What the Right Gets Right: Exceeding the Good

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Abstract: The key to the appeal of right-wing populists is their insistence of excess at the expense of the good. They take up the capitalist imperative of excess and use the expert's advocacy for the good as a way of demonstrating their own commitment to excess. This is the lesson that right-wing populism has to teach the project of emancipation: Not giving up on knowledge but reimagining knowledge itself as a form of excess rather than as a social good.

Key Words: dialectic of enlightenment, right-wing populism, excess, the good society,

Dialectic of Progress

The question of how progress engenders reactionary movements has preoccupied thinkers since the middle of the twentieth century, when the most destructive reaction manifested itself. The first great attempt to make sense of what nourishes reactionary politics is Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. For Adorno and Horkheimer, progress always entails a vicious underside of violence, an underside that they see manifesting itself the manipulations perpetuated by Odysseus, the perversions celebrated by the Marquis de Sade, and the prevarications unleashed by the culture industry. The forces of enlightenment operate forcefully, imposing themselves on anything that puts up resistance. In the view of Adorno and Horkheimer, the engine of progress is its own reaction, a logic that reaches its apogee in the Nazi death camps, where we see that industrialization doesn't just produce easier living but also mass murder. Adorno and Horkheimer measure progress negatively, as the continued expansion of the forces of domination and destruction. For them, the reactionary response to progress lies inherent within it.[1]

Chantal Mouffe approaches the question from a different angle. She contends that efforts to improve society run aground when the forces of progress abandon politics. Without a sense of political antagonism, people turn away from progressive movements and embrace right-wing populism because it preserves the antagonism that makes political struggle worthwhile. Without antagonism, political struggle ceases to be a satisfying venture and loses adherents. As Mouffe puts it, "envisaging the aim of democratic politics in terms of consensus and reconciliation is not only conceptually mistaken, it is also fraught with political dangers. The aspiration to a world where the we/they discrimination would have been overcome is based on flawed premises and those who share such a vision are bound to miss the real task facing democratic politics."[2] Mouffe links the rise of right-wing populist movements to the progressive abandonment of politics, the attempt to transform political antagonism into a question of morality. The defeat of this populism requires an

insistence on what Mouffe calls agonistic political struggle. In contrast to Adorno and Horkheimer, she has a clear idea of how to respond to the threat of right-wing populism and a clear theory about what leads to its rise—the repression of political antagonism.

What both of these analyses miss, however, is the relationship between right-wing populism and the capitalist society in which this populism appears. Although Adorno and Horkheimer along with Mouffe have a Marxist bent to their thinking, they don't theorize populism as a response to the capitalist society and the demands that it makes. The right-wing populist leader is a specifically capitalist phenomenon, one that would be inconceivable in an earlier epoch. To make sense of right-wing populism, one must take the basic imperatives of capitalist society as the point of departure.

The emergence of capitalism entails a fundamental reorganization of the social order, a change in its structuring principle. Capitalism orders society around the promise of excess rather than any conception of the good, which is what previous societies privileged in a variety of ways. The good might have been survival, social cohesion, the reinforcing of a hierarchical structure, or even the maximization of pleasure. But under capitalism, the good becomes marginalized relative to excess. The production and consumption of an excess outstrips any consideration of what might be good for oneself or the society. Better to make an additional million dollars than ponder the negative effects of dumping toxic waste. Better to get the best deal on a new smart phone than worry about the plight of the workers who made it. In capitalist society, everyone aspires for too much, for a pure excess that has no regard the good of the society. Under capitalism, everyone must worship at the altar of excess.

Excess is the motor for capitalist society in a way that it isn't in previous societies. This gives capitalism its uniqueness relative to other social forms that take some idea of the good as their central principle. Capitalist society centers around the commodity form, which contains the promise of pure excess.[3] We invest ourselves in selling, distributing, and purchasing commodities because each commodity seems to provide access to this excess. Although no one actually obtains a pure excess, it nonetheless structures everyone's existence in the capitalist universe. Politics becomes the struggle to determine how we should distribute excess. One engages in political activity for the sake of the excessiveness it promises, not for any social good. This is what the right-wing populist understands in a way that other political actors don't.

The right-wing populist sees where the appeal of politics lies. This figure doesn't offer a path to a good society but promises followers a taste of the pure excess that inheres in the commodity form. Although capitalist society holds out the ideal of a pure excess, no one can attain this ideal. Every excess is tainted and evanescent. The most excessive commodity is never excessive enough to eliminate my status as a lacking being. No

matter how excessively I act, there always seems to be someone a little bit more excessive. This is why the wealthiest capitalists constantly seek to outdo each other in how much they accumulate or in how far into outer space they travel or in how large their yachts are. There is no winning at the game of pure excess, but the failures it engenders serve only to encourage people to commit themselves to it with ever more fervor. This fervor goes far beyond the wealthiest capitalists and infects everyone who partakes in capitalist society. It is what right-wing populists stake their campaigns on.

Populism tells people why they aren't enjoying the excesses that capitalist society promises them. The focus of this political movement—from Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in Turkey and Narendra Modi in India to Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil and Donald Trump in the United States—is on the barriers to excess. By proposing to eliminate these barriers, the populist leader points supporters toward a future of pure excess that awaits them, which is precisely the imaginary future that inheres within the commodity form itself, the future that the commodity never delivers. The right-wing populist leader responds to the failure of the commodity form by doubling down on excess. While this image of pure excess is a lie, the idea of structuring politics around excess is instructive.

The great lesson of right-wing populism is the same as the great lesson of capitalist society: it is excess, not the good, that drives us as subjects. The deception of capitalist society and of right-wing populism does not lie in the emphasis that each place on excessiveness but in the image of pure excess that they proffer. When we grasp the necessary impurity of our excesses, the requisite admixture of lack with every excess, we propose an alternative form of politics (and of society) that nonetheless displays fealty to the lesson that populism teaches. The effective counter to right-wing populism's pure excess is not an insistence on the good but an insistence of excess's impurity, an insistence that there is only a lacking excess. Rather than acting as a barrier to excess, it is our status as lacking beings that makes it possible for us to be excessive. Because we lack, we act excessively in response. This recognition is the key to changing our relationship to excess and thus changing our political terrain. When we come to this point, we no longer need the enemy that the right-wing populist props up to sustain the image of a pure excess that this enemy blocks. The subject of lacking excess doesn't return to the good as its ideal, but it approaches excess in a distinctly non-capitalist way. It envisions progress itself as excessive and no longer as a good. But to arrive at this position, one must fully assimilate what right-wing populism has to teach.

The Evils of Expertise

The right-wing populist has numerous targets. Foreigners, immigrants, and minorities are always among those who receive the opprobrium of the

right-wing populist leader. In a certain sense, each of these targets has a clear logic to it, even if the attacks on them are thoroughly ideological and disingenuous. These groups are different manifestations of outsiders that threaten—at least psychically—the status of those who strive to belong to the society and yet experience their belonging under siege. If the state border loses all ability to keep people out, those on the inside will lose the identity that derives from their status as citizens. While the fear is unrealistic, it identifies a logical threat. The danger that the immigrant represents is not difficult to conjure up, which is why no right-wing populist avoids it. The same is true for the foreigner insofar as a foreign invasion would also imperil the identity of citizens. But these targets do not reveal the secret of right-wing populism.

The most instructive figure on the enemies list of the right-wing populist is the expert. All right-wing populists pose experts as part of the various groups that pose an existential threat to the social order. Experts of all stripes are fodder for populist attacks—from health experts and economists to political experts and climatologists. No matter what their orientation, the right-wing populist insists that the expert is a threat. We should take stock of how this target appears, especially in contrast with the immigrant or the foreigner. Experts are already part of the social order and don't threaten to undermine it. Quite to the contrary, experts are the champions of the good. They use knowledge for the sake of helping individuals and society to progress. Ultimately, the expert wants to make society better, to create a structure in which progress has advanced to such an extent that it has eliminated unnecessary human suffering. They want what is best for their social order. And yet, the right-wing populist identifies them as a threat to this order every bit as pernicious as the immigrant.

Experts are not the targets of right-wing populism because they have what others want. They don't have an outsized share of the society's wealth, nor do they pose a threat to the society's well-being. In fact, sustaining and improving its well-being is the aim of their expertise. They want to do their part to create a better society. It is the very illogic of the populist disdain for the expert that renders this disdain instructive.

Right-wing populist leaders target experts because they are the proponents of the good, a good that in each case requires us to tame our excessiveness. Experts tell us that we must restrain a certain excessive behavior for our own good or for the good of the society. We shouldn't drink too much to avoid a heart attack. We shouldn't eat too much to avoid diabetes. We shouldn't go out at the height of a pandemic to avoid dying. Or so the experts tell us. According to the expert's advice, our individual good life depends on not drinking, eating too much, or exposing ourselves unnecessarily to a deadly virus, on restricting our excessiveness. To give in to excess is to resign oneself to an early death.

The same holds true collectively. Today, experts make clear that the climate catastrophe has become an existential threat for humanity. The

excesses of capitalist modernity have heated the planet to such a degree that it will soon become uninhabitable. Excess has disrupted weather patterns, brought unforeseen cataclysmic events, and killed off untold numbers of species. Climate experts now warn us that the failure to act immediately will exacerbate the destructiveness and bring about the irreversible downfall of humanity. Although mainstream political figures attempt to account for this threat with (inadequate) policy changes, right-wing populists disdain the warnings. Sarah Palin's cry, "Drill baby drill," represents the apogee of this position. It doubles down on the excessiveness of carbon emissions in the face of expert warnings about the imminent threat that they pose.

Taking the side of excess against the good, as the right-wing populist Palin does when she leads this chant, threatens to accelerate the warming of the planet driven by the burning of fossil fuels. But this excessive destructiveness, this doubling down on a resource that threatens humanity's survival, is not a barrier to the attractiveness of Palin's position but essential to it. Followers find satisfaction in the excesses of "Drill baby drill" because this chant challenges expert knowledge about what's good for us. As a good right-wing populist, Palin understands that she must make a challenge to the expert central to her political activity.

When right-wing populists take power, they do not do so because they are experts but because they pose a fundamental challenge to all expertise. They govern in an authoritarian manner, but not as political experts. As a result, what would be a political misstep for the professional politician—for the political expert—becomes an indication of the populist's lack of expertise and commitment to excess. The sex scandal or the impolitic remark adds to the appeal of the right-wing populists because it reveals an excessiveness untamed by expertise.[4] They rule as non-experts, which is why they often find themselves in opposition to experts in their own government, what they might derisively refer to as big government or the deep state. They aren't part of the ruling apparatus of experts.

The problem with the expert's exhortation for the good is that the good is not the organizing principle of capitalist society. Capitalist society centers around the production and consumption of excess, not around any type of good. The good exists in this society only as what one sacrifices to be excessive. We have a good today so that we have something to go beyond in the pursuit of excess. One sacrifices one's health for the sake of overeating, or one destroys the habitability of the planet to augment one's profit. Experts tell us what we should or shouldn't do so that we can find an excess by going beyond their restrictions. This is the dynamic that the right-wing populist picks up on and exacerbates.

Right-wing populists emerge in the wake of capitalism's failure to provide the excess that it promises. A pure excess looms as the ideal that everyone chases, but no one reaches this ideal. The right-wing populist

realizes that people desire an explanation for their failure, an explanation that provides a way of keeping the ideal intact despite its impossibility, an explanation that doesn't require them to give up on capitalism itself. This is where the populist introduces the expert. Experts play the heavy. Their adherence to the good in the face of a society focused on excess explains people's failure to attain this excess for themselves. Experts do their part in the universe of right-wing populism just by virtue of how good they are. The better they are, the more of a threat to excess they appear to be.

Singing on Key

Although the expert advocates restraining excessiveness for the sake of the good, the right-wing populist points out the threat that the expert poses to our ability to be excessive at all. The expert's call for a good society becomes, in the populist vision, a lethal threat to our excesses because it aims at reversing our calculus. If experts get their way, we'll privilege the good and marginalize the sources of excess, which will lead to a deleterious transformation of the social order. Following this path far enough leads to a good future utterly bereft of anything to make it enjoyable. Nowhere is the expert's attack on excess more evident than in the case of Peter Singer, the quintessential expert (and a significant philosopher). In all his many books and public pronouncements, Singer advocates the good by warning us to abandon our excessiveness. The warning about the dangers of excess is the one constant in Singer's work. It is consonant with his expertise.

As a utilitarian ethicist, Singer engages in multiple calculations about our excessiveness and ways that we should curb it. At no point in his philosophy does Singer come out on the side of excess. He is a thinker of the good. He calls for restricting our consumption of meat so that animals can have a better existence. In Singer's view, the problem with eating meat isn't just the cruelty that it inflicts on animals but its extreme wastefulness. Eating meat is intrinsically excessive, no matter how modestly one does it. This argument is as important to Singer as what he says about animal suffering, which he also views as detracting from the good. Eating animals is far too excessive and wasteful for us to justify it. As Singer points out in *Animal Liberation*, "the food wasted by animal production in the affluent nations would be sufficient, if properly distributed, to end both hunger and malnutrition throughout the world."[5] Singer never addresses the value of the enjoyment that this wasteful excess produces simply by virtue of its status as excessive. The value of excess doesn't enter into Singer's calculation, which is what tells us that he's an expert.

Singer's emphasis on the good leads him so far as to dismiss human life as an unnecessary excess when people can no longer live well. He argues for saving resources spent on the severely disabled in order to use those resources on persons capable of a good life or even on animals capable of a good life. The excess that we spend on treating those whose

situation is hopeless, Singer contends, is a wastefulness that comes at the expense of the good. We should not waste resources to keep alive a child who can't survive past infancy or those with severe mental disabilities. To do so is to act excessively, to be needlessly wasteful. In every situation, for Singer, the good should trump the wastefulness of excess. At every point where our society acts excessively, he argues for restraining this excess and bringing it under control.

In the name of the good, Singer calls on all middle and upper class people to restrict their excessive consumption so that they can give to relief organizations. By limiting their own proclivity for excessiveness, they can promote the good of others and help to create a better society. Singer gives the example of forgoing new clothes for the sake of famine relief. He writes, "When we buy new clothes not to keep ourselves warm but to look 'well-dressed' we are not providing for any important need. We would not be sacrificing anything significant if we were to continue to wear our old clothes, and give the money to famine relief."[6] As this example shows, if we restrain our excessiveness just a little bit by curbing our consumption, we can do a lot of good in the world. We give up a little bit of excess that enables us to make major advances toward the good of others. Rather than advocating ways to help people enjoy their excessiveness more heartily, Singer insists on the necessity of restricting their excessiveness in order to promote the good. In this way, he exemplifies the expertise that offers perfect fodder for the right-wing populist. If experts like Singer did not exist, right-wing populists would have to invent them.

The chief barrier to Singer's project seems to be simple human selfishness. We enjoy an excess for ourselves in lieu of sacrificing so that everyone can enjoy a good society. It appears as if our selfish devotion to hoard too much of what society produces for ourselves impairs the good of everyone. But this misses the real threat that experts such as Singer represent—and the reason why right-wing populists target them. What the expert proposes is a radical realignment of capitalist society. Expert advice, even something as simple as advice on one's diet or sleep patterns, implicitly asks us to privilege the good over excessiveness. In this sense, every piece of expert advice is a challenge to the way that capitalist society organizes itself, a challenge to the absolute prerogative that excess has under capitalism. Most of the time, capitalist society uses the expert's conception of the good as a means for conceiving excess. We know what is excessive not just because excess labor went into its production but because experts tell us that it is not good for us.

Given his commitment to the good, Singer should be a thorn in the side of capitalism, which is a system that depends on what exceeds the good. And yet, Singer's ethical pronouncements manage to fit perfectly within the structure of capitalist society. Despite his radicality concerning eating animals and condemning obscene wealth, he is not a proponent of radical politics. His advocacy for the good simply provides excessive

capitalist subjects with a site where they can be excessive. Experts give advice knowing that it cannot be followed while we remain within the capitalist universe. The right-wing populist reveals the threat that they pose to capitalist society if they were to be effective.

Singer gives away a considerable amount of his earnings to charity. He is genuinely a good person (as he himself points out).[7] But he does not restrict his own excessiveness with this giving. Rather than having a job that condemns him to at least forty hours of mindless labor per week, Singer, like all experts, has a career that he pays him to be excessive. He earns a salary for engaging in philosophical speculation and for discussing philosophy with students. These activities are not socially beneficial. Despite sacrificing a hearty amount of his income, Singer never sacrifices the excess that accompanies his position as an expert. This would require him ceasing to be an expert. When one looks at how experts actually live in contrast with the followers of the right-wing populists who critique them, it is difficult not to believe that the populists have a point. Even when experts don't live in opulence—again, Singer is clearly not a hypocrite—they enjoy the excesses of their own expertise more than the good society that they promulgate.

It is also clear that Singer enjoys the excessiveness with which he reproves society for its excesses. Like proselytizing evangelical ministers enjoying the sins that they condemn through the act of condemning them, Singer can get off on meat and cheese through his repudiation of them.[8] And as he describes the excesses of the billionaires who purchase lengthy yachts instead of helping the hungry, Singer is able to enjoy the excessiveness of the yacht much more than its unfortunate owner. Singer and his fellow experts may sacrifice their tithe to the proper charities, but they don't appear to be sacrificing all their excessiveness along with their money, which is why they make an easy target for the populist leader who rails against them.

But whether or not experts really partake in excess through their condemnations of society, they are important for the position that they occupy, not for how they experience their lives. In the act of championing the good and warning about the dangers of excessiveness, experts give us a map for how to be excessive. By telling us what not to do, they illuminate what we can do to reach excessiveness. Singer informs us that it's not good to eat animals so that the excess of doing so becomes clear. He tells us to live more humbly so that we can enjoy buying an SUV. Singer would forbid the obscene excess under his regime of the good, making him and his fellow experts the perfect target for the right-wing populist. The expert's alternative of an enjoyment-free capitalism holds an appeal only for those who can find excessiveness in their work—that is, only for the experts themselves. Unlike the people he chastises, Singer can easily give up his excess income because he lives a life replete with the expert's excessiveness that most capitalist subjects cannot access.

Through the example of Singer, one can see the clear opposition between the expert and the right-wing populist. Singer advocates the good, while Palin would have us believe that she holds the keys to excess. Singer counsels restraint, while Palin argues for throwing caution to the wind. Singer champions the attainment of the good through limiting ourselves, while Palin calls for abandoning all limits. Singer's insistence that we shouldn't eat meat for the sake of the planet's inhabitability meets Palin's injunction to drill. The path of the right-wing populist cannot be the path of emancipation, but the path of the expert is just as much a dead end, no matter how genuine and noble Singer's intentions. It leads only to political defeat and can never achieve the good society that it promises. Its image of the good is just as illusory as capitalism's image of pure excess. One must find a different path.

Sleeping with the Enemy

When Chantal Mouffe examines the lessened appeal of the emancipatory project relative to right-wing populism, she imagines a form of emancipatory politics that incorporates the populist's insistence on antagonism. To do so, she has recourse to the thought of the Nazi sympathizer Carl Schmitt, who insists that the distinction between the friend and the enemy is the sine qua non of all politics.[9] In Mouffe's translation of Schmitt's rightist definition of the political for her own purposes, the essence of politics becomes agonistic struggle. The difference between agonism and antagonism is that the former doesn't view the opponent in the struggle as an enemy to be defeated but as an adversary to be convinced. This is how Mouffe tries to integrate the appeal of right-wing populism into an emancipatory politics. A step in this direction is requisite if the project of emancipation is not just to throw its hands up in defeat.

But the project of emancipation cannot adopt the visage of right-wing populism. It cannot have an authoritarian structure or identify an enemy to create political consolidation. At the same time, this project must learn the lesson that right-wing populism teaches about what motivates subjects politically. If it is not to doom itself to perpetual marginalization and failure, emancipation must invest itself in excess every bit as much as right-wing populism does. Politics is always an excessive activity.

This cannot mean giving up on the link between emancipation and the Enlightenment. The hostility to knowledge and embrace of stupidity that characterizes the right-wing populist cannot come to characterize the project of emancipation without utterly dismantling that project. It is not coincidental that when Marx and Engels enumerate their list of the aims for emancipatory politics in *The Communist Manifesto*, they include free universal public education. Without knowledge, all emancipation is unthinkable. Those who dismiss education as oppressive either willingly or unwittingly take the side of the forces of reaction. There can thus be no

question of the project of emancipation turning its back on knowledge in the fashion of the right-wing populist.

The task for the emancipatory project is to integrate right-wing populism's insistence, its rejection of the good, without abandoning the heritage of the Enlightenment, without rejecting knowledge. This necessitates reconceiving knowledge itself. To examine how this might work, let's look at a joke that Slavoj Žižek is fond of often repeating. Time travelling communists go back to question Marx, Engels, and Lenin about their sexual preferences. They ask each of them, "Do you prefer just having a spouse or also having a mistress?" Marx, who has a pretty traditional understanding of sexual morality, opts for just a spouse. The free spirit Engels says that he wants a mistress. Lenin, known for his hardheaded discipline, surprisingly claims to want both a spouse and a lover. The astonished questioners ask, "Why?" Lenin responds, "I can tell my spouse that I'm with the lover and the lover that I'm with the spouse, while on my own I can learn, learn, learn." This joke holds the key to reconceiving emancipatory knowledge on the basis of an understanding of right-wing populism's appeal.

What stands out about Lenin in this joke is that his insistence on the importance of knowledge over sex doesn't treat knowledge in the way that the expert does. In this imaginary Lenin's conception, knowledge is not on the side of the good. He doesn't dismiss sex as politically or socially useless or champion learning for its utility. Instead, he places knowledge on the side of excess. As the joke frames it, learning is more appealing than sex with one's spouse or with one's lover. It exceeds these other activities in its enjoyability. Lenin opts for education not because it is good for him but because it satisfies in the same way that sex does but even more so, at least according to the joke. Learning isn't good for us. It can even be sexier than sex. We learn not to bring about a better world but for the libidinal thrill that it provides thanks to how it allows us to exceed ourselves. The importance of education is not its role in producing a better society but the site that it gives us to be excessive. One theorizes not for the sake of a better social arrangement but for the sake of theorizing in itself. Like every excessive activity, learning in an end in itself, not a good that contributes to a better end. It is only through this dissociation of education from the good—the alignment of education with excessiveness—that we can bring the excessive appeal of the right-wing populist into the project of emancipation.

The joke also reveals that Lenin is on the side of emancipation rather than that of the right-wing populist (in case we didn't know already). We see this not because he forgoes sex for the sake of education but because he values learning over ignorance. The project of emancipation does not have to reject right-wing populism's appeal to excess, but it must reorient where we conceive of this excess. Making clear that learning is a site for excess offers a way to adopt the formal appeal of the right-

wing populist without succumbing the populist's political deceptions. As an excess, learning is always impure because it is inextricable from the sacrifice that it requires. Insisting on learning as an impure excess rather than as a good that we should pursue is the way that emancipation can make itself attractive to those who succumb to the wiles of the right-wing populist.

1 Because he grasps the dialectical structure of progress, fellow traveler of Adorno and Horkheimer, Walter Benjamin, envisions the revolutionary act not as an act that moves history forward progressively but as one that arrests this oppressive movement. In "On the Concept of History," Benjamin claims, "What characterizes revolutionary classes at their moment of action is the awareness that they are about to make the continuum of history explode." Benjamin 2003, p. 395. Envisioning revolution as the interruption of progress is Benjamin's theoretical response to the dialectic of progress and reaction that Adorno and Horkheimer chronicle.

2 Mouffe 2005, p. 2.

3 Marx theorizes capitalism's focus on excess in terms of surplus value. According to Marx, capitalists don't exploit workers because they place their own good over that of those they employ but because they pursue the production of surplus value, which only the exploitation of workers can accomplish. It is not the capitalists' selfishness that renders capitalist society oppressive but their commitment to the excess embodied in surplus value.

4 One of the most striking aspects of the political phenomenon of Donald Trump in the United States was the consistency with which political experts proclaimed an end to his political career after a certain revelation of excess—from bragging about his own sexual violence to mishandling the Covid pandemic—only to see his popularity hold steady and even grow. The display of excess is not an argument against the right-wing populist but the basis for this figure's appeal. The more experts criticized this excess, the clearer its appeal became.

5 Singer 2009, p. 166.

6 Singer 1972, p. 235.

7 See Singer's self-assessment of his moral status relative to others at the end of his interview with *The New Yorker* in Singer, 2021.

8 This is also a self-critique. As a vegetarian, I have indulged in this form of excessiveness many times.

9 Despite his avowed reactionary politics, Schmitt provides a fecund source of inspiration for thinkers on the Left because he focuses much more on the formal features of the political situation and not the content. In addition to insisting on the distinction between the friend and enemy as the fundamental form of political struggle, he theorizes the sovereign exception as constitutive of every legal order. The content of the sovereign—what constitutes this figure—does not play any significant role in Schmitt's thought. It is for this reason that Mouffe and Giorgio Agamben can insert his thought into their philosophies without believing that they are betraying their political commitments.

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