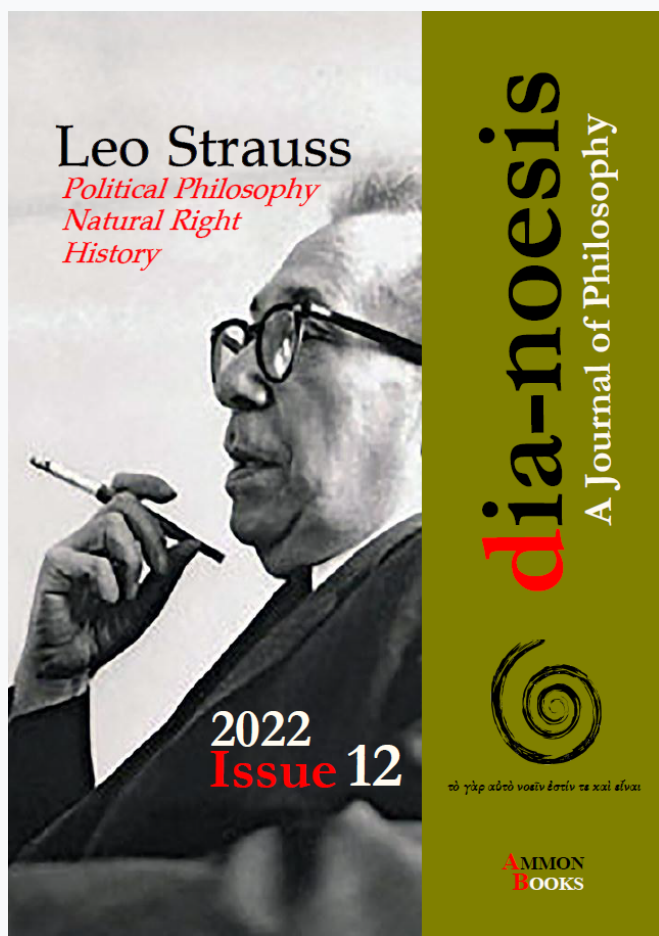


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Towards a Political Theology of World Politics

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Towards a Political Theology of World Politics

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**Political theology as a transdisciplinary metonymy of
world politics**

Political theology represents one of the most fundamental subfields of Contemporary Political Theory (CPT) as well as International Political Theory (IPT). Since 1920s, when Carl Schmitt (2005) introduced the respective terminology in the broader field of social and

political sciences, political theology has developed in an absolutely dynamic way, composing, one way or another, a broader interdisciplinary field in which philosophy, theology and politics are fruitfully interconnected (Scott and Cavanaugh, 2005; Phillips, 2012).

The last decade the academic literature on political theology in the field of international relations has been steadily enriched by excellent volumes (Luoma-aho, 2012; Troy, 2014; Molloy, 2017; Bain, 2020; Pui-Lan, 2021). In a sense, it could be claimed, that political theology nowadays is deployed as a common reflective field of inquiry in which politics as a whole, either domestic or international, is seen through the lens of theopolitical metaphysics, or, in Foucauldian lexicon, genealogies of the theological/political as an ontological dimension (Paipais, 2017).

Vassilios Paipais' edited collective volume entitled *Theology and World Politics. Metaphysics, Genealogies, Political Theologies* constitutes one of the recent most illuminated and specialized books on the topic of political theology with regard to world politics. The book is divided into three individual parts that bring to the fore the basic aspects of the political theology of the International in our days: that is to say, Metaphysics, Genealogies, and Political Theologies (Vatter, 2022).

The preeminent contributors of the collective volume compose a disciplinarily diverse, however absolutely solid, group of contemporary academics and experts of political theology, who approach world politics from different theoretical angles, exploiting the radical conceptual edifice of political theology, in particular the rich and increasingly interconnected intellectual toolkits of philosophy -not only so-called Continental Philosophy (Kahn, 2016)- and theology -not only Christian Theology (Hovey & Phillips, 2015).

From the very beginning, Paipais stresses the fact that political theology or, to put it another way, the theo-political aspects of the International, represent one of the fundamental thematic areas of so-called English School of International Relations (IR), naming especially the massive contribution of Martin Wight (Jackson, 2005: 51-72 & 2008). On the other

side of the pond, Paipais underscores the exceptional case of Reinhold Niebuhr, the father of so-called Christian realism who influenced American foreign policy, by advocating a form of political ethics guided by moral principles and the religiously-inspired ethics of the lesser evil (Rich, 1992; Pedro, 2021).

Without ado, in the first section of his Introduction, Paipais poses the critical question of religion and theology applied to world politics. Despite the fact that the huge wave of secularism, empiricism and positivism, as the main intellectual offspring of Enlightenment and Western modernity as a whole, discredited the prestige of religion throughout the twentieth century, installing an epistemological paradigm which was dominated by scientific forms of neorealism and a value-free theory of politics, so-called return of religion since 1970s and then through the end of Cold War in 1990s and eventually with the cataclysmic event of 9/11 reanimated the significance of religion in world politics.

Nevertheless, Paipais points out that paradoxically via the trend of post-secular thought religion has been entrapped once more in the net of secularism, reduced to the level of a parasitic dimension in discourses about democracy, international security and global politics. For this reason, at this stage of his analysis, he introduces the concept of theology seeking, not simply methodologically and epistemologically but first and foremost ontologically, to raise again the question of politics and international relations via the analytical lens of theology and by extension philosophy and metaphysics (Makris, 2019).

Thus, it is rendered absolutely clear that political theology does not concern a question about religions or religious affairs in politics but it refers to an interdisciplinary field of philosophical and theological investigations of world politics. Even though, within political theology, the post-secular mood has been hijacked by post-metaphysical orientations, Paipais insists that the so-called *theologico-political problem* as a question about political ontology stands at the very heart of contemporary political theology. In that respect, he

underscores that political theology today is a key dimension of political theorising within the broader fields of CPT and IPT (Robbins, 2011; Bretherton, 2019; Vatter, 2021).

In that sense, it could be claimed that the most eminent social and political thinkers of contemporary modernity, from Leo Strauss to Claude Lefort and from Ernst Kantorowicz to Giorgio Agamben, are nothing but pure political theologians or, as aforementioned, theopolitical metaphysicians. Philosophy, theology and politics, that have been intricately linked for centuries have regained once more their lost connection (Speight and Zank, 2017).

Thus, it is by no chance that influential contemporary social and political thinkers go back to the Middle Ages in order to place this crucial relationship into its original context. From this point of view, political theology signifies the return of the pre-modern spirit in the field of politics. For some, this is the actual end of modernity and the starting point of so-called postmodernity. It is no coincidence that the most famous thinkers of post-structuralism as well as postmodern thought explore politics using the thriving conceptual armory of political theology (Crockett, 2013).

God, the problem of evil, theodicy, original sin, neighborly love, etc., are some of the basic notions they use to disclose the metaphysical or even transcendental aspects of world politics. Paipais makes here a second interesting distinction between transcendence and immanence, interposing some relevant questions about messianism and eschatology. Since Baruch Spinoza (James, 2012), political theology has followed a pantheistic trajectory either enhancing so-called natural theology or collapsing into the radical field of immanence, within which philosophical and/or theological metaphysics tends to be invested with the garment of messianic nihilism, as in the case of Walter Benjamin, or political eschatology, as in the case of Gilles Deleuze (Esposito, 2021).

At the conclusion of the second section of his Introduction and before Paipais gives us an outline of the individual contributions of the collective volume, he makes some final remarks about the theme of political theology, especially concerning the crucial relationship between theology and

politics, that are absolutely illuminating on the content of the *theologico-political problem* in the age of so-called globalization. Firstly, giving simultaneously a working definition, he explicitly states that political theology concerns the exploitation of theological ideas in world politics. This is a very important statement to the extent that with this epistemological commitment, Paipais places political theology within the greater tradition of intellectual history or, in other terms, the history of political ideas (Lasonczi and Singh, 2010)¹.

To give his statement more conceptual, theoretical and analytical strength, he refers to so-called New Political Theology or by extension to the famous theology of liberation, where the phenomenon of power or cognate concepts, such as sovereignty for example, are approached via alternative theological, philosophical and metaphysical perspectives that bring to the fore not only the transcendental, ethical or pastoral sides of politics but, even more so, the version of a form of power that has either liberating or non-sovereign character (Rasmusson, 1995).

In this vein, Paipais uses the absolutely critical and inspirational term *theo-political* that on the one hand stresses so-called *theological turn* in contemporary political and social philosophy, and on the other, it opens up a new field of reflective inquiry, beyond political theology as we know it since 1990s, in an intellectual site where the political, whether domestic or international affairs, is grasped as a human activity where invisibility plays a bigger part than visibility.

To be further clear on that, this is not a simple acknowledgment of so-called post-foundational political thought (Marchart, 2007), but an essential epistemological assumption that metaphysics, either philosophical or theological, will continue to be the epicenter of CPT or IPT in the coming future. For this reason, it becomes increasingly more intuitive to frame the whole *problématique* using the generic term *political metaphysics*.

¹ See also *Telos* 175 (Summer 2016): “Political Theory, Political Theology” (Special Issue).

Outlining the aim of the collective volume, Paipais does not only highlight the return of theology but adds the dimension of a constructive and balanced *symbiosis* between theology and politics as two interconnected discourses that enter a zone of indistinction, to use an apt Agambenian metaphor. Paraphrasing his words, it could be said that political theology today seems like a transdisciplinary metonymy of world politics that broadens our meta-theoretical horizons providing us with a sound epistemological imagination that enriches and extends our scholarly and research horizons.

Towards a political metaphysics of the International: Reflective perspectives

The first part of the collective volume called *Metaphysics* opens with the chapter by Adrian Pabst who foregrounds the transcendent characteristics of world politics. Nonetheless, Pabst places this political metaphysics in the broader historical frame of so-called *living traditions*, exploiting the philosophical and theoretical thought of Edmund Burke. In fact, Pabst, following in Burke's footsteps, situates the 'transcendent morality given to humanity by God', a kind of divine law so to speak, within customs, social bonds, mutual duties, traditions, 'obligations written in the heart', etc., thus creating a sort of organicist associationism, full of material and ideational elements, where identity and community co-exist as communicating vessels.

From this point of view, Pabst sees world politics as a social phenomenon that is governed by a covenantal link among generations, cultures and societies, which are extended into the time, like an organic net that connects past, present and future. Knowing how Hannah Arendt has been influenced by Burke's thought, it could be said that Pabst discovers in Burke's radical conservatism an element of organic ontology of the humankind, where the perennial problems of international and world politics are approached not in the frame of international anarchy, as in the case of

political realism, but as social forms of a holistic cultural tradition.

No doubt, and Pabst explicitly refers to it, this is an approach that owes much to the so-called English School of IR, where even war is faced as a social institution that eventually aims to social peace: reminding us of the well-known approach of Immanuel Kant. Rightly, Pabst places this approach against social contract theory in which the social bond is based on the horrific fear of sudden death instead of tradition, ethical reciprocity and cultural conservation.

No doubt, Pabst explores Burkean ideas on international relations as a strong anti-Hobbesian tradition of thought in which, in an Aristotelian sense, world politics is likened with a commonwealth that is governed by a natural morality, stemming straight from divine law and God Himself. As such, it could be claimed that Burkean associationism has a sound republican flavor, despite Burke's reputation as an archetypical conservative thinker, prefiguring theoretical and philosophical insights from within the English School of IR introduced under the conceptual label of international society.

Contrary to the Hobbes-inspired political realism, where international affairs are governed by the anarchy principle and social contract is rooted in human vice, Burke-led political metaphysics of world politics refers to a kind of a natural sociality, full of divine references, that gives human life and especially international politics the ontological and theological characteristics of an international community.

However, things are not so simple when it comes to Thomas Hobbes and so-called Hobbesian tradition of IR. William Bain, in his chapter, strives to deconstruct the leading myth of political realism that anarchy is about violence and brutal war. In fact, he goes back to the medieval theology itself, especially to the fruitful theological tradition of nominalism, unearthing a neuralgic political theological interpretation of Hobbes that makes sense of the international anarchy in a metaphysical way. What is particularly striking in this approach is that Bain disconnects Hobbes from

scholastic rationalism, by placing his political philosophy in the heart of medieval theology and in particular within the theological frame of nominalism. So, in that sense, it seems that international anarchy derives straight from the way that Hobbes perceives the idea of God.

According to theological nominalism, and this is undoubtedly a preview of so-called postmodern thought in late twentieth century, God creates the world without a pre-existing specific reason. Creation is just the realization of His divine will. God's will is the source of freedom itself. In that respect, anarchy is nothing but the worldly realization of divine will. For Bain, this is exactly the way that Hobbes sees the state of nature, the modern state, and interstate relations. International anarchy is grounded in this nominalist and metaphysical idea of divine free will.

It is really impressive the way Bain paints an unconventional intellectual portrait of Hobbes, if we can say so, beyond the parochialism of mainstream political realism, identifying anarchy with the inherent and steady feature of an irreducible freedom. Without perhaps suspecting it, Bain opens up a huge theoretical door towards so-called postmodern nominalism, putting Hobbes there as a great forerunner of a radical onto-theological theory of sovereignty. According to this approach, sovereignty is by nature indifferent, unrestricted and irreducible.

In this specific vein, Hobbes' theory of interstate anarchy is perceived as a secular realization of divine singularity itself. Following the principle of *imago Dei*, Hobbes re-creates the world as an ensemble of singular entities that build human life on an *ad hoc* basis, imitating the creative impulse of divine free will. Both Hobbes' political metaphysics of world politics and the anarchy principle are regarded as earthly exemplifications of God's free will. Therefore, according to Bain, Hobbes' political philosophy is not an apotheosis of violence and war, but a nominalist-metaphysical approach of freedom in modernity. However, Bain emphasises, this political theory is nothing but an original political theology that draws its inspiration from medieval soil.

Undoubtedly, this is a revisionist approach, nearly postmodern, that not only deconstructs the intellectual origins of political realism, but connects Hobbes, now through theological nominalism, once again to the English School of IR, in the sense that international society is a social creation; a kind of social constructivism that is rooted in the ontological-divine singularity of states.

It is also interesting how this approach radically affects the meaning of the key-concepts of political realism, for example the notion of sovereignty, which is no longer seen as the rationalistic culmination of power, but as an almost divine commitment to an irreducible free will. It is worth noting here that this kind of narrative reminds us the republican reading of so-called Machiavellian realism, in which state sovereignty is identified with an onto-theology of popular freedom.

It is also noteworthy to add here that the contemporary Greek social thinker Panagiotis Kondylis (1943-1998), despite that his *oeuvre*, written mainly in Greek and German, is not yet known in Anglophone academia, develops a theory about world politics whereby state sovereignty is considered as the institutional crystallization of a metaphysical origin of free will or singularity in general terms. Both Pabst and Bain, in the excellent way that Paipais puts the two chapters one on top of the other in the very beginning of the collective volume, build a special constructive frame, within which we can definitely see political metaphysics of world politics as a transdisciplinary field of radical and fresh recasting of CPT as well as IPT and, even more so, as a provocative encore to deconstructing the key-concepts of traditional IR theory.

From the outset of her chapter on political theology of world politics via Jacques Derrida and Slavoj Žižek, Agata Bielik-Robson frames the so-called *theological turn* in late modernity as a return of metaphysics. Actually, she goes one step further by connecting political theology with the question of materialism in the broad sense of the term. She dares to accuse contemporary post-metaphysical materialism for 'theological illiteracy', claiming that this specific onto-theological lack opens up the gloomy doors of nihilism. This

kind of approach sounds like Leo Strauss' thesis that historicism and empiricism in modernity have systematically cultivated the soil for the vehement advent of relativism and so the nihilistic catastrophe of the first half of the twentieth century.

Bielik-Robson explicitly connects the *theological turn* in world politics with the necessity of the existence of a so-called 'unconscious horizon' of the human activity as a whole. In other words, humanity needs a metaphysical depth in order to give meaning to the world. Political theology means signification. In fact, she explores two kinds of contemporary materialism. On the one hand, she investigates Žižek's 'transcendental materialism' as a Gnostic intellectual venture that lacks every aspect of a material affirmation. She attributes this fundamental onto-theological and epistemological contradiction to the Lacanian origins of Žižek's thought. Žižek has been entrapped into a radical negation of matter, by deifying the psychoanalytic desire for nothingness.

On the other hand, she explores Derrida's theological materialism as a counter-Žižekian materialism, in which matter takes, through the Jewish concept of *difference*, the form of a finite Subject that can deal with Substance affirmatively and creatively. She asserts that finally, Derrida stays closer to the dialectics of Hegel, transforming the Gnostic negation of Žižek into a worldly *belief in matter*.

It is worth noting that Bielik-Robson connects Derridean materialism with Isaac Luria's theory of *tsimtsum*, where divine contraction, or whatever Patristic theology defines as *perichoresis*, gives humanity a critical space for existence, action and *praxis*. It is *as if* divine will is transferred into humanity itself. God offers His finite creature the charisma of creation. Matter takes the flavor of whatever Martin Heidegger and Arendt call *worldliness*. Transcendence is turned into immanence. Eventually, God forgives Prometheus for his original sin and accepts him back to the land of creation and a sort of a gay materiality, to paraphrase Nietzsche.

Bielik-Robson's basic objective is to introduce us, via Derrida and the 'Lurianic myth', to a new alternative metaphysics of finitude that gives priority to the narrative and creative powers of humanity itself. Now, world politics is transformed into a field of pure events; a dynamic reality, which runs along an onto-theological continuum that ranges between being and non-being. No doubt, this is a kind of a post-foundational thought that flirts with the *problématique* of immanent transcendence (Haynes, 2012). Thus, for Bielik-Robson, Derrida's approach offers us the possibility to invest matter with a narrative faith absolutely necessary for the building of world as a 'phenomenal reality'. Phenomenality ceases to be a by-product of the Absolute and is transformed into an onto-theological spectrum of human creation and material re-creation.

What is striking about her argument is her claim that Derrida's political theology gives Subject a divine-like strength to run world politics through imaginative narration and performativity. Although Derrida is usually perceived as a tough post-structuralist that deconstructs the Cartesian cogito, Bielik-Robson brings to light an onto-theological approach of world politics, in which the constructivist style of human affairs dominates. Prometheus is back strong and full of creative impulse. By using faith, he has now the proper intellectual skills to turn negation into affirmation. According to this *problématique*, political theology and by extension political metaphysics are not so much about a divine Absolute, but mainly about the Aristotle-inspired human ability to create and re-create the world through speech act.

In the last chapter of the first section of the book, Shannon Brincat introduces Buddhism as a *middle way* between substantialism and nominalism, trying to bring to focus alternative political theologies of world politics, beyond Western onto-theology and the dominant duopoly of religion and secularism.

For him, a proper philosophical, theoretical, theological and cultural context in order to read world politics are the conceptions of 'Emptiness' and 'Independent Co-arising' coming from the civilization of ancient India. In fact, this

approach rejects metaphysical extremism and so balances its strong trends towards either nihilism or divine absolutism. Thus, it is no coincidence that building on the ancient Greek and so-called pre-Socratic philosophy, Brincat uses the concept of cosmology instead of onto-theology and the like.

Actually, via Buddhism, he injects world politics with the practical wisdom of a cosmological political theology that is interested in practical questions of life as a cosmic whole. Cosmos is seen as an energetic system of phenomena ceaselessly interchanged. Therefore, essentialism and nihilism are rejected as absolutely weak onto-theological forms, while what is affirmed is the diversity, creativity and dynamicity of the cosmos itself. In the final analysis, cosmic system is something bigger and greater even than creation as such.

By overcoming the onto-theological and metaphysical obstacles of God, nihilism and nothingness, Brincat sees world politics as a cosmological field that is informed by the elements of co-origination and radical interdependency. This approach is inclusive and broadly speaking ecological. What is at stake here is not the Weberian disenchantment of the divine nor religious dogmatism. It is the existence of cosmos itself. The complexity of cosmos, according to Buddha's teachings, needs a relational approach of world politics, beyond the conventional wisdom of substantialism and nominalism or, in other terms, foundationalism and post-foundationalism. All things are co-originary with each other and this co-existence makes the world a cosmological topos.

This paradoxical emptiness of cosmos brings to the fore the principle of co-existence. Everything is possible but only within this plurivocal cosmological context. Brincat presents political theology of world politics as a relational cosmology based on Buddhism. This middle way opens up the path towards a cosmological cosmopolitanism that favors global harmony and reduces the Hobbesian 'monster' of Sovereignty. It is also interesting that in his conclusion, Brincat likens this relational cosmology with Arendt's neo-Aristotelian republicanism, where world is regarded as an 'acting in concert'; as this Buberian 'in-between', within which, every single day, humans, as Sisyphean entities, create

and re-create the world from the very beginning as strangers and newcomers (Makris, 2020).

Political theology of IR via genealogies of thought: Theoretical trajectories

The second part of the collective volume is titled *Genealogies*, in a very Foucauldian jargon, and starts with the chapter of Nicholas J. Rengger, which is devoted to Martin Wight and Eric Voegelin and how their philosophical and theoretical thought affects a political theology of world politics. Undoubtedly, IR theory and especially IPT has been constructed the last decades as theoretical genealogies of politics, or, to put it another way, as reflective historiographies on the philosophical and theological foundations of (international) politics. This is a very critical dimension of contemporary IPT that has embraced among others the cognate field of political theology (Paipais, 2021).

In his chapter, Rengger, with his eloquent prose, critically engages Voegelin's approach to the crisis of modernity. Voegelin belongs to the so-called Weimar Renaissance and as among the brightest of her children, he puts the question of order and disorder at the heart of his political philosophy. Rengger gives special emphasis on how Voegelin interrogates the balance or the space between theology and politics, or transcendence and immanence, throughout the Western civilization from St. Paul to Machiavelli and Hobbes.

State sovereignty and power, broadly conceived, founds its legitimation either on divine roots or on human radicalism. Both are governed by the elements of Gnosticism and perfectionism. Rengger claims that, according to Voegelin, the history of world politics, via the hegemony of Western culture, must be conceived as the history of this difficult and tragic oscillation between religion and politics. In that sense, political theology of world politics is nothing but the prevailing narrative of IR in Western civilization. One way or another, Christianity dominates within the intellectual ranks of this long philosophical, theological and theoretical course.

Thus, St. Paul, St. Augustine and Luther could be regarded as the founding fathers of Western political theology, so to speak.

Actually, Rengger tries to cast light on the mutual affinity between Voegelin and Wight and especially on how both see world politics and the crisis of modernity through the lens of Christianity or via the balance between religiosity and paganism. It is not accidental that Voegelin uses the term 'political religions' to account for the rise of Nazism in interwar Europe. For Rengger, Wight offers a parallel explanation that culminates in the so-called Whig tradition. Thus, for him, both Voegelin and Wight see international relations more profoundly than a superficial political realism, constructing a political theology of IR that is rooted in political ontology of Western civilization itself. International disorder is seen as a sort of *hubris* that originates either from the side of religion and Church or from the side of human activity and state power.

In the conclusion of his chapter, Rengger interrogates further this parallel approach that draws emphasis on the critical role of medieval Christianity in the construction of power politics in modernity and in turn on the era of world wars and postwar international relations. In fact, he looks for an approach beyond the so-called *sacrum imperium* of Western Christendom, to a plural world or, to put it in a nutshell, towards a balanced world politics through a global, comparative and pluralistic IPT.

Mustapha Kamal Pasha's chapter on the political theology of Sayyid Qutb, a prominent Islamist thinker, sets the question of world politics from a non-Western viewpoint. This is a very critical question to the extent that traditionally IPT revolves around so-called Continental Philosophy and Christianity. On top of that, as Pasha explicitly points out, the historical relation of non-Western cultural zones, especially Islamic Cultural Zones, with modernity represents one of the thorniest questions of world politics today. In this respect, Political Islam can be seen only as the tip of the iceberg.

It is noteworthy that Pasha summarises the entire chapter in its very last paragraph, where he illuminates the basic

problem of Qutb's political theology: is there a possibility for a pure theological state in the Islamic societies? This is the hard core of Qutb's approach, which, according to Pasha, must be regarded as a pure political theology: that is to say, God's sovereignty is embodied into the state and its earthly institutions.

However, Pasha clarifies that state remains a Western child: modernity's secular apotheosis. In other terms, how is it possible for imperfect mortals to carry out the stakes of a divine state? Nevertheless, this not only an Islamic aporia. In fact, the question of human imperfection and finitude has tortured great thinkers of Western civilization, too, such as Plato and St. Augustine for example. The latter builds two different cities, a celestial one and a terrestrial one, desperately seeking to efficiently respond to this constitutive question.

For Pasha, this question, especially within Islamic societies, raises a series of contradictions and antinomies, insofar as Qutb's political theology heralds a spiritual renewal of Islam, or, otherwise, a kind of return to the authentic trajectory of a divine community. It is worth noting that Pasha, following faithfully this train of thought, claims that Islamic fundamentalism is nothing but a sort of spiritual alienation to the extent that Islam imitates the secular practices of Western modernity.

No doubt, Pasha brings to focus a structural problem of world politics on the whole: that is, the problem of an International based on different civilizational, cultural and theological traditions. From that point of view, Islamic political theology raises the essential question of co-existence in a multi-cultural and thus multi-polar world. On the other hand, he sheds light on the relevant question of fundamentalist purism, whatever this may be, either religious or secular. Thereby, political theology of world politics discloses the inherent difficulty for a purist approach, particularly in the so-called post-secular world, where the return of religion signals at the same time the return of metaphysics, theology, ethics and transcendence as ineradicable ontological categories both of human existence

and human thought. In that respect, Pasha's chapter helps us to reflect further on the inter-cultural character of political theology of IR.

György Geréby's chapter draws our attention to the so-called Christian political theology in the context of Early Christianity, and how it could be read as *prolegomena* to a global nationhood: that is to say, a global Ecclesia of Christ. Despite the fact that this case, as every type of religious universalism, can raise the question of a divine imperialism, even racism, Geréby clearly tries to keep his argument close to the spiritual message of Scripture, in particular to Jesus' urge to his disciples to go to all the nations around the world preaching the word of God.

In this vein, Geréby reads Christian political theology as a narrative process that begins with the first nation, the nation of Israel, then follows the plural routes of the nations and finally completes its global route with the third nation, i.e., the Christian Church itself, which embraces all the Christian believers across the globe. Without doubt, Christian political theology concerns the International itself. From the very beginning, Jesus and then St. Paul, through his theology of *corpus Christi*, created the necessary spiritual and narrative preconditions for building a global nationhood: the nation of Christian Church as the metonymy of Jesus' body.

Christian universality is fascinating as every religious narrative of a universal nationhood. For the Western civilization and especially for the Western hegemony, Christianity and in particular the Christian Church symbolize the quintessence of Western social and political ontology. It is quite impossible to think of the Western material and intellectual domination upon the earth without taking seriously into account the defining role of Christian Church. For centuries, Western Christendom, and this is exactly the way Wight and the English School of IR see European power politics until the first half of the twentieth century, represented the absolute synecdoche of the International *per se*.

Geréby depicts a true story which at the end of the day brings to the fore the imaginary institution of a global

religious nation: the utopia of a global Christendom. Christian universalism and by extension the ecumenical spirit of Christian Church compose a critical part of world politics for millennia. Nonetheless, as every religious utopia, the Christian utopia carries the potential of radical fundamentalism, which is by definition the hard evidence of an inner contradiction: that between particularism and universalism.

This is the red line of every religion, the Rubicon of every religious utopia that when crossed, religious community is turned into a purgatory of human souls. This is absolutely true, always of course in a tragic manner, for the religions that advance the sublime principles of love, solidarity and forgiveness, like the Christian Church does, since the days of Early Christianity.

Ilias Papagiannopoulos, in his chapter, offers an excellent example of the sort of political metaphysics that could be defined as a political theology of the threshold. Actually, he constructs a narrative genealogy of origin, continuity and discontinuity, of unity and identity, of inside and outside, in which the question of ontology is perceived, in the final analysis, through the intellectual lens of a messianic anamnesis of the lost historical past.

In the epicenter of his analysis, Papagiannopoulos puts, as a case study, the ontological and cultural continuity of Modern Greece, as the 19th century Austrian historian Jacob Philipp Fallmerayer challenges it in his work. It is interesting that Papagiannopoulos connects the whole affair with Carl Schmitt's political theology of enmity, especially when it comes to the paradoxical phenomenon of the *katechon*: 'eschatological paralysis' creates history as a 'state of emergency', as a condition *in limbo*, where no one can confirm his originality and authenticity. We are all inherent enemies to ourselves: *stasis* is the inner meaning of the world.

Thus, Papagiannopoulos, with a very fruitful philosophical, theological and theoretical eclecticism, constructs a genealogy of the International, according to which space is an empty place, a naked threshold, where foreigners, exiles, immigrants,

etc., desperately seek a mnemonic restoration of their supposedly lost identities.

In Freudian terms, this is also a political psychoanalysis of world politics to the extent that our collective unconscious always returns to the spatial surface as a kind of uncanny: this bizarre *unheimlich*, which scares us as our repressed sameness that is stemming straight from our chaotic depth. For Papagiannopoulos, cosmos is like a threshold, a liminal condition, a weird stage, on which we perform our history, building allegedly pure events, that is to say, sovereignty, state, nationhood, etc., using as raw material empty signifiers. In that respect, a political theology of threshold is nothing but a political genealogy of our 'symbolic nakedness', this curse of linguistic arbitrariness that is hidden in our unconscious itself, to paraphrase Papagiannopoulos' concluding statement.

Political theologies of great thinkers: From Kant to Hans J. Morgenthau

The third part of the book is called *Political Theologies* and is dedicated, if I can say so, to some specific political theologies of modernity and contemporary era that are marked by the contribution of some great thinkers that have shaped the field of IPT today. Often, either key-ideas or grand theories are nothing but the intellectual products of some great philosophical, theological and theoretical figures. In the long run of the Western history of political thought, for better or for worse, the so-called *canon* consists of great intellectuals that have shaped the entire field with their contributions.

Michael Hollerich's chapter offers a reconstruction, via postwar German Catholicism and some of its leading figures, of a political theological debate on nuclear weapons and, by extension, on the intellectual and ethical tensions between conventional political theology, in the sense of Carl Schmitt, and so-called New Political Theology, supposedly starting with Erik Peterson and culminating with Johann Baptist Metz

and Jürgen Moltmann. In fact, Hollerich draws us into the very heart of political theology throughout twentieth century, especially from Weimar democracy to the Cold War.

First off, the political theology of a nuclear Apocalypse, that is to say, an anthropogenic eschatology, raises the critical question of God's inner intentions. Is it possible for us to know for sure His inner thoughts about the world? We have only the Scriptures and the writings of those who have founded the Christian Church. If Schmitt borrows the concept of the *katechon* from Apostle Paul and then he turns it into a theory for statism or even totalitarianism, this is not a problem of God Himself. Hollerich gives us the chance to reflect further on this question focusing on a second crucial question: is Christianity by definition a liberal institution or could it support an authoritarian state? This question goes beyond the problem of *just war* unveiling the problem of modernity itself: power and especially the technological and military power of the state must be restricted or is it unrestricted?

The third question that Hollerich poses is the question of Sovereign in terms of Hobbes and his follower Schmitt. Actually, who is the sovereign decision-maker? Or, in other words, who has the legitimation to make the critical decision: that is to say, the decision that could lead the whole world to an apocalyptic self-destruction via the use of nuclear weapons?

This series of questions might display the superficiality of Schmitt's political theology of *katechon*: we use state power in order to defer the advent or the dominance of the coming Antichrist. But, the question remains the same: who is the Antichrist exactly? Once again, we are entrapped in the same rhetoric of friend-enemy distinction.

At the conclusion of his chapter, Hollerich seems to cut this *sui generis* Gordian knot of the political theology of extreme state power in world politics by an appeal to New Political Theology. For Erik Peterson and his contemporary followers, there is nothing like *Christi Imperii*. Christian Church is not the continuation of Roman Empire. Moltmann, via *Theologia Crucis*, brings to light a new political theology,

where God's power is reduced for the sake of His interlocutors within the constellation of Holy Trinity.

To put it differently, it could be claimed that Christian political theology as a whole, throughout the centuries, is governed by two strong ideological tendencies. On the one hand, a hardline tendency, (let's say in contemporary terms the Schmittian one), leading to the phenomenon of authoritarian and totalitarian state. On the other hand, a soft-line tendency, (let's say the Petersonian one), leading to the phenomenon of the liberal and democratic state. Hence, Hollerich demonstrates this inherent bifurcation within Christian political theology in a very emphatic way.

Liane Hartnett's chapter focuses on the so-called political theologies of love, or peace, or pacifism as an approach to world politics. She frames her analysis within the historical, intellectual and theoretical context of three preeminent figures with a global influence: Leo Tolstoy, Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. No doubt, it could be argued that political theology of love is by definition a theology worthy of its name. Despite the fact that Hartnett stresses the compatibility of love with world politics, it is true that IR theory, especially during so-called First Great Debate, revolved around political realism, or the dominance of war in international affairs, and political idealism, that is, the projection of peace in interstate relations.

So, when Tolstoy gives his famous novel the title *War and Peace*, Hartnett has absolutely right to name him a prophet of the contemporary world. She underscores his practical pacifism that nevertheless is grounded in the spirit of love and non-violent resistance. On top of that, she underlines Tolstoy's firm Kantian mood with regard to humanity and the possibility of a perpetual peace. Finally, Hartnett highlights the fact that Tolstoy's conversion to love and/or peace is linked to his strong affinity to Christian religiosity. Playing on words, it could be claimed that Tolstoy builds a political theology of the unarmed prophet.

Hartnett builds an articulated narrative, where each figure goes inside the other. Gandhi was born in 1869 just exactly the year that Tolstoy's masterpiece *War and Peace* was

published in its entirety. Actually, she views Gandhi's political theology of love and peace as an advancement on Tolstoy's political theology of *agape*. Gandhi, having been influenced by Tolstoy's pacifism and universalism, turns political theology of peace into an activist rhapsody of non-violent resistance against colonialism and imperialism. It is no accident that both deconstruct Western hegemony via a return to a pre-modern religiosity that puts at the heart of humanity love and peace instead of war and capitalism.

Gandhi's concept of *ahimsa* is seen as the metonymy of a non-violent political activism: that is to say, a model of anti-politics so very close either to Jewish political theology of *tsimtsum* or Christian New Political Theology of *perichoresis* (Mohan and Dwivedi, 2019). By denying power, possession and sovereignty in the Western terms, Gandhi furnishes an alternative model of political life, in which abnegation and self-sacrifice dominate. At the end of this intellectual chain, full of elective affinities, Hartnett examines the case of Martin Luther King, Jr. From the outset, she argues that King, through the so-called civil rights movement in postwar America, internationalizes Gandhi's political theology of love, peace, and non-violent resistance. In a miraculous way, so to speak, King transposes political theology at the very heart of Western capitalism: America itself.

Hartnett presents King's political theology of civil rights movement as the ideal mixture of a republican-led politics, in a so-called Arendtian style, and a theology-driven religious activism that is revolved around the redemptive crux of self-giving. This inherently balanced political theology of civic friendship, she claims, can be regarded as a kind of a Christian realism *à la* Reinhold Niebuhr or, in other words, as a theologico-political pragmatism that sees politics, not necessarily as the corrupted field of evil, but as a potential space of a soteriological restoration of justice.

No doubt, as Hartnett correctly points out, King's theology of politics as a whole, whether domestic or international, is governed by the spiritual and practical principles of so-called movement of Social Gospel. For those who know the roots of American political theology (Dunn, 1984: 179), King's

political theology represents one of the most thriving intellectual trajectories of postwar American political theology, i.e., public theology, whose ideological objectives go beyond the specific civic goals of so-called Black Theology. King's political theology addresses humanity since it has by nature a sustained and constantly renewable universal, ecumenical, and international orientation. His tragic assassination raised political theology to the status of a grand theory of world politics for the future to come.

The book closes with the political theologies of Immanuel Kant and Hans J. Morgenthau. In conventional terms, it must be said that Paipais decides to frame the entire *problématique* of the political theology of world politics within the dominant theoretical debate between political idealism and political realism. But, this is only the obvious side of the things. Even though Morgenthau has been identified with the postwar American political realism, it is always important to remember that, as a German with Jewish origins, he draws his inspirations from the theoretical matrix of Weimar culture. In that sense, he is nothing but another one eminent contemporary representative of Continental Philosophy.

Thus, it is quite difficult for us to follow here the conventional dichotomy of IPT between realism and idealism to the extent that behind Morgenthau's thought looms the demonic figure of Kant: i.e., the patriarch of German Idealism. Morgenthau's political realism, as in the archetypal case of Thucydides, is actually the international theory of a restricted state power by the normative elements of ethics and law.

Seán Molloy has written a fascinating chapter on Kant's political theology of divine providence, emphasizing how the father of Enlightenment strives to create a common intellectual and reflective field for both reason and faith. In this vein, it could be said that Kant builds his philosophical cosmopolitanism on the basis of a natural theology, in which practical faith takes the place of God Himself. So, perpetual peace must be conceived as the transformation of divine providence, that is to say, God's plan for the world as a whole, into a moral law for the humanity as such.

It is worth noting that Molloy sees in Kant's political theology, throughout his *oeuvre*, the passage from a theodicy to an anthropodicy, according to which man must recognize the anthropological antinomies of his thought, upholding his civilization on the principles of ethos, morality and practical faith. Thus, for Kant, God, despite the illegitimacy of the question about His existence, is necessary in order to keep world politics under a purposeful and meaningful course. God secures us from suffering spiritual nihilism and social entropy.

Molloy attributes to Kant's political theology of cosmopolitanism an instructive character to the extent that both pure reason and practical faith compose the pillars of education in the sense of edification: God's appeal gives us the strength to reshape ourselves into moral beings. Kantian deism means that henceforth either salvation or soteriology must be considered as the deeds of humanity herself. At the end of the day, divine transcendence is turned into human immanence. Prometheus takes his fate in his own hands having turned at the same time his face towards the *beyond*. This is Kant's image for world politics as a perpetual peace: to exist, paraphrasing here Descartes, is something beyond our human potentialities. It is God's blueprint that we have to carry out using the qualities of reason and faith together.

John-Harmen Valk's chapter on Morgenthau's political theology could also be seen as a conclusion of the book. It is like Morgenthau encloses in his thought the most significant questions of the political theology of world politics as a whole. Valk centers his analysis on the basic onto-theological and ethical problem: that is to say, the critical balance between religiosity and the desire for power. In other words, he explores Morgenthau's thought by focusing on the most essential point and/or question of the so-called classical political realism: what is the relationship between morality and the *animus dominandi*?

In fact, as is the case with Albert Camus, Valk claims that Morgenthau attributes man's unrestricted craving for power to a kind of a metaphysical rebellion. Modern Prometheus cannot control the animal part of his human potentialities.

This absolutely greedy longing for power fills humanity with suffering, tragedy and guilt. World politics seems like a ceaseless collective *hubris*.

Valk asserts that Morgenthau opts for Kant's reflective trajectory of religiosity. Actually, for him, Morgenthau seeks an infinite divine light beyond human finitude oriented towards moral law. So, Morgenthau's political realism is projected through the prism of a political theology of lesser evil. Human life seems like a continuous and desperate agonism between good and evil. This is why Valk points out that Paipais, in his relative analysis on Morgenthau, talks about a moral dualism that tends to take the characteristics of an ontological dualism, drawing its inspiration from Gnosticism.

The case of Morgenthau is indicative on how political theology of world politics remains, in the final analysis, as Leo Strauss would put it, a sustained rumination on the so-called *theologico-political problem*; otherwise, a hard intellectual riddle about an innate human schizophrenia, so to speak, that tears apart the world into multiple pieces: i.e., the tragic swinging between the gradations of good (theology) and the gradations of evil (politics). It is well-known that Jean Baudrillard, who draws his inspiration from Manichaeism and Gnosticism, resolves the tricky theologico-political riddle using the pataphysical principle of reversibility (Makris, 2020a, 2021). At the end, world politics looks like a gigantic cosmic pendulum that is swinging back and forth between radical good and radical evil.

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