

Article

High Heels as Hammers: Hannah Arendt's Critique of Carl Schmitt's Political Theological Analogy

Judah Isseroff 

John C. Danforth Center, Washington University in St. Louis, St. Louis, MO 63130, USA; judah@wustl.edu

Abstract: Carl Schmitt and Hannah Arendt have been read together in several studies in previous years. They make an intriguing pair because Arendt appears to share a good deal of Schmitt's diagnosis concerning the modern crisis of legitimacy, while also departing radically from his political conclusions. This article frames the Arendt–Schmitt encounter, real or imagined, in terms of the role of analogy in the discourse of political theology. Schmitt's political theology relies on what he calls a "systematic analogy". Arendt, meanwhile, levies a devastating critique of all conceptual analogies between theology and politics. The article shows that this difference between Schmitt and Arendt is undergirded by a fundamental theological dispute. Schmitt's concept of sovereignty depends on the possibility that human beings can become God. Arendt's contrasting account of freedom is structured by a fundamental *disanalogy* between humans and God. The article gestures to the idea that this dispute may be something of a basic difference between Christianity and Judaism.

Keywords: Schmitt; Arendt; political theology; Judaism; Christianity

1. Introduction

In his *Political Theology* (1922), Carl Schmitt famously argues that theological and juridical concepts are not only linked historically, but also by what he calls a "systematic analogy". In addition to the historical process of secularization, Schmitt supposes that the secularizing of theological concepts is also intrinsically rational. For Schmitt, the paradigmatic political theological analogy is that of sovereignty. Specifically, Schmitt analogizes "the exception in jurisprudence" to "the miracle in theology" (Schmitt 2005, p. 36). The sovereign's suspension of the law in a political emergency is analogized to God's suspension of nature in the performance of miracles.

In the enormous quantity of scholarship on Schmitt, there is a surprising absence of attention to the formal and historical character of his analogy. Thus, this article offers a close reading of what Schmitt has to say about his use of analogy, as well as his explicit and implicit intellectual historical influences.¹ Schmitt's analogy, I show, is based on a selective reception of the Scholastic—and specifically Thomistic—understanding of analogy. Situating Schmitt in the Scholastic context that he claims for himself allows us to see that his rendition of analogy actually demands a significant theological departure from the sources of his thought. That is, it allows us to historicize his view as a thoroughly innovative form of political theological analogy.

This article further considers Schmitt's analogy in relation to the role of *disanalogy* in Hannah Arendt's well-known critique of sovereignty. Arendt's account of the secularization of political authority both resembles and departs from Schmitt's in significant ways.² For Arendt, as for Schmitt, the most consequential effect of secularization has been to divest the political realm of a transcendent source of legitimacy. In contrast to Schmitt, however, Arendt disassembles the possibility of coordinating theological and political concepts via analogy. For Arendt, the concept of sovereignty—which for Schmitt is the central concept of political theology—evinces the failure of political theological analogy.



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Recently, some scholars have attempted to situate Arendt's critique of sovereignty in terms Jewish political theology.³ Specifically, Miguel Vatter has sought to bring out an archive of "non-Christian, alternative political theologies" (Vatter 2021a, p. 4)—what he also calls "political theology without sovereignty" (Vatter 2021a, p. 3). Arendt understandably appears as a ripe target for the constitution of this archive since she is a Jewish political thinker who wages an assault against the conceptual foundations of sovereignty.

However, in emphasizing the issue of analogy, I will show that Arendt objects wholesale to the discourse of political theology—a discourse, as Vatter helpfully defines it, that traces "the transposition of certain theological concepts and teachings into the sphere of law and politics" (Vatter 2021a, p. 5). Indeed, Arendt's critique of sovereignty emerges out of her critique of political theological analogy. For her, contra Vatter, there is no possibility of "political theology without sovereignty". Instead, as I show with reference to Arendt's attempt to reclaim a concept of freedom purged of its associations with sovereignty, Arendt replaces political theological analogy, i.e., the aforementioned "transposition", with an orienting *disanalogy* between the theological and the political.⁴

At the same time, Arendt's grounding *disanalogy* indicates, contrary to what some have argued (Moyn 2008; Gordon 2007), that she is *not* unwaveringly committed to the cause of political secularism.⁵ To be sure, because of Arendt's longstanding reception in relation to secularist and anti-metaphysical political thought, and the accompanying neglect of her Jewish thought, it is easy to mischaracterize her opposition to the discourse of political theology. However, Arendt's critique on the basis of *disanalogy* draws directly and explicitly on her understanding of, and Jewishly tinged commitment to, the givenness of plurality and freedom.

Arendt frames the discourse of political theology as reliant on a rejection of the world, and the other human beings in it, as created and conditioning givens of human life. In particular, Arendt's account of sovereignty's basic error is that it is rooted in the idea of a human being in utter solitude. That is, according to Arendt, sovereignty only makes sense where there is only *one* person in the entire world. Such a world is not the one created for, and given to, human beings. Ultimately, Arendt views sovereignty, and political theology more broadly, as a secularized mirror of what she regards as the fundamentally worldless and anti-political attitudes of Christianity.

Susannah Young-ah Gottlieb has ornately captured the contrast: "for Arendt, the *world* is saved—not souls from the world" (Gottlieb 2003, p. 137). Thus, Arendt's "glad tidings" are defiantly un-Christian.⁶ She gives us the good news that human beings are *not* God. This cheerful affirmation, suggests Gottlieb, constitutes Arendt's "almost totally inconspicuous contribution to—in Scholem's words—'the messianic idea in Judaism'" (Gottlieb 2003, p. 137). Arendt's grounding *disanalogy* between God and human beings evokes faith in the created conditions of human life as appropriate to the most basic political concepts: freedom and action. As opposed to Schmitt's world-annihilating conception of the miraculous, Arendt's man-made miracles—evident in the merest exercise of human freedom—cohere with, and emanate out of, a Jewish affirmation of the given conditions of the created world.

2. Schmitt's Analogy

"All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts" (Schmitt 2005, p. 36).

This statement, from the third chapter of Carl Schmitt's *Political Theology*, is among the most famous in twentieth century Western thought. These words are quoted so often that it is nearly impossible to parse them apart from the history of their reception. Nevertheless, my current interest in them will remain, to the extent possible, with the text itself. What is Schmitt's basic understanding of the relationship between political concepts ("modern theory of the state") and theological ones? How exactly do they relate?

To try and answer this deceptively simple question, let us first reproduce the statement in a fuller version:

All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are *secularized* theological concepts *not only because of their historical development*—in which they were transferred from theology to the theory of the state, whereby, for example, the omnipotent God became the omnipotent lawgiver—but *also because of their systematic structure*, the recognition of which is necessary for a sociological consideration of these concepts. [emphasis added] (Schmitt 2005, p. 36)

First among the quandaries in this text is the meaning of the word “secularized”. In the first sentence, there is a total, de-temporalized equivalency between political concepts and “secularized theological concepts”. In other words, “secularized” does not at first refer to a historical process of secularization, but simply to a change in semantic context. They “are” identical.

Immediately thereafter, however, Schmitt complicates the issue. The relation between political and theological concepts is mediated in history, but then “not only” in history. Here, Schmitt makes a distinction with respect to possible causes of secularization. He is answering the question, why did politics borrow from theology, i.e., secularize theology? To this question, Schmitt poses two related answers. One answer is “historical development”. This answer appears to correspond to a view of “secularization” as a historical process. That is, theological concepts were evidently useful or amenable to political deployment later. According to this answer, one need not suppose that there is something logically necessary about secularization.

Schmitt’s second answer, however, is that the political theological relation denoted by “secularized” also obtains in a dimension besides a historical process of secularization. This is the significance of his statement that theological and political concepts share a “systematic structure”. On this point, Schmitt continues:

The exception in jurisprudence is analogous to the miracle in theology. Only by being aware of this analogy can we appreciate the manner in which the philosophical ideas of the state developed in the last centuries. (Schmitt 2005, p. 36)

Here, Schmitt marks a move from a historical relation to a systematic or analogical one. As analogy, rather than as historical process, political theology is a more hardwired feature of our reality. For Schmitt, secularization is not merely a contingent feature of modernity, but possesses a trans-historical significance.

However, this transition in focus does not exhaust the dialectic between the historical and analogical aspects of political theology. Even as he moves from a historical to a logical definition, Schmitt does not lose the thread of political theology in its historical aspect. On the contrary, he links the historical and the logical. Specifically, Schmitt advocates parsing modern political history according to the (evidently modern) idea of his political theological analogy. For Schmitt, “recognition” or “being aware” of his political theological analogy is what links the logical and historical definitions. Here, with his unique rendition of reason, history, and consciousness, Schmitt sounds considerably more like Hegel than he may have intended. Whatever his intentions, Schmitt’s argument is that underlying awareness of the analogy between political and theological concepts is the only way to properly understand what has transpired over “the last centuries”. For Schmitt, reason and history coincide in political theology. Put differently, political theology is simultaneously historical and trans-historically rational.

It is worth noting that Schmitt feels quite bound to defend his claim of fundamental analogy. Indeed, his defense of his analogy appears deeply personal. Schmitt cites a battery of his earlier works as precedent for *Political Theology’s* ambitions with respect to analogy, arguing: “I have for a long time referred to the significance of such fundamentally systematic and methodical analogies” (Schmitt 2005, p. 37). Schmitt then angrily parries the suggestion that political theology qua analogy is spurious or unserious:

What we immediately recognize in [the Catholic philosophers who have previously applied such analogies] is a conceptually clear and systematic analogy, and

not merely that kind of playing with ideas, whether mystical, natural-philosophical, or even romantic, which, as with everything else, so also with state and society, yields colorful symbols and pictures. (Schmitt 2005, p. 37) [emphasis added]

Here, Schmitt tries to defuse the accusation of his analogy's unseriousness by conceding the appeal of a "kind of playing with ideas" that he says affects all philosophical worldviews equally. Schmitt argues that his analogy is much less questionable than the "playing" that regularly infects thought. In making this point, Schmitt even invokes Leibniz as his intellectual predecessor. In this unlikely precedent, Schmitt finds a source of mathematical validation to lend to his cause. This kind of validation is crucial for Schmitt to be able to insist that his political theology is capable of a "scientific result". Most basically, it is clear that political theology rests on an adequately scientific, i.e., rational, use of analogy, which is otherwise susceptible to an unscientific "playing with ideas". Analogy is thus the linchpin of a political theological account beyond secularization—one that expresses the deep underlying coherence of theological and juridical concepts.

3. Arendt's Deflationary Account of Secularization

The legacy of Schmitt's *Political Theology* is the overdetermined interpenetration of discourses of theological and political legitimacy. For Schmitt, the proof of this analytical interpenetration is discoverable within the history of the West. For him, every era's political character manifests a secularized, even sublated expression of its metaphysical commitments. As such, Schmitt's preferred political theological analogy—that between divine kingship and human sovereign—has been practically manifest only occasionally (in the early modern era). Nevertheless, he considers it true analytically. Ultimately, Schmitt establishes a theo-political history of the (Christian) West, such that all Western history is unavoidably theo-political.

The task of going beyond political theology—a task that Arendt set for herself, even if not in those words⁷—thus requires an approach to secularization as something other than the inevitably theo-political character of modernity. In *Between Past and Future*, Arendt's proposes a definition of secularization in that vein:

If by "secularization" one means no more than the rise of the secular and the concomitant eclipse of a transcendent world, then it is undeniable that modern historical consciousness is very intimately connected with it. (Arendt 2014, p. 69)

Here, Arendt suggests a deflationary, almost naive, definition of secularization. She asserts the uncontroversial "rise of the secular and the concomitant eclipse of a transcendent world". "Modern historical consciousness" is defined by its awareness of the process of secularization. Almost no claim has been so relentlessly attacked in previous decades. However, the simplicity of Arendt's claim does not belie a triumphalism about modernity. On the contrary, as we will see, Arendt sees her definition of secularization as posing a tremendous unresolved problem for modern politics.

Before moving to Arendt's consideration of the possibility of secular politics, it is important to remain with her definition of secular concepts. Arendt's view of the simply secular character of "modern historical consciousness" is in stark contrast with Schmitt's view of secularization as political theology. For Arendt:

Secularization means first of all simply the separation of religion and politics, and this affected both sides so fundamentally that nothing is less likely to have taken place than the gradual transformation of religious categories into secular concepts. (Arendt 2014, p. 69)

Recall that Schmitt theorizes political theology, qua historical phenomenon, as an abiding link between religion and politics. Even though his account of secularization consists in the subordination of ecclesial authority to the political (as in the Hobbesian account), it does not limit the discursive power of theology. To the contrary, Schmitt's argument is that political theology as a historical process is only intelligible when viewed in terms of his rational, ahistorical analogy. For Arendt, in contrast, the historical movement of secularization

with respect to religion and politics is strictly one of “separation”. It is an interruption of the pre-modern political theology coincidence of church and state. This interruption pre-empts the possibility of conceptual continuity suggested by political theological analogy. Indeed, according to Arendt’s account of secularization, “nothing is less likely” than such an analogy.

In critiquing the view of “secular concepts” as reformulated theological ones, Arendt raises the specter of intellectual irresponsibility—mere “playing”—that Schmitt explicitly worries over in *Political Theology*. For Arendt, secularization as political theological analogy results from “a human mind. . . forever playing with its own images, unaffected by experience and with no relationship to the world” (Arendt 2014, pp. 69–70). Arendt’s characterization of the type of thinking that undergirds Schmitt’s analogy is more than a little reminiscent of his aforementioned intellectual anxieties. Where Schmitt proposes political theology as a scientific sociology of concepts, Arendt sees the radical worldlessness of the human mind isolated from experience.⁸

What seems to motivate an Arendtian reply to political theology is less a concern for “the secular” than a simple commitment to the givenness of historically conditioned experience as the ground of useful thinking. Arendt is constitutionally suspicious of master narratives. The inevitably theo-political character of modernity is one such narrative. In other words, Schmitt’s historical account of political theology is genealogical in precisely the sense that Arendt rejects in her post facto framing of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.⁹ As we will see in Arendt’s critique of sovereignty, she concedes the temptation of political theological analogies. However, she nonetheless notes that they are tempting for the same reason that they ultimately fail: such analogies are always forged in the flight from experience.

Rather than outflank Schmitt theologically, Arendt’s move beyond political theology begins with her disassembly of the credibility of the analogy that undergirds the whole discourse. For Arendt, such analogy is not theologically illicit, but a kind of intellectual malpractice. Schmitt, she might have said, does not meet the standard of “scientific” rigor that he sets for himself. On that point, Arendt decries “the almost universal functionalization of all concepts and ideas”. She continues, memorably:

It is as though I had the right to call the heel of my shoe a hammer because I, like most women, use it to drive nails into walls. (Arendt 2014, p. 102)

While the explicit target of this barb is anyone willing to call communism a “new ‘religion’”—likely Jules Monnerot in particular—we will see that Arendt’s critique of what she calls “functionalization” applies as forcefully to sovereignty, i.e., Schmitt’s political theological concept of choice.¹⁰

Arendt’s critique rests on the notion that one knows intuitively whether she is holding a hammer or a high-heeled shoe. The “functionalization” of concepts consists in relating to them exclusively in terms of their usefulness. Two ideas that “do” the same thing are thereby considered identical. Arendt’s critique here is reminiscent of her Heidegger-inspired arguments against *homo faber*’s utilitarianism in *The Human Condition*. There, Arendt worries about *homo faber*’s basic elevation of means over ends (Arendt 1998, p. 153f). In the context of secularization, however, the temptation of functionalist thinking is even more dangerous. Whereas *homo faber*’s relentless instrumentalism is at least world-building—producing lasting objects such as tables, chairs, and computers—the functionalization of concepts is world-denying in its isolation of thought from basic experience. Indeed, such functionalization exacerbates an already latent problem. As Arendt repeatedly reminds us, all thinking runs the risk of worldlessness.¹¹ After all, no concept—whether the “right” one or the “wrong” one—can actually hammer a nail into a wall. For Arendt, a conceptual analogy drawn across divergent domains, and historical epochs, of experience can obtain only in flight from the givenness of experience.

Ultimately, the beginning of Arendt’s critique of political theology is less evidently political than we might have first supposed. Her critique begins with interrogating new

challenges for the relation of thought and experience under conditions of secularization. Schmitt's analogy of theological and juridical concepts renders both de-yoked from human experience of history and the world. It is thus a *philosophy* of history in the most pejorative sense—that is, one where the concreteness of history drops out. In the next section, I will turn to Arendt's critique of sovereignty as predicated quite directly on her critique of the worldlessness of Schmitt's rational, i.e., analogical, representation of secularization.

4. Arendt's Critique of Absolutism

Arendt's *On Revolution* is a cryptic and curious mixture of political hopefulness and despair. It is this ambivalence that Samuel Moyn captures well in his comment that Arendt treats political theology as a "temptation" that she also seeks to move beyond (Moyn 2008, p. 79). Moyn's comment in this regard draws from his important observation of the parallels between Arendt in *On Revolution* and Schmitt in *Political Theology*. These parallels are rooted in Arendt's ambivalence about modernity. Moyn notes that for Arendt, "moderns tried to break with the religion of the past, but they could not leave behind the hardship of the demands and burdens it had so long borne" (Moyn 2008, p. 76). What were these "demands and burdens"? They were none other than those that motivated Schmitt to turn to political theology. Religion, according to Arendt no less than Schmitt, had borne the burden of legitimizing the state and its laws.

Arendt characterizes the unresolved quandary of the legitimacy of modern politics in the following way:

[A] new authority had to be devised in such a way that it would fit and step into the shoes of the old absolute that derived from a God-given authority, thus superseding an earthly order whose ultimate sanction had been the commands of an omnipotent God. (Arendt 2006, p. 29)¹²

In contrast to Schmitt, Arendt emphasizes divine commands rather than miracles. Nevertheless, her invocation of "the old absolute" sounds profoundly Schmittian. In *On Revolution*, Arendt concedes the primacy of the theological in the construction of the political.¹³ Under conditions of secularization, Arendt identifies a God-sized hole in political authority. Whatever "new authority" is "devised" must fit the form of the old theological kind of authorization. Arendt is here already foreshadowing a new application of her critique on the basis of "functionalization". The formulation, "fit and step into the shoes of the old absolute", appears intentionally evocative of this critique.¹⁴

For Arendt, as for Schmitt, sovereignty is the *sine qua non* of political theological concepts because it epitomizes the attempt to confer true, i.e., absolute, legitimacy on a *secular* political realm. Similar to Schmitt, Arendt regards secularization as posing an enormous *political* problem.¹⁵ In response, sovereignty—more precisely, absolute sovereignty—emerges in order to "fit and step into the shoes of the old absolute", necessary for the legitimacy of the political realm. Arendt writes, "the existence of an absolute sovereign. . . had been the first and most conspicuous consequence of what we call secularization". According to Arendt, sovereignty fills the void of political legitimacy left by secularization, i.e., the historical retreat of the religious absolute. In her historical accounting of the political consequences of secularization, Arendt suggests, "absolutism. . . seemed to have found, within the political realm itself, a fully satisfactory substitute for the lost religious sanction of secular authority" (Arendt 2006, p. 150). Here, Arendt is referencing the period of absolute kingship in early modern Europe, which Schmitt cites time and again in *Political Theology* as a time of unobscured political theology (Schmitt 2005, p. 9f).

In this quick and dirty history of sovereignty, Arendt re-traces the contours of Schmitt's account of secularization qua "historical development". In her critique of sovereignty, Arendt also follows Schmitt methodologically in transitioning from a historical standpoint to a philosophical one. For Schmitt, the validity of political theology analogy—expressed in the concept of sovereignty—is rooted in something beyond history: sovereignty's participation in a systematic analogy with divine miracle. Likewise, for Arendt, the basis of

the failure of the concept of sovereignty is not simply history, but the pure impossibility of analogizing the transcendent and the mundane:¹⁶

The specific sanction which religion and religious authority had bestowed upon the secular realm could not simply be replaced by an absolute sovereignty, which, lacking a transcendent and transmundane source, could only degenerate into tyranny and despotism. (Arendt 2006, p. 151)

There is a world of difference, Arendt supposes, between divine omnipotence, on the one hand, and the seeming omnipotence of the guy with the gun on the other. The latter is always only playing God, just as a high-heeled shoe is only ever playing at being a hammer. Any conflation on the basis of the fact that both God and guns can kill is nothing other than the “playing with ideas” that Schmitt claims to denounce.

The coincidence of Arendt’s critique of sovereignty as the embodiment of the failure of political theological analogy seems more than merely coincidental. It is likely, though not definitive, that *On Revolution* is written as an explicit counter to Schmitt.¹⁷ Whatever the case with respect to Arendt’s reception of Schmitt, it is certainly true that Arendt’s critique of sovereignty is predicated on her profound criticism of something that approximates Schmitt’s position. That is, she criticizes those who participate in the wayward drift from viewing political theology as a dynamic historical phenomenon to seeing it as anchored by a trans-historical rational analogy. Arendt disclaims this idea from the outset of *On Revolution*:

[T]o find a new absolute to replace the absolute of divine power is insoluble because power under conditions of human plurality can never amount to omnipotence. (Arendt 2006, p. 29)

In other words, for Arendt, the whole substitutionary temptation of political theology depends on a false premise. The premise requires a conflation of transcendence and immanence, of the plurality of human beings and the singularity of God.

At a general level, Arendt’s critique of the substitution of absolute sovereignty for divine dominion refuses political theology’s solution to the problem of modern political legitimacy. This much has been evident to previous attempts to read Schmitt and Arendt together. However, Arendt’s critique of sovereignty does not only operate at this level of generality. It also picks up the thread of her ongoing and often neglected reflections on the character of the God–human relationship. For Arendt, there is no possibility of an analogy between these two terms. Suggesting otherwise, I will show in the next several sections, is rooted in a profoundly mistaken view of the givenness of freedom. Before proceeding to that deeper level of Arendt’s critique, I will first examine the intellectual historical background to Schmitt’s discussion of analogy. This examination will further texture Arendt’s relation to an overwhelming Christian discourse of political theology.

5. Schmitt’s Recovery of Scholasticism

What exactly is Schmitt’s science of political theological analogy? What is its scientific method? On this question, Schmitt refers to a “sociology of concepts,” which he distinguishes from a “socio-psychological ‘portrait[s]’”, “best assigned to belles-lettres”. The former, according to Schmitt, “transcends juridical conceptualization oriented to immediate practical interest”. In other words, it does not tarry with essentially psychological questions of personal motivation or occupational conditioning. Rather, Schmitt frames his “sociology of concepts [as] concerned with establishing proof of two spiritual but at the same time substantial identities” (Schmitt 2005, p. 45).

At this point, it is useful to briefly digress and discuss what Schmitt means by his reference to “two spiritual but at the same time substantial identities”. A few pages earlier in *Political Theology*, Schmitt criticizes his arch-nemesis Hans Kelsen for, among other things, his failure to attend to “the concept of *substance* in Scholastic thought”. Schmitt insists that this particular failure is crucial for understanding Kelsen’s neglect of the “distinction between the substance and practice of law, which is of fundamental significance in the

history of the concept of sovereignty" (Schmitt 2005, p. 42). In this criticism of Kelsen, Schmitt anticipates his invocation of "substantial identities" when he defines his sociology of concepts. However, why is Schmitt making such a fuss about a substance? What, most basically, does he mean by substance?

In alluding to "Scholastic thought", Schmitt is almost certainly referring to the thought of Thomas Aquinas—the most important Scholastic interpreter of Aristotle's account of substance. Reductively, a substance—for Aristotle and Aquinas—is something that *is*. A substance possesses its own being. A substance can thus undergo a change and remain itself. A tree, for instance, loses its leaves in the winter and remains a tree. An accident, in contrast, is not a substance. An accident has no being of its own but relies on its relation to a substance to have reality. For instance, *yellowness* is an accidental predicate of a leaf, just as *leafy* depends on a tree for giving reality to its being.

With this simple account of substance and accident, we can see why Schmitt considers the Scholastic concept of substance to be so important for understanding sovereignty. For Schmitt, sovereignty must be treated as a substance in its own right. As a substance, sovereignty is ultimately independent of the accidents that are predicated of it. If sovereignty is "substantial", then any-old positive law is never more than a mere accidental predicate of sovereignty. Thus, the substance of sovereign power is no more exhausted in the totality of all positive laws than it is in any particular law. For Schmitt, a definition of sovereignty that collapses the distinction between substance and accident would not properly be called a concept of sovereignty.

Schmitt thus insists on a "distinction between the *substance* and the practice of law", wherein "practice" refers to the appearance of concretized, i.e., accidental, laws. The "substance" of law is the underlying legal power, which exceeds any concrete expression. Thus, in *Die Diktatur* (published a year before *Political Theology*), Schmitt traces the emergence of the "distinction between the *substance* of legal omnipotence and its exercise" (Schmitt 1921, p. 45).¹⁸ In that same text, Schmitt cites the "in principle unlimited *substance* of the omnipotence of the state" (Schmitt 1921, p. 193).¹⁹ In this last quotation, it seems that Schmitt's recovery of the meaning of substance in the Scholastic tradition is important not only to the "history of the concept of sovereignty", but also to a definition of God as an unlimited substance, i.e., the one substance, unlike all others, that subsists without any limitation.

Returning to *Political Theology*, we can now begin to see how Schmitt's understanding of "substantial identities" influences his understanding of analogy. Schmitt is arguing that his analogy obtains strictly between substantial identities and that this is evidence of the "scientific" character of his enterprise. Recall that Schmitt's paradigmatic analogy concerning sovereignty obtains between the "exception in jurisprudence" and the "miracle in theology". On this basis, Schmitt proposes an analogy between divine kingship and the human sovereign. Moreover, according to his recovery of Scholasticism, God and the human sovereign are both "substantial identities".

Here, Schmitt appears to blend two related but ultimately distinct aspects of Aquinas's thought: substance and analogy. As noted, Schmitt explicitly invokes the former in his criticism of Kelsen. However, Schmitt never says outright that his use of analogy stems in part from Aquinas's famous understanding of analogia. Nevertheless, there is reason to think that Aquinas influenced Schmitt in this regard as well. Schmitt was raised as a Catholic (though, admittedly, much of his education took place in more Protestant climes).²⁰ It is unlikely that he would have avoided contact with Aquinas's works on law, logic, and theology throughout his schooling. Moreover, several of Schmitt's identified predecessors, specifically with respect to his use of analogy, were counterrevolutionary Catholics explicitly influenced by Aquinas (Schmitt 2005, p. 37). All this considered, a return to Aquinas on analogia seems warranted for a better grasp on the theological implications of Schmitt's own analogy.

6. Schmitt's Convoluted Relation to Aquinas on Analogy

Thus, why does Schmitt omit mention of Aquinas on analogy? Would that not bolster his claims of scientific rigor? Or, we might ask: why does Schmitt choose to emphasize Aquinas on substance rather than on analogy?

Without going into too much detail about Aquinas on analogy, the answer is possibly that Schmitt knowingly distorts Aquinas's account of analogy. For Aquinas, an analogy is the middle term between "equivocity" and "univocity". Essentially, an analogy obtains where two terms are neither identical nor entirely distinct. Equivocal terms, meanwhile, cannot be related analogously because they are excessively different, and univocal terms cannot be related analogously because they are identical. Analogous terms, for Aquinas, are "distinct, but related in meaning" (Harris 2017, p. 34).

In suggesting an analogy between divine and human sovereignties as substantial identities, Schmitt is likely riffing on the most important and controversial analogy in Aquinas. Aquinas queries whether, and in what way, human beings can speak about God. What are we saying when we attribute terms to God—such as "wise" or "good"—that we otherwise attribute to human beings? Are we saying something absolutely true—that God and men are good in the exact same way (univocity)? Are we talking about two entirely different definitions of wise and good (equivocity)? Since "we can name God only from creatures"—that is, because the language in which we predicate things of God derives from the language used for living beings—Aquinas concludes that we would be speaking analogously. Wisdom or goodness is intrinsically true of God, where it is only extrinsically true of human beings. Both God and human beings have a relation to these attributes. However, because humans are derivative of God, this relation is of a different kind for each.²¹

In significant contrast, Schmitt's peculiar recovery of substance paves the way for an analogy with respect to sovereignty that makes no distinction between God and humans as kinds of substantial identities. For Schmitt, each is unlimited [*unbegrenzten*]. In terms of Aquinas's analogy, Schmitt proposes a univocity of being between God and humans. In somewhat different terms, William McCormick suggests that Schmitt, contra Aquinas, makes a "direct analogy between divine and human rule" [emphasis added] (McCormick 2022, p. 93). For McCormick, the excessive directness of Schmitt's analogy obscures what he calls "the political ambivalence of Christianity" (McCormick 2022, p. 100). McCormick thus critiques Schmitt by suggesting a corrective to the erroneous metaphysics of his analogy. This mode of Schmitt-critique is probably most associated with Schmitt's erstwhile friend, Erik Peterson.²² For Peterson, any attempt at political theological analogy—even Aquinas's—transgresses true trinitarianism.

What Thomistic and Petersonian corrections to Schmitt both neglect, however, is that Schmitt effectively swaps out Aquinas's analogy in being (*analogia entis*) for analogy as the fulcrum of political theology. Reductively, Christian, i.e., theologically focused, criticisms of Schmitt are most often peddling a form of re-dedication to the "true" Christian path. Whether these paths are the Thomistic moderation of Christian Aristotelianism or Peterson's radical trinitarianism, they do not include grappling with "a concept of secularization"—without which, Schmitt argues, "we cannot understand our history of the last centuries" (Schmitt 2005, p. 2).²³ To directly engage with Schmitt, one must reckon with Schmitt's harnessing of a particular metaphysical heritage for the purpose of explaining the "significant concepts" of a distinctly "modern theory of state". In other words, one must reckon with Schmitt's brand of modern historical consciousness.

In *Political Theology*, Schmitt's recuperation of a concept of sovereignty on the basis of Thomistic substance is nested within this historicism.²⁴ As noted in the first section, the peculiarity of Schmitt's political theological analogy is its intermixing of reason and history. Despite its Scholastic heritage, Schmitt avers that the terms of his analogy remain confined to an investigation of the "metaphysical image that a definite epoch forges of the world" (Schmitt 2005, p. 46). In other words, Schmitt presents himself as most interested in historical periodization. Portraying himself as metaphysically agnostic, Schmitt argues for a philosophy of history premised on the idea that "metaphysics is the most intensive and

the clearest expression of an epoch" (Schmitt 2005, p. 46). The Thomistic and Petersonian challenges to Schmitt respond to his theological deviance. However, this deviance is not the true source of Schmitt's innovativeness.

Political Theology has doggedly shadowed modern politics because it is a book about the meaning of modernity. For Schmitt, secularization consists in a kind of metaphysical amnesia, or Weberian disenchantment. Although, Schmitt is perhaps unique in his opportunistic approach to this metaphysical aporia. Under the guise of a recovery of the true concept of sovereignty, Schmitt innovates radically. He winds up "recovering" what he has himself invented through a repurposing of Aquinas's analogy. Schmitt "recovers" man's divinity.²⁵ He endows human sovereignty as an "in principle unlimited substance" by positioning it, in an analogy of substantial identities, as coeval with God. Such a definition of sovereignty is markedly different than Aquinas's monarchism within the bounds of natural law, or even Bodin and Hobbes's indivisible sovereign.

Nevertheless, or possibly for the very reason of its innovativeness,²⁶ Schmitt's political theology has led to an ongoing bout of anxiety of influence for modern, would-be secular politics and political thinkers. Schmitt makes political theory into the brawniest imaginable kind of theodicy: there is no evil when we realize that God is *here on earth*, incarnated as the political sovereign. As shown above, attempts to reconfigure Schmitt's analogy by narrowly appealing to better theology can only go so far because they do not fundamentally grapple with secularization as a historical phenomenon. However, secularist political thought has not fared well either in its response to Schmitt because it repeatedly draws the accusation that it is simply concealing its dealings in political theology.²⁷ That is, secularization can be convincingly framed as a development *internal* to a particular religious tradition.

A cloud of doubt lingers over the question of the legitimacy of modern Western politics. The overwhelming and often arbitrary power of the contemporary state, its powers to surveil and to kill, re-inscribes the intuitive appeal of Schmitt's analogy. In late modernity, it would seem that only a menacing and murderous God is on the level with sovereign power. Amidst this chaos, several political and legal theorists have turned to Arendt for an alternative account of the "extraordinary politics of secular foundations".²⁸ In this juxtaposition with Schmitt, Moyn has kindled the hope that Arendt can serve as a resource for the "overcoming of political theology". According to Moyn, "Arendt aims to identify an alternative to political theology and a model of human coexistence genuinely independent of religious premises" (Moyn 2008, p. 91).

The next section, premised on Arendt's skepticism of the historical emergence of absolute sovereignty, turns to her critique of the identification of freedom and sovereignty. This critique runs throughout her account of political founding in *On Revolution*.²⁹ For my purposes, Arendt's account of freedom is less important for what it tells us about "instituting deeds and founding practices" than for what it reveals about the seemingly theological significance of non-sovereignty in Arendt's thinking. This significance, I will show, is Arendt's unique contribution—ambiguous in its relation to political theology—to the question of an analogy between God and human beings.

7. Man-Made Miracles

In his reading of *On Revolution*, Samuel Moyn puzzles over a question seemingly left out of Arendt's account of secularization:

[Arendt] does not really consider in the book—or anywhere else, to my knowledge—what sparked secularization (and thus revolution). (Moyn 2008, p. 94)

While apparently simple, Moyn's question is quite complicated. In the history of secularization, how does Arendt suppose we arrived at a place—what she terms revolution—that is no longer forced to compensate, however woefully, for "the [modern] loss of authority"? How does Arendt think about escaping the anxious substitutionary cycle of political theology? At what point does the modern crisis of political legitimacy simply end to allow, finally, for something to replace it? Moyn's question is marked by the success of Schmitt's

political theology. In a sense, Moyn is asking about how Arendt is even capable of a vision of Western history as something other than theo-political.

As a self-consciously inadequate answer to his own question, Moyn suggests that secularization may have been “simply entailed by the failure of stopgap absolutism all by itself”. That is, the substitutionary basis of modern political legitimacy was too frail to endure for very long. However, this suggestion, Moyn quickly course-corrects, “only begs the question”. At the risk of begging the question, I think Moyn’s tentatively offered answer is the right one.

In his reading of Arendt, Moyn hopes to demarcate the crucial line between substitutionary political theology, on the one hand, and the fully secular on the other. He explores the fault line between early modern absolutism and the outbreak of democratic revolution. However, in the wake of my earlier unpacking of Arendt’s critique of early modern absolutism, I believe that the real line of demarcation in Arendt’s account of secularization is much earlier—between pre-modern theological authority³⁰ and the (failed) substitutions of early modern absolutism. For Arendt, the end of the pre-modern overlap of the cities of God and man is the beginning of the re-emergence of a dignified secular realm. This development may have been covered over by early modernity’s flimsy substitutions for divine authority, but absolute sovereignty evidently could not endure forever.

However, Moyn is still right that the crumbling of “stopgap absolutism” is no answer in and of itself. On Arendt’s account of politics and political revolution, there is no genuine revolution that is simply an entailment of some irresistible philosophy of history. To the contrary, contingency, that is, freedom, is the spark of revolution. Arendt writes on the very first page of *On Revolution*:

[N]o cause [of revolution] is left but the most ancient one of all, the one, in fact, that from the beginning of our history has determined the very existence of politics, *the cause of freedom versus tyranny*. (Arendt 2006, p. 1)

Revolution, for Arendt, is born of freedom. Its “aim. . . was, and always has been, freedom” (Arendt 2006, p. 1). In Arendt’s sense of politics, then, revolution is a consummately political act. It expresses freedom of action as an end in itself, purified of all instrumentalism. It is the vigorously and undeniably *political* character of revolutions that, for Arendt, make them products of “secularization itself, and not. . . Christian teachings” (Arendt 2006, p. 16). In other words, they are predicated on the idea that the “secular realm [has] a dignity of its own” where human freedom and action matter in and of themselves (Arendt 2006, p. 16).

Arendt’s enchantment with the purely and genuinely political is often the ground of a related claim: that she is a “secular” thinker. Moyn’s reading of Arendt is characteristic of this point of view.³¹ For him, Arendt’s critique of political theology ideally culminates in a political discourse finally purged of the temptation to draw on the theological language for legitimacy—such that the dignity of the secular is unquestioned.

Moyn’s hoped-for cordon off of theology goes further than the anxious question of modern political legitimacy; rather, it extends to any and all invocations of theological language. Moyn thus takes Arendt—or the best part of Arendt—to wholly undercut the political significance of theology-talk. However, as the remainder of this section will argue, the meaning of secular, for Arendt, does not mean politics purged of all theology talk, but a politics purged of any version of what she takes to be Christianity’s specious analogy between humans and God.

The theological underpinnings of Arendt’s political thought require that we return to freedom. For Arendt, freedom is at once secular and yet still hospitable to being thought of theologically. In fact, in Arendt’s conception of freedom, the political and theological coincide totally. This is not a claim for political theological analogy, nor is it an identity of politics and theology (which Schmitt would call analogy). In all cases, the site of freedom remains the human being. There is no transposition from divine to human. Nevertheless, as the singular site of freedom, the human being is nonetheless host to something at once human and divine. How is this possible? And why is this not another species of political theology?

The answers to these heady questions come out in Arendt's basic contrast of freedom and sovereignty.³² As already noted, Arendt condemns absolutism for positing the impossible possibility of human omnipotence. For Arendt, this possibility rejects the meaning of human power as obtaining only in plurality. Ultimately, Arendt attacks the whole concept of sovereignty, not only for distorting, i.e., de-pluralizing, the meaning of power, but as destructive of human freedom. For Arendt, sovereignty is the outcome of a distortion of "freedom as it is given in human experience". This distortion involves "transposing [freedom] from. . .the realm of politics. . .to an inward domain, the will" (Arendt 2014, p. 144). This transposition, much like Schmitt's analogy between God and man, escapes from the realm of experience and action, and tumbles ever more into the realm of thought.

For Arendt, sovereignty's flight into abstraction amounts to no simple theoretical error. To the contrary, sovereignty's particular brand of philosophical politics winds up negating the given factuality of freedom:

Politically, this identification of freedom with sovereignty is perhaps the most pernicious and dangerous consequence of the philosophical equation of freedom and free will. For it leads either to the denial of freedom. . .or to the insight that the freedom of one man, or a group, or a body politic can be purchased only at the price of freedom, i.e., the sovereignty, of all others. (Arendt 2014, pp. 162–63)

Sovereignty, according to Arendt, pioneers the idea of freedom as zero-sum in a new and uniquely disastrous way. If freedom is the same as free will, then my freedom consists in my ability to effectuate something. Freedom is free when it can effectively cause something to happen. Such a definition of freedom is epitomized by Schmitt's sovereign decisionism: "Sovereign is he who *decides* on the exception" (Schmitt 2005, p. 6). This decision resides in the will of the sovereign, and what it effectuates is the suspension of all positive law. The sovereign will is maximally efficacious. At the point of deciding on the exception, there are, practically speaking, no other wills for the sovereign to contend with. No one else is meaningfully free.

For Arendt, the concrete result of the philosophical mistake of equating freedom and the will is an account of political sovereignty that takes itself to be always already dealing with free *and unfree* human beings.³³ Politics is thus transformed from something whose "raison d'être. . .is freedom" into a dubious metaphysical enterprise that, as its essential task, upholds the freedom of some over and against the freedom of others (Arendt 2014, p. 145). This sort of politics is properly called political theology, in that it involves relations among human beings where some, the free, are effectively gods in comparison to mere humans—the unfree. Phrased differently, the political theology of sovereignty consists in the humanization qua divinization of the free, at the expense of the humanization qua barbarization of the unfree. Under the equation of freedom and sovereignty, Schmitt's "analogy"—where a man must be a god to be a man—makes a lot of sense. Albeit it is a satanic kind of sense, wherein mere mortals must find refuge from the modern sons of God, i.e., the sovereign few.³⁴

Arendt attempts to reclaim freedom from its identification with sovereignty by recovering freedom as something "*given* to men" (Arendt 2014, p. 163). Freedom, for Arendt, is not zero-sum, but is given to *all* human beings. For Arendt, our experience of freedom's fragility is simple proof of its limitless abundance. "[N]owhere", she writes in *The Human Condition*, "does man appear to be less free than in those capacities whose very essence is freedom" (Arendt 1998, p. 234). This may not seem like the picture of super-abundance from the first. Arendt's picture of free human action is not exactly majestic. Indeed, it is the precise opposite of the cataclysmic potency of Schmitt's sovereign decision. Where Schmitt's free sovereign can unilaterally suspend all law, Arendt's free human being approximates a toddler trying to walk. The steps themselves are what matter—the destination is of no concern whatsoever. It is precisely because the freedom to begin is not the freedom to secure a particular end that freedom itself is a limitless resource. All human beings, as human beings, can continuously initiate processes whose outcomes are chaotic, uncertain, and ultimately unrelated to the givenness of their freedom to act.

In her critique of sovereignty, Arendt consistently authorizes her claims through an appeal to human experience.³⁵ This appeal is evidently non-metaphysical. Arendt's mode of writing is, almost without exception, descriptive. Nevertheless, Arendt also invokes theological language when summing up her picture of the fragility of human freedom. "Every act", she writes, "is a miracle" (Arendt 2014, p. 167). She continues:

It is men who perform [miracles]—men who because they have received the twofold gift of freedom and action can establish a reality of their own. (Arendt 2014, p. 169)

Arendt's invocation of miracle insists on a comparison with Schmitt's invocation of the same. For Schmitt, miracle is the divine antecedent in the analogy to sovereign exception.³⁶ Recall that, for Arendt, the substitutionary quandary posed by secularization is that of command rather than miracle. For Arendt, commands must preserve their transmundane point of origination in order to remain effectively coercive.³⁷ Miracles, however, require no such external point of departure to remain relevant to secular politics.

Arendtian miracles are human-made. Moreover, contra Schmitt, *all* human beings are created free. Thus, *all* human beings are liable to "perform [miracles]". In their terrestrial provenance and universal accessibility, such miracles have no theological precedent. However, for Arendt, the effective interruption of the relentless chain of natural causation insists on some theological description. The givenness of freedom is, properly speaking, of superhuman origin: a "received. . . gift". Thus, the terrestrial provenance of the miraculous *is* linked to something external. The capacity for free human action comes from the beyond, even as the actualization of the *initio* derives from human beings alone. The fact of freedom, for Arendt, is created—"given and not made".³⁸

Arendt's penchant for nonchalantly turning to theological language has been a source of both curiosity³⁹ and dismay.⁴⁰ In the case of her disaggregation of freedom and sovereignty, this turn makes for a suggestive contrast with the theological discourse underlying the concept of sovereignty that she is critiquing. Arendt's concept of miracle is predicated on an idea of "freedom. . . given to men under the condition of non-sovereignty" (Arendt 2014, p. 163). As an expression of the frailty of human freedom, miracles do not accomplish all that much. In perfect contrasts to the sovereign decision, their inefficacy is the point.

Human miracles are appropriately feeble. Recall Arendt's comment, "nowhere does man appear to be less free than in those capacities whose very essence is freedom". How much more so is this true with respect to any supposed resemblance between human and divine miracles? Whatever resemblance there is—contained in the miracle's definitional capacity to interrupt the otherwise normal functioning of things—is refracted through Arendt's sense of a fundamental difference between God and human beings. Arendt's human miracles, usefully contrasted with Schmitt's, draw from her understanding of a *disanalogy* between human beings and God. The givenness of plurality and freedom, on Arendt's account, contrasts crucially with the singularity and power of the divine. In reflecting on Arendt's commitments in *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Susan Neiman makes exactly this point:

The features that Arendt holds to be the most definitive of the human, natality and plurality, are just those that distinguish us from the God of Abraham. (Neiman 2001, p. 70)

Arendt's political thought gives us an account of the human and the political apparently structured by an account of God of which we are only given an occasional glimpse.

That is, Arendt's politics are rooted in an account of the God–human relationship, wherein human beings "receive" the means of transcending the determinism of nature and fate that otherwise inform the human situation.⁴¹ However, even as this relates the theological and the political, Arendt's antecedent theology does not make for a conventional political theology. Politics, for Arendt, remains the realm of freedom; thus, it is free from being positively structured by an antecedent and transposed theology. Instead, Arendt's inchoate theology informs her understanding of political subjectivity, but *not* the

substance of political legitimacy. It is in this crucial sense that Arendt departs wholesale from the discourse of *analogia entis*. Where Aquinas avers that “we can name God only from creatures”, Arendt names creatures from the unnamable (unnamed) infinitude and plenitude of the divine. In other words, it is Arendt’s negative theology that structures the basic limits of her account of politics.⁴²

8. Conclusions

Carl Schmitt’s impact on twentieth century Jewish political and philosophical theology has been increasingly well established (Ben-Ami 2022). Recently, the attempt has been made to look to Arendt—among others—as part of a discourse of *Jewish* political theology, beyond, or in response to, the shadow of Schmitt.⁴³ This tradition of political theology, it has been argued, goes beyond sovereignty by transposing theological concepts into political warrants for democracy. I have argued here that Arendt’s critique of the political theological analogy underlying Schmitt’s conception of sovereignty is not its own kind of political theology. One way to express the reason for this is that Arendt’s critique of political theology supposes, both historically and conceptually, that political theology is intelligible only as a Christian phenomenon. Moyn quotes her from the essay “Religion and Politics”: “secularism did not simply sever politics from religion in general but very specifically from the Christian creed” (Moyn 2008, p. 93). In other words, Arendt specifies that it is aspirationally post-Christian politics that has uniquely suffered the crisis of authority. Moreover, it has been a post-Christian conception of sovereignty that has born the burden of political theological analogy in order to fabricate a source of legitimacy for a politics set adrift by secularization.

In sovereignty, however, Arendt argues post-Christian secularism has not found a political concept able to overcome Christianity’s fundamentally anti-political orientation. Rather, sovereignty repackages Christian anti-politics in a form even more overtly hostile to plurality and freedom. Arendt writes in *The Human Condition*, “[t]his unitedness of many into one”, which characterizes sovereignty’s purported indivisibility, “is basically antipolitical” (Arendt 1998, p. 214). Contra Christianity and pseudo-Christian sovereignty, Arendt prefers the given plurality of creation to its overcoming through a unitary body, substance, or savior.

For Arendt, every new child “born unto us” is “human” in such a way that she is not “the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live” (Arendt 1998, p. 8). As suggested by Neiman and Young-ah Gottlieb, this affirmation of plurality is putatively—and Jewishly—theological. Indeed, Arendt’s basic definition of plurality could be read as a paraphrase of the Mishnah in Sanhedrin:

The Holy One, Blessed be He, stamped all people with the seal of Adam the first man, and not one of them is similar to another.⁴⁴

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Notes

- ¹ This article will read Schmitt’s presentation of political theological analogy in *Political Theology* without consulting later developments in his political thought. The formulation in that text still determines the dominant paradigm of how Schmitt is broadly understood. Moreover, that formulation appears to depend on Schmitt’s understanding of a scholastic view of substance, which helps clarify a more general encounter—transcending Schmitt and Arendt—between Christian and Jewish theology.
- ² Though there is little direct engagement to go on, there is a growing literature on Arendt and Schmitt, cf. (Jay 1977; Kalyvas 2008; Arato and Cohen 2009; Keedus 2011). Cf. (Ackerman 2013), 240 for the most unambiguous argument in favor of a real Schmitt–Arendt encounter. He argues that Arendt “pursued [Schmitt] Ahab-like for half a century”. For Schmitt reading Arendt, cf. (Graf 2022).
- ³ Cf. (Vatter 2021b), especially Chapter 6. Also cf. Ackermann, “Politics of Political Theology”. Vatter focuses on what he sees as Arendt’s reading of “Martin Buber’s politico-theological recasting of Jewish politics” (239). This view picks up from the recent work that has been carried out to recover Buber’s critique of Schmitt in his *Kingship of God*. On this, cf. (Schaefer 2017; Lesch 2019).

I do not follow this tack in large part because Arendt's critique of Schmitt's political theology of sovereignty does not relate to proper submission to the divine but to the proper creaturely meaning of freedom. Freedom, in Buber's account, is relegated to a secondary concern. It is, according to Lesch, a by-product of acknowledging our dependence on God (202). For Arendt, freedom is more ontological; it is an in-born, "given" human capacity for making miracles.

4 Some readers might insist that this disanalogy is also a form of political theology. I am open to that suggestion, though I think that Arendt's position is so diametrically contrary to Schmitt's that it is misleading to characterize her view as political theology.

5 What is the third option, it is reasonable to ask, other than political theology and secularism? Perhaps the language of political theology can be reclaimed for something such as Arendt's view, shorn of its associations with Schmitt. Cf. (Jacobson 2003) for something in this direction. "It is in the biblical sense that political theology is used here." Jacobson, 6.

6 Cf. (Arendt 1998), 247 [HC hereafter]: "It is this faith in and hope for the world that found its most glorious and most succinct expression in the few words with which the Gospels announced their "glad tidings": "A child has been born unto us". Cf. Gottlieb, *Regions* 136–137, where she helpfully informs us that this quotation is not from the Gospels but from Isaiah 9: 5. She writes, "Whatever the origin of this mistake—deliberate strategy, parapraxis, mere oversight, or a complex combination of all three—this much is clear: her argument proceeds in accordance with the worldliness of Isaiah as opposed to the otherworldly spirit of *The New Testament*".

7 Cf. HC, 5. Arendt's call to "think what we are doing" is, among other things, a rebuke of the idea that all Western history is unavoidably a history of political theology. In contrast to other thinkers in twentieth century Jewish thought, we find in Arendt very little anxiety about the legitimacy of her present philosophical vantage. That is to say, with Peter Gordon, we find Arendt ultimately unafflicted by political theology.

8 Cf. (Baehr 2010), 111f for Arendt's overlapping critique of political theology and sociology.

9 Arendt repudiates the term "origins" in favor of "the elements which crystallized". Similar to Schmitt, Arendt's bugaboo is determinism and her concern is for freedom and the future.

10 Cf. (Baehr 2010), Chapter 4, for Arendt's critique of Monnerot. Arendt particularly loathed the preponderance of social "function" talk as the guiding analytic of sociology. Recall, of course, that Schmitt himself claims to be engaged in "sociology of concepts".

11 In *The Human Condition*, she renders this in terms of Christianity's inversion of the priority given to the *vita contemplativa's* versus the *vita activa*.

12 In this article, "authority" and "legitimacy" are related but distinct ideas. Authority is a source or purveyor of political legitimacy. Legitimacy requires some antecedent source of authority. In this case of pre-modern political theology, the relationship is relatively straightforward. In the case of social contract theory, the source of authority is the consent of the contracting parties. Legitimacy is the actuality of political rule on the basis of this prior aut.

13 For Schmitt, the sovereign exception, i.e., the provisionality of all positive law, indicates the permanently subsisting source of all authority in the state. On Arendt's account of pre-modern political theology, divine authorization of earthly laws derives from God's role as issuer of commands. Earthly laws can thus be traced back to a transcendent source beyond the contingency of their formulation.

14 This is not to mention the resonance between "high heels" and "shoes". Though the primary context of this critique is various Cold War debates over Communism as a new religion, it proves just as crucial to Arendt's critique of sovereignty.

15 Arendt reiterates the problem in OR, 152: "The enormous significance for the political realm of the lost sanction of religion is commonly neglected in the discussion of modern secularization because the rise of the secular realm. . .seems so obviously to have taken place at the expense of religion".

16 Arendt's personal experience of despotic politics, as an experience of something other than God, does not require elaboration here.

17 Cf. (Moyn 2008), 72: "Despite overwhelming circumstantial evidence, there is no direct proof that Arendt herself saw *On Revolution* as a response to Schmitt's thesis about the continuation of religion in a political guise (there is direct evidence that Arendt saw it as an intervention in a twentieth century debate, largely Germanic, that Schmitt sparked)".

18 Translations are mine. The German reads: "der Unterscheidung von Substanz der rechtlichen Allgewalt und ihrer Ausübung". "Prinzipiell unbegrenzten Substanz der staatlichen Allmacht."

19 Cf. (Balakrishnan 2000), Chapter 1.

20 Thomas Aquinas, ST I, q. 13, a. 5. Also cf. ST I, q. 4, a. 3.

21 Cf. (Peterson 2011).

22 From the second preface in 1934.

23 This line of critique is, to an extent, pursued by (Blumenberg 1985), cf. (Ifergan 2010).

24 More apt perhaps: he recovers *one* man's divinity. Rather than "Christ is king" it is: "whoever is king is Christ".

25 I would suggest that Schmitt's recovery has produced a kind of intellectual vertigo in those who would overcome his influence.

26 Moyn notes the "withering contemporary skepticism about a commitment to "the secular" either as a historical category or as a political cause". (Moyn 2008), 73. Also cf. (Asad 2003).

- 28 Cf. (Kalyvas 2008), 195: “I see [Arendt] as attempting to rethink the pivotal issue of how to contain and limit the risks, arbitrariness, and excesses inherent in the extraordinary politics of secular founding”.
- 29 Moyn characterizes her rendition of American colonial history as “bear[ing] little relation to historical fact”. (Moyn 2008), 90. Also cf. Arato and Cohen, “Banishing the Sovereign?” on Arendt’s neglect of the true nature of the American presidency.
- 30 That is, the effective operation of political theology.
- 31 Cf. (Ackerman 2013).
- 32 Importantly, Moyn leaves sovereignty out of consideration in his engagement with Arendt on secularization. He writes: “Arendt’s dissatisfaction with the concept of sovereignty is well established and usefully studies in different sectors of the literature”. He continues: “it bears insisting that the concept’s religious origins, and not just its normative confusions or practical effects, are what trouble her” (Moyn 2008, p. 83). I agree with Moyn on this point, except that it is not sovereignty’s religious origins per se that trouble Arendt, but its mimicking of Christian anti-politics. As such, attention to sovereignty is necessary for properly particularizing the object of Arendt’s critique in her critique of political theology.
- 33 Cf. (Agamben 1998) for a different version of this argument.
- 34 Cf. Gen. 6: 1–7, which mentions the *b’nei elohim* prior to the flood.
- 35 Arendt is explicit that this is a joint critique: “Under human conditions, which are determined by the fact that not man but men live on the earth, freedom and sovereignty are so little identical that they cannot even exist simultaneously”. BPF, 163.
- 36 Cf. (Kalyvas 2008), 209ff; (Honig 2007), 82ff; (Ackerman 2013), 218 for a comparison of Arendt and Schmitt on the language of miracles. Honig and Ackerman both argue that Arendt’s sense of miracle is like Rosenzweig’s and thus Jewish.
- 37 Cf. (Arendt 1994), for her view that Kant’s categorical imperative “brought back the concept of obedience, through the back door as it were”.
- 38 This is Arendt’s language in her famous letter to Scholem in the midst of the controversy over *Eichmann in Jerusalem*.
- 39 Cf. (Neiman 2001).
- 40 Cf. (Moyn 2008), 96: “Arendt’s rhetoric lapses, blatantly, into the theological”. Moyn asks, “Does this last fact wreck any attempt to present Arendt as a secularist?” He answers: “[F]ar from contradicting her argument about the difficulty of overcoming political theology, Arendt *performs* it, unwittingly, no doubt. . . If the move to the secular is difficult as a matter of theory, it has to be just as difficult as matter of the practice of theory”.
- 41 Cf. (Arendt 2014), 170: “It is disaster, not salvation, which always happens automatically”.
- 42 Arendt is closer to Maimonides, who denied the possibility of a God–man analogy altogether, than to Aquinas.
- 43 The most popular Jewish text for establishing a human-centric, non-metaphysical theology is the story of the Oven of Akhnai (b. Bava Metzia 59a–b). However, Mishnah Sanhedrin provides a pithier and arguably more relevant iteration of the point in discussing the obligation to give testimony and the vetting of the witness.
- 44 M. Sanhedrin 4:5. The Mishnah continues: “Therefore, each and every person is obligated to say: The world was created for me”.

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