human as such, to live in a for-or-against situation and to delimit and to claim for itself a zone of its own [Eigenzone] against a foreign zone [Fremdzone].<sup>3</sup>

Plessner’s interlocutor seems to echo him in the 1932 version of his famous *The Concept of the Political*: *Helmuth Plessner, who as the first modern philosopher in his book Macht und menschliche Natur dared to advance a political anthropology of a grand style, correctly says that there exists no philosophy and no anthropology which is not politically relevant, just as there is no philosophically irrelevant politics. He has recognized in particular that philosophy and anthropology, as specifically applicable to the totality of knowledge, cannot, like any specialized discipline, be neutralized against irrational life decisions. Man, for Plessner, is “primarily a being capable of creating distance” who in his essence is undetermined, unfathomable, and remains an “open question.” If one bears in mind the anthropological distinction of evil and good and combines Plessner’s “remaining open” with his positive reference to danger, Plessner’s theory is closer to evil than to goodness. This thesis coincides with the fact that Hegel and Nietzsche too belong on the side of evil, and finally power itself(...) is also something evil.*<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> H. Plessner, *Political Anthropology*, transl. by N.F. Schott, Evanston 2018, pp. 3, 5, 75 and 117–125, Plessner’s emphasis.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 6, 61 and 56.

<sup>4</sup> C. Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, transl. by G. Schwab, Chicago 2007, pp. 59–60. The other major interlocutor of Plessner’s in *Political Anthropology* is Heidegger, whose existential analysis in

This dialogue – which might suggest a possible, if short-lived, affinity between two thinkers who seem to differ or even oppose each other on everything – might come as a surprise.<sup>5</sup> Such a proximity is nonetheless in line with the ambiguous tradition of a fascination that Schmitt has exercised over minds as diverse as Walter Benjamin, Leo Strauss, and, after the war, Jacob Taubes or Hans Blumenberg. Beyond this possible *liaison dangereuse* between Plessner and Schmitt, we must also note the troubling affinity, stressed by Jacques Derrida in his *Politics of Friendship* as far back as 1994, between Schmitt's discourse and the most "revolutionary" figures, such as Lenin and Mao (to whom Schmitt refers in *Theory of the Partisan*) but also between Schmitt and certain currents of the European left or extreme left in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In Derrida's view, this *sympathy* is not *some interpretative confusion* but *an immense historico-political symptom*. He traces these *notable sympathies* back to Hegel, more precisely to Schmitt's homage to Hegel, who, having migrated, as it were, to Moscow, virtually reaches across his Marxist posterity thanks to the translation of the notion of *class enemy* (the bourgeois capitalist). The homage consists in the definition of the enemy in Hegelian terms as *ethical [sittlich] difference*, that is to say, as *an otherness [Fremdes] to be negated*.<sup>6</sup>

As suggested, the question of a possible affinity between Plessner and Schmitt is decided on this very point of the conceptual distinction friend–enemy. In *The Concept of the Political*, Schmitt articulates his friend–enemy axiom in Hegelian terms: *The distinction of friend and enemy denotes the utmost degree of intensity of a union or separation, of an association or dissociation. (...) The political enemy need not be morally evil or aesthetically ugly; he need not appear as an economic competitor, and it may even be advantageous to engage with him in business transactions. But he is, nevertheless, the other, the stranger; and it is sufficient for his nature that he is, in a specially intense way, existentially something different and alien, so that in the extreme case conflicts with him are possible*.<sup>7</sup>

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*Being and Time* Plessner reads as an "a priori anthropology"; see: H. Plessner, *Political Anthropology*..., pp. 21-24.

<sup>5</sup> The "dialog" between Plessner and Schmitt, who met in person at least once, in Berlin on April 4, 1930 (see R. Mehring, *Carl Schmitt: Aufstieg und Fall*, München 2009, p. 253), found little echo in the literature until the early 1990s, when the publication of Rüdiger Kramme's *Helmuth Plessner und Carl Schmitt* prompted interest with his idea of an "elective affinity" between the two thinkers. See: R. Kramme, *Helmuth Plessner und Carl Schmitt. Eine historische Fallstudie zum Verhältnis von Anthropologie und Politik in der deutschen Philosophie der zwanziger Jahre*, Berlin 1989, p. 13, and the review by A. Honneth, "Plessner und Schmitt. Ein Kommentar zur Entdeckung ihrer Affinität", in W. Essbach et al. (eds.), *Plessners 'Grenzen der Gemeinschaft'. Eine Debatte*, Frankfurt 2002, pp. 21-28; see also: H. Bielefeldt, *Kampf und Entscheidung. Politischer Existentialismus bei Carl Schmitt, Helmuth Plessner und Karl Jaspers*, Würzburg 1994, pp. 83-99; W. Pircher, "'Pflicht zur Macht': Helmuth Plessner und Carl Schmitt", in R. Weiland (ed.), *Philosophische Anthropologie der Moderne*, Weinheim 1995, pp. 154-164.

<sup>6</sup> J. Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, transl. by G. Collins, London 2005, pp. 107 and 139-141; C. Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*..., pp. 62-63 [modified].

<sup>7</sup> C. Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*..., pp. 26-27.

In this distinction, which has attracted so much commentary, the figure of the enemy has the potential to structure the community that constitutes a *Volk*, a people. The enemy is thus said to define the political as such and to shape its configuration because the enemy–friend distinction, according to Schmitt, implies a *sovereign* decision concerning the enemy: in the extreme case of war, it must be possible (by virtue of a state's *ius belli*) physically to eliminate the enemy. Still in *The Concept of the Political*, Schmitt writes: “*The friend, enemy, and combat [Kampf] concepts receive their real meaning precisely because they refer to the real possibility of physical killing. War follows from enmity. War is the existential [seinsmäßig] negation of another being. It is the most extreme consequence of enmity.*”<sup>8</sup> Schmitt conceives of the pair friend–enemy, said to indicate the *intensity of a union or separation*, as a determined opposition that serves as to make distinctions (*Unterscheidungen*). He says he borrows it from several modern authors (among them Donoso Cortés and Alamos de Barrientos), but it has been suggested that it leads back to a Paulinism, perhaps mixed with a *counterrevolutionary Marcionism*, that, like a matrix, organizes Schmitt's thinking of the community.<sup>9</sup> In the First Epistle to the Thessalonians, the coming *parousia* implies the distinction between two types of people and two ways of living those of *the night or of darkness*, who claim to live in the peace and security of the world, and the *children of light* (1 Thess 5:4) who know that they must stay awake and watchful amid permanent insecurity, in the face of the “danger” of an unstable situation, in an eschatological expectation that is to unite the first Christian communities. Yet, according to Schmitt's controversial interpretation, this dualism derives from the germinal cell of the “enigmatic” figure of the *katekhōn* in the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, that is, that which (institution) or the one who (person) must delay the coming of the Antichrist and the *end of times*.<sup>10</sup> Beyond the varied or even contradictory forms the *katekhōn* takes – what it allows for and what it is relevant to – what we are concerned with here is the elaboration of a *political*

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 33 [modified].

<sup>9</sup> See: R. Faber, “Politische Dämonologie. Über Carl Schmitts und anderer gegenrevolutionären Marcionismus”, in *Politische Dämonologie. Über modernen Marcionismus*, Würzburg 2007, pp. 93–137; R. Groh, *Arbeit an der Heillosigkeit der Welt. Zur politisch-theologischen Mythologie und Anthropologie Carl Schmitts*, Frankfurt 1998. See also: Tristan Storme's study of the echo in the French context: T. Storme, *Carl Schmitt et le marcionisme. L'impossibilité théologico-politique d'un œcuménisme judéo-chrétien*, Paris 2008.

<sup>10</sup> See: 2 Thessalonians 5–8, which prompted as early as Augustine to remark, “I frankly confess I do not know what he means” (St. Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God*, transl. by M. Dods, vol. XX, ch. 19). See also Schmitt's January 11, 1948 letter to his translator Pierre Linn, written in French: “We are still – as in 500 or 800 – in the Christian ‘aion,’ still in agony, and any essential event is but a matter of the ‘Kat-echon,’ that is to say, ‘the one who holds,’ *qui tenet nunc* (2<sup>nd</sup> Letter of Saint Paul to the Thessalonians, 2<sup>nd</sup> ch., v. 7). You know my theory of the *katechon*, it dates to 1932 [recte: 1942? – CS]. I believe that in every century, there is a concrete bearer of this force and that the task is to find him.” See: C. Schmitt, *Glossarium*, Berlin 1991, p. 80. On Schmitt's not always coherent use of the notion of the *katekhōn*, see: F. Grossheutschi, *Carl Schmitt und die Lehre vom Katechon*, Berlin 1996; P. Metzger, *Katechon. II Thess 2,1–12 im Horizont apokalyptischen Denkens*, Berlin 2005, pp. 23–25; W. Schuller, “Dennoch die Schwerter halten. Der ‘Katechon’ Carl Schmitts”, in H. Cancik et al. (eds.), *Geschichte – Tradition – Reflexion*, Tübingen 1996, pp. 389–406.

*theology* of history that governs Schmitt's theory, including and especially, his conceptual friend–enemy distinction.<sup>11</sup>

For Schmitt, the concept of *political theology* is an offensive tool linked to a *polemic situation*, that is to say, an antagonism said to provoke a concrete, hostile opposition (*Gegensein*). This aspect helps situate the *katechontical* and *theocratic* legitimization of the total state's dictatorial violence that Schmitt, perhaps seeing himself as an antiapocalyptic decelerator of the end of history and the end of the political, elaborates in the years after 1933. He considers himself to work *against* the apocalyptic accelerators of *neutralization* and *depoliticization*, which according to him are eminently tied to the de-theologizing process of *secularization*, a process that, paradoxically, gives him the definite opportunity for retheologizing. This is what Hans Blumenberg seems to get at in *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*: if secularization didn't exist, one would have to invent it because it allows Schmitt to pursue the political concretization of certain theological concepts and to call for the retheologizing combat *against* the presumed enemy.<sup>12</sup>

Thanks to the figure of the *katekhōn*, Schmitt elaborates an enemy to structure the *community*, namely, the *eschatological enemy* who brings and spreads anarchy, who takes the form of liberal democracy, or of the Communist Party, or, after the war, of a technicized global state, which Schmitt systematically and obsessively *Judaizes* on the pattern of an antiapocalyptic *anti-Semitism* inscribed in this very schema of katechontic antagonism.<sup>13</sup>

The hyperbolic investment, this side of the political theologies of 16<sup>th</sup>- and 17<sup>th</sup>-century absolutism, of the theologoumenon *katekhōn* from Thessalonians 2 thus produces the corollary of the conceptual distinction friend–enemy which Schmitt himself claimed only to diagnose in a descriptive and formal, a *phenomenologically* neutral, way.<sup>14</sup>

In keeping with the hypothesis of *theology as politics* (Blumenberg), that is to say, of theology as the *ideology* of politics, we must ask to what extent Schmitt's theory,

<sup>11</sup> See: H. Meier, *Carl Schmitt, Leo Strauss und 'Der Begriff des Politischen'. Zu einem Dialog unter Abwesenden*, Stuttgart 1998, p. 85; R. Groh, *Arbeit an der Heillosigkeit...*, pp. 13-14. In 1932, Schmitt does not defend any explicit concept of "political theology" and speaks only of a "methodical connection of theological and political presuppositions" (C. Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political...*, p. 65). To uncover the presuppositions of Schmitt's political theory, which is governed by a certain kind of "theology" dissimulated in the esoteric mode of a "secularized immanentism" (H. Meier, *Carl Schmitt...*, pp. 64, 76-77, 85-86), we must apply to Schmitt himself the well-known basic proposition of his treatise *Political Theology* from 1922: "All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts"; see: C. Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, transl. by G. Schwab, Chicago 2005, p. 36.

<sup>12</sup> H. Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, transl. by R.M. Wallace, Cambridge 1985, pp. 97-98; R. Groh, *Arbeit an der Heillosigkeit...*, p. 170.

<sup>13</sup> R. Groh, *Arbeit an der Heillosigkeit...*, p. 66.

<sup>14</sup> Reinhard Koselleck takes up the strategy Schmitt adopted in Nuremberg defending himself against the charges brought by Robert Kempner, namely qualifying the pair friend–enemy as purely a phenomenological description, in: R. Koselleck, "The Historical-Political Semantics of Asymmetric Counterconcepts", in idem, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, transl. by K. Tribe, New York 2004, p. 191.

programmed by the theologoumenon *katekhōn*, symptomatically translates an as it were apotropaic response to the chaos and anarchy that Schmitt feared so much. Derrida rightly characterized this fear as a *reactive panic* or phobia that consists in inventing enemies all around to the point of subsuming them under, conjuring them in the ultimate form of the eschatological enemy to be destroyed, under the pretext of seeing in this hostile opposition the condition of possibility of the political or of repoliticizing an allegedly depoliticized age.<sup>15</sup>

In this regard, Schmitt's affirmation of the political is less an affirmation of the state of nature as permanent *status belli* than it is the negation of the bourgeois security of the *status quo*, which amounts to turning war into the inescapable horizon of the political.<sup>16</sup> This affirmation of the political as negation of the status quo explains the amplification of the rhetoric of danger, adapted as it is to the perpetual possibility of conflict. Recall that in the pages from *The Concept of the Political* cited above, Schmitt hailed Plessner as a thinker of danger, even a dangerous thinker in the *pessimist* tradition of the *evil* side: Machiavelli, Hobbes, de Maistre, Hegel, Fichte, Nietzsche. And he adds *the remarkable and, for many, certainly disquieting diagnosis that all genuine political theories presuppose man to be evil, i.e., by no means an unproblematic but a dangerous and dynamic being*.<sup>17</sup>

This notion, or, rather, this creed of *danger* and of *man's dangerousness*, which Leo Strauss criticized in 1932 as *the ultimate presupposition of the position of the political*, marks the distinction between *authoritarian and anarchist theories*.<sup>18</sup> It is based on an alleged natural malice of the human. This fundamental corruption calls for power and domination and is said to unite the members of a community according to an antagonistic tendency that excludes those determined to be foreign to this community. Put differently, they are united according to the friend–enemy distinction, which raises the predetermined political anthropoumenon of the naturally *evil* human being, or, to put it in theological terms, on a determination of the human as naturally *sinful* and *corrupt*.

Does Plessner, in drawing on the friend–enemy distinction, subscribe, actually or implicitly, to this theological-anthropological-political creed, as Schmitt intimates in his 1932 publication? Let's go back to *Political Anthropology* to examine the function of the friend–enemy distinction for Plessner in more detail: *Here, we rather conceive of the friend–enemy relation as belonging to the essential constitution of the human* and we do so precisely by blocking *any concrete essential determination of the human, by treating it as an open question or as power. In its indeterminateness toward itself, that peculiar horizon takes shape inside of which everything appears to the human as known, familiar, and natural, appropriate to its essence and necessary, [and] outside*

<sup>15</sup> J. Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*..., p. 84.

<sup>16</sup> C. Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*..., p. 94; see also: idem, *Glossarium*..., p. 95.

<sup>17</sup> C. Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*..., pp. 65 and 61.

<sup>18</sup> L. Strauss, "Notes on Carl Schmitt, 'The Concept of the Political'", transl. by J.H. Lomax, in C. Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*..., pp. 111 and 60.

of which everything appears as unknown, foreign, and unnatural, against its essence and incomprehensible.<sup>19</sup>

The reason for the opposition familiar–foreign, which is at the basis of the friend–enemy distinction, is not primarily (although it plays a role) the fear, the anxiety even, of a hostile reaction coming from what is situated beyond this limit, outside the *familiar circle*.

[T]his fear is rooted in the uncanniness of the foreign and not in the detrimental effect the foreign might possibly have on the sphere of familiarity; because the foreign is not merely another (...). The foreign is that which is one's own, familiar, and homely in the other and as the other and therefore – to recall an insight of Freud's – is uncanny.<sup>20</sup>

Reformulated in light of the familiar–foreign opposition, the friend–enemy distinction leads, beyond Schmitt, to problematizing an *intersubjective* relation as interlocking (*Verschränkung*), which Plessner specifies as follows: *the human does not see 'itself' only in its Here but also in the There of the other. The sphere of familiarity is thus not limited by 'nature,' extending (as if extra-historically) only to a certain limit; it is open and thereby opens up for the human the uncanniness of the other in the inconceivable interlocking of what is one's own with the other.*<sup>21</sup>

What is one's own is another foreign self; each ego faces, or confronts, an alter ego: the ego seizes the alterity of this alter ego as itself because, Plessner notes, what is one's own *is* also the other, and this mode defines the particular intersubjective relation that is the *interlocking of perspectives in the with-one-another and the against-one-another* (*Miteinander und Gegeneinander*).<sup>22</sup> This *interlocking of what is one's own with the other*, to be sure, seems close to the Hegelian (and Schmittian) master–slave dialectic or the movement of recognition where the other as enemy, in a sibylline formula that Schmitt often cites in the *Theory of the Partisan*, is nothing but the form of our own question because this enemy, as *other*, puts the *self* into question that accedes to itself only through the other – for the Hegel of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, self-consciousness is self-consciousness in itself and for itself (*an und für sich*) only in being recognized by the other. But to read Plessner this way would be to misunderstand the specifically *hermeneutic* turn Plessner gives this relation.

In fact, he reinterprets the friend–enemy distinction in light of the opposition one's own/familiar–foreign by firmly tying it to the principle of the human's unfathomability (*Unergründlichkeit*), which entails a redefinition of the very possibility of a political anthropology. This possibility resides in history. The possibilities of *being* human unfold in the space of history: a student of Dilthey's hermeneutics, Plessner considers that *the human can experience what the human is only through history*.<sup>23</sup> He remarks: *The*

<sup>19</sup> H. Plessner, *Political Anthropology*..., p. 53, Plessner's emphases.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56. See also: idem, "Der Mensch als Lebewesen. Adolf Portmann zum 70. Geburtstag", in *Gesammelte Schriften: Conditio humana*, vol. VIII, pp. 319-320.

<sup>23</sup> Idem, *Political Anthropology*..., p. 77.

*history of culture (Kulturgeschichte) shows a relentless displacement of the horizon of uncanniness and a correlative displacement of the sphere of friendly familiarity, such that the changes in how the friend–enemy relation manifests itself can only be investigated historically. This relation thus does not of necessity have the sense of a specifically political relation because it pervades all relationships of the human.*<sup>24</sup>

The object of study, historical *human life* structured by the distinction friend–enemy, is as a matter of principle unfathomable or inexplicable (*unergründbar, unergründlich*): *human life, in its historical reality cannot be the object of a questioning by comprehension [Verständnis]; it is an open question, as opposed to the formally closed objects of the natural sciences that are susceptible to positive explanation.*<sup>25</sup> The process of comprehension structurally includes the living subject, the human attitude that accomplishes it by relating the unfathomability of historical reality to the present of its position. Plessner explains: *In this breaking of the perspective, life turns to itself to discover itself as past life, as life that has become. In this breaking, however, it lifts itself out of the continuum of what has become and manifests, as present, its power over the past. This power to presentify (vergegenwärtigen), the condition of possibility for the historical past to transform and to open up, is both theoretical and practical: The principle of the bindingness of the unfathomable [Verbindlichkeit des Unergründlichen] is the at once theoretical and practical conception of the human as a historical and therefore political being.*<sup>26</sup>

In virtue of this principle of unfathomability that comprehends the living human being as a fundamentally open and indeterminate practical-theoretical question, Plessner rejects any exclusive claim on the part of an empirical anthropology to embrace a posteriori the totality of empirical forms of the human being; he just as firmly rejects the claim of an a priori anthropology to fix an unchanging essence of the human, that is to say, to determine the essential indeterminacy of the human: *It [the human] must remain open, for the sake of the universality of its view onto human life in the full scope of all cultures and epochs of which the human is capable. This is why the unfathomability of the human moves to the center of anthropology.*<sup>27</sup>

While the friend–enemy distinction, governed by the principle of unfathomability, is rearticulated in analogy with the opposition familiar–unfamiliar (the foreign and

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 45, Plessner's emphasis. On the "principle of the bindingness of unfathomability" elaborated by Georg Misch in the wake of Dilthey, see: G. Misch, *Der Aufbau der Logik auf dem Boden der Philosophie des Lebens. Göttinger Vorlesungen über Logik und Einleitung in die Theorie des Wissens*, G. Kühne-Bertram, F. Rodi (eds.), Freiburg–München 1994, p. 110; idem, *Lebensphilosophie und Phänomenologie. Eine Auseinandersetzung der Dilthey'schen Richtung mit Heidegger und Husserl*, Darmstadt 1967, pp. 51 and 192; idem, "Die Idee der Lebensphilosophie in der Theorie der Geisteswissenschaften", in F. Rodi, H.U. Lessing (eds.), *Materialien zur Philosophie Wilhelm Diltheys*, Frankfurt 1984, pp. 132–146.

<sup>27</sup> H. Plessner, *Political Anthropology*..., p. 26.

uncanny), this opposition leads back, more fundamentally, to *the life-situation's entitative incongruence between world and environment*.<sup>28</sup>

*In permanent breaks, the human thus conquers its environment from the world between environment and world, between the homely zone of familiar references and relations of signification that have "always already" been understood and the uncanny reality of the bottomless world. In the interlocking, the human displays its mastery.*<sup>29</sup>

The human, as power to *conquer* its environment, thus unfolds in the antagonistic tension that animates the friend–enemy distinction: *As power, the human – risked in this generality toward what is human, and any statement determining its formal character remains a risk – is necessarily engaged in a struggle for power, i.e., in the opposition of familiarity and foreignness, of friend and enemy.*<sup>30</sup>

The essential ambiguity of the *natura hominis*, the nature of the human as both animal and not animal, situated at the intersection of environment and world, between the foreign, hostile and the familiar, friendly sphere, translates into what Plessner calls *natural artificiality*. The human being, in the *finitude* of its contingent situation, must ceaselessly restore and artificially compensate for a natural environment that, however, has never existed as such, by establishing a familiar cultural sphere. Plessner explains that this finitude *is itself a finitude interlocked with an infinity and therefore a finitude that manifests itself explicitly as such, a finitude that naturally demands to be compensated for artificially. This is why the human is "by nature" artificial and never in balance. This is why it attains any kind of immediacy only in a mediation, any kind of purity only in a clouding, any kind of non-refractedness only in a refraction.*<sup>31</sup>

Artificiality is the very expression of human *nature*: human being is *naturally artificial* because it must always already compensate for, without ever being able fully to counter-balance them, the deficiencies and disequilibriums of what Plessner in the *Levels of the Organic* (1928) calls its *excentric positionality*, a biologically fragile positionality not specialized, not adapted to either the center or the periphery of nature. The human – this *apostate of nature, constitutively homeless, standing nowhere* – is compelled, by virtue of its inborn *rootlessness*, to *create a second native country (zweite Heimat)* by means of cultural, that is to say, artificial and technical, operations, of *mediated immediacy*.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., pp. 58-59.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., pp. 57-58, Plessner's emphases.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 53, Plessner's emphases.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 58. The syntagma "artificial nature" probably first appears in G. Sorel, *De l'Utilité du Pragmatisme*, Paris 1928, pp. 83, 335-338, 376, 413.

<sup>32</sup> H. Plessner, *Levels of Organic Life and the Human: An Introduction to Philosophical Anthropology*, transl. by M. Hyatt, New York 2019. See also: idem, "Mensch und Tier", in *Gesammelte Schriften...*, pp. 52-65, on the "political" import of the "uprootedness" that characterizes excentric positionality, against the attachment to the local spirit or to *Blut und Boden* that Plessner, in 1946, saw as an attachment of the kind animals maintain to their environment (*Umwelt*). On the three "fundamental laws of anthropology", namely the laws of "natural artificiality", of "mediated immediacy", and "of the utopian standpoint", see: idem, *Levels of Organic Life...*, pp. 267-321.

This tendency of the human to create another *native country*, another home, that is to say, to form a *naturally artificial* society against the hostile world by confronting its uncanny foreignness,<sup>33</sup> according to Plessner, is a primary tendency; it imposes itself from the essential *homelessness* implied by its excentric positionality, the singularity of its status as a living being in constant conflict with its natural animality, and it is by virtue of this very conflict, which is constitutive of the *conditio humana*, that the human possesses the fragile power to transform itself.

There is a universal dimension to the homelessness inherent to the human being's excentric positionality and the principle of unfathomability defining its essential opening, a universality that situates Plessner at the antipodes of Schmitt. It explains why Schmitt, initially hastening to read into the principle of unfathomability an opening to "danger" and a sympathy with evil, could not but strike the passage praising Plessner from the new edition of *The Concept of the Political* in 1933, replacing it with a reference to Hobbes. In a theological-political anthropology extolling the *polemos* as the essence of the political, where the enemy constitutes a virtually destructible figure, the principle of unfathomability as *the European principle of open immanence* has no place or, more precisely, it occupies the place of the enemy.<sup>34</sup>

Plessner's political anthropology, in fact, implies universalizing and relativizing the view of the human being; it rejects absolutizing the familiar sphere of a people or a community in virtue of the possible *universality* of humanity (*Menschheit*), which – as *mediated immediacy* demands – is accessible only via the translation of a particular and contingent people.<sup>35</sup> Such a mediation avoids *dressing the alien in a uniform it has tailored according to its own essence*, avoids designating what is foreign as *barbarian*. Against *absolutiz[ing] our own Western position*, against *monopoliz[ing] being human*,

<sup>33</sup> At times, this "foreignness" acquires gnostic overtones, for example when at the of *Levels of Organic Life...*, Plessner evokes the "blessed strangeness" opened up by "Marcion of Sinope's Christ" (321). As an allusion to Adolf von Harnack, this is to be read as a concession to the *zeitgeist*; see: A. von Harnack, *Das Evangelium vom fremden Gott. Eine Monographie zur Geschichte der Grundlegung der Katholischen Kirche*, Leipzig 1924, pp. 225, 19.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 76. Plessner thus cannot but reject the criterion of the "friend" Schmitt notes in 1933, namely "ethnic identity" (*Artgleichheit*) or "belongingness to people and race" (see: C. Schmitt, *State, Movement, People. The Triadic Structure of the Political Unity*, transl. by S. Draghici, Corvallis 2001, pp. 48 and 51), a criterion that places Plessner – classified by the new regime as "half-Jew" – in the Schmittian sphere of an "enemy" of the German people – of a *Gemeinschaft* or "community" of the kind Plessner had criticized as early as 1924 from the perspective of the bourgeois *Gesellschaft* or "society"; see H. Plessner, *The Limits of Community. A Critique of Social Radicalism*, transl. by A. Wallace, Amherst 1999. After being forced into exile, and even more so after the war, Plessner no longer hesitates explicitly to criticize Schmitt's friend-enemy distinction and his "decisionism," which he classes among the "fascistic" projects aiming at an "aestheticization of the political" in Benjamin's sense; see: Idem, "Die Emanzipation der Macht", in *Gesammelte Schriften...*, vol. V, p. 277: "state action [*staatliches Handeln*] becomes a subspecies of political action that obeys the opposition of the friend-enemy relationship alone. The amorality of naked power was set free; the final decision was robbed of its tragic gravity; and the road into dictatorship was taken." See also: idem, "Ergänzungen von 1959", in "Die verspätete Nation. Über die politische Verführbarkeit bürgerlichen Geistes (1935/1959)", in *Gesammelte Schriften...*, vol. VI, pp. 212-213.

<sup>35</sup> H. Plessner, *Political Anthropology...*, pp. 83-87.

the unfamiliar other, the enemy, constitutes the figure of an alternative possibility of being human. *In the gradual overcoming of positing its own ethnicity as absolute (...) politics civilizes itself* because the recognition of the *foreign* opens a space of freedom where, on an level of equality, *fair play* is possible.<sup>36</sup>

In 1931, in the context of a radicalization of the minds in the twilight of the Weimar Republic, Plessner calls for *renounc[ing] the hegemonic position of the European system of values and categories* in the very name of *the European mind*, henceforth considered to be one expression, among others, of the plurality of historical cultures. Rather than Euro-centric, Plessner's humanism is *Euro-excentric*, we might say; the affirmative relativization of the European position, of its culture and religion, that is to say, *renouncing its absolutization*, implies recognizing the plurality of the forms of being human and of the equality of rights (*Gleichberechtigung*), in principle, of allegedly peripheral extra-European or non-Christian cultural and religious systems. This fundamentally democratic recognition, explicitly indifferent to all ethnic or racial determination, of the plural possibility of being human defines the universality of the task of a philosophical anthropology that has succeeded in abandoning *the hegemonic position of its own epistemological conditions, the conditions that are its own possibilities, to access the world by breaking (...) the perspective* on the living human being.<sup>37</sup> And if philosophical anthropology is necessarily political, it is so to the exact extent to which it aims, in its universality, at the human being, without prior determination or explanation of its essence, as an open question conceived as a power of transformation that is none other than that of life itself.

Translated by Nils F. Schott

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., pp. 24, 26, 50, 86 and 83.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., pp. 28, 14, 16 and 45.

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