

Circum-Navigating The World Island, Among Enemies¹

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Abstract

Everyday our vision travels across time and space. We see images in the media about atrocities, disruptions, crises, famine, and wars. And in each case, our sense of injustice is awakened. We feel outrage and indignation based upon our ideals and value systems, which were formed through our traditions and religions. But in this age where the power of media and information is so powerful, what we see is often manufactured to appeal to our values. While these values circulate among the images we see in cyberspace, these manipulations are rooted in certain realities: geography, natural resources, and power relationships. Our values are managed to serve the control of resources and territory. They serve the deeper reality of geography and geopolitics.

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How then are these ideals and values created, manipulated, and opposed across various pivots or boundaries, between East and West, between the individual and the collective? Through English geographer Sir Halford Mackinder's concepts of "pivot" and "heartland"; German philosopher Carl Schmitt's importance of "nomos"; and French writer Victor Segalen's reflections on the loss of cultural diversity, we outline this priority of geography. By examining these writers, we can begin to ask if our ideals and values have any real moral or theological significance, or if they are merely effects of the competition between powers. Can ideals and values lead to real change and development, or are they merely leashes to guide us based on the aims of power?

Keywords: *Carl Schmitt, cultural diversity, geography, geopolitics, Halford Mackinder, natural resources, political theology, Victor Segalen*

Back in the early 1990s, when I lived in Tanzania, I accompanied a friend on an errand to the office of Habitat for Humanity, located in the Meru Hotel in Arusha. There, on that day, a world military conference was being held in the hotel. Many of the top military officers from around the world were meeting together. There they were, like an aviary of brightly colored birds, lounging around the hotel lobby dressed in their military uniforms, festooned with

various colored pompoms, braids, metals, and oddly shaped hats. The idea that military leaders could meet in a conference together was unfathomable. Those who were at war, those who would be at war, friends and enemies joking, eating, and drinking together.

We academics are in a similar situation. We meet together under one roof, while our countries engage in various kinds of warfare. We are friends; yet technically enemies. But how could we join together and transcend the political forces that keep our countries at odds? It is perhaps because we deal with ideals and values that transcend our territories, cultures, and religions.

But what if our ideals and values are also used as mechanisms that serve the flows of power outside of our intellectual gaze? We see machinations happening around us every day, the manufacture of democracy movements, the staging of color revolutions, the manipulations of nationalism, the selective labeling of human rights violations. These become merely various moves in a larger great game. What does that mean for the status of our cherished ideals of democracy, human rights, and freedom? Are we perhaps living in an age in which our cherished ideals are merely ruses and directing mechanisms in the flows of power, resources, and capital?

It is easy to get lost when we consider the manipulation of our values. But where can we begin to navigate a way around these manipulations? I imagine there are many ways of addressing these questions, but let me focus on one: the ground upon which we stand.

Mackinder (British)

The word “geo-politics” is quite interesting. It involves the paradoxical combination of something ancient and something fluid, between something concrete and something that engages in deception. This tension was realized by the great thinkers of geopolitics in the past.

The most famous was Sir Halford Mackinder, a British geographer from the early twentieth century. He recognized that history is based upon geography. In the introduction to his major work written in 1904, *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, he explains the goal of his whole project. How can we maintain justice between nations and create a democratic global order?

In our great replanning of human society, we must recognize that the skill and opportunity of the robber are prior facts to the law of robbery. In other words, we must envisage our vast problem as business men dealing with realities of growth and opportunity, and not merely as lawyers defining rights and remedies.

My endeavor, in the following pages, will be to measure the relative significance of the great features of our globe as tested by the events of history, including the history of the last four years, and then to consider how we may best adjust our ideals of freedom to these lasting realities of our earthly home. But first we must recognize certain

tendencies of human nature as exhibited in all forms of political organization.²

He questioned why the West was quite successful in controlling the world except for the region of interior Asia—the home of such nomadic groups as the Huns and the Mongols who had historically disrupted Western civilization. This area is what he called the “heartland.” His global geopolitical strategy was based on the control of the heartland. His famous formula runs as follows:

Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland;
 Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island;
 Who rules the World-Island commands the World.³



Figure 1. Mackinder's Pivot and Heartland⁴

² Sir Halfrod Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality: A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction* (Washington: National Defense University Press, 1942), 3.

³ *Ibid.*, 50.

Mackinder's ideas were expanded upon by Nicholas Spykman, who coined the term "rimland," the regions on the periphery of the World Island. The South East Asian region is considered an important part of the rimland. In geopolitical strategy, democracy was to be promoted in these areas to check the undemocratic forces inland. This became the basis of George Kennan's theory of containment.

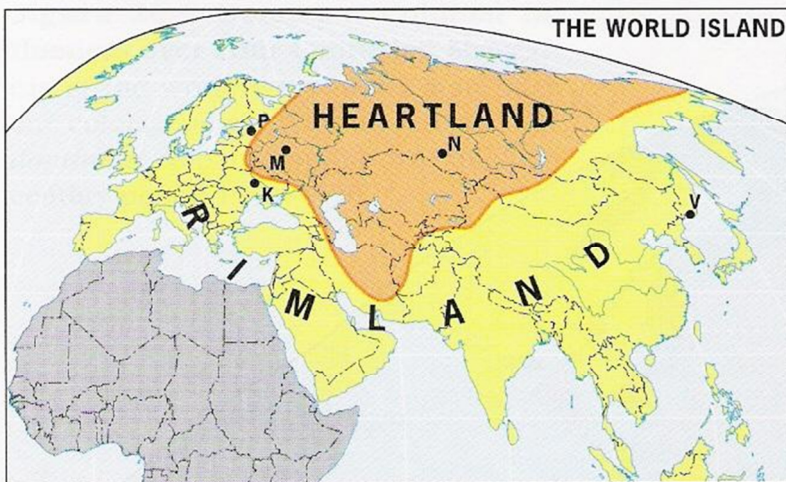


Figure 2. The World Island according to Spykman⁵

You can still see echoes of this in the history of geopolitics, from Henry Kissinger, to Zbigniew Brzezinski, to the present day. Now, it plays itself out in the competition of the

⁴ Nick Megoran and Sevara Sharapova, "Mackinder's 'Heartland': A Help or Hindrance in Understanding Central Asia's International Relations?," CA & CC Press, https://www.ca-c.org/journal/2005/journal_eng/cac-04/02.megeng.shtml, accessed March 13, 2018.

⁵ Global Policy Index, accessed March 13, 2018, <https://gpindex.org/2016/09/17/the-21st-century-strategic-pivot-the-rimland>.

superpowers: the Western “containment” of China and Russia, which of course deeply influences South East Asia.

This is an underlying reality that we face today. And this material reality continues to be relevant, especially as we face a period of climate change and fierce competition over the remaining resources of the earth. But we need to understand the deeper symbolic meaning of the earth and its elements as well. To understand it on a deeper philosophical, theological, and historical level, we can turn to the infamous German legal philosopher Carl Schmitt.

Schmitt (German)

In a way, Schmitt, who was a great critic of pluralism, should be our intellectual enemy.⁶ And yet he was committed to clarifying the problem we face: the connection of our ideals with the realities of the earth. He attempted to preserve such ideals not through conventional ethics, but through an appeal to a theology attentive to the earth and world history.

Schmitt believed that secular ideas of the political are ultimately disguised theology. The political is a kind of faith.⁷

⁶ Certainly, I have been attracted to Schmitt (like many others) even as I consider his ideas antithetical to everything I hold dear. I find him a convenient foil when I try to defend pluralism and a future of humanity, which can maintain its diversity without being threatened by war. But what is it that calls me back again and again? What I wish to do in this essay is to consider in what way Schmitt might have insight into something that resonates with my own concerns. To bring into focus something that precedes my reflections and challenges them.

⁷ In *Political Theology*, we find Carl Schmitt’s now famous declaration:

According to this political theology, the cultures and religions are always at odds with one another. Each presents a vision of a world or the vision of an order reliant on faith. But faith is nothing in and of itself. To be real, it needs to be actualized by force. This is why Schmitt believed that the distinction between friend and enemy is the very possibility of the political.⁸

Schmitt describes the history of this actualization of law in his later work entitled *The Nomos of the Earth*, written in 1950. It deals with nothing less than the entire world history of land appropriation and war in the establishment of law and order. This is done with attention to the earth itself and the mastering of land, sea, and finally space.

The point he makes is that political order cannot be fully understood without considering how that order comes to be. Law is always preceded by the violence required to create that

All significant concepts of the theory of the modern 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 omnipresent God became the omnipresent lawgiver—but also because of their systematic structure, the recognition of which is necessary for a sociological consideration of these concepts. The exception in jurisprudence is analogous to the miracle in theology. (2005, 36)

⁸ Heinrich Meier in his book *The Lesson of Carl Schmitt* observes:

According to Schmitt's teaching, faith is always opposed to faith, metaphysics to metaphysics, religion to religion, even if the opponent poses as unfaith, antimetaphysics or irreligion. "Metaphysics is something unavoidable." But unlike the follower of the "agonal principle" who believes he has reached the final reality in the sheer irrationality of the battle of faith and who regards the clash of attitudes of faith, which can no longer be accounted for, as part of the great play of the world, the political theologian insists that the battle between true and heretical metaphysics be fought out. (1998, 43)

law. This is why he speaks of *nomos*, the Greek word for law. Summarizing, Schmitt writes:

First *nomos* means *Nahme* [appropriation]; second, it also means division and distribution of what is taken; and third, utilization, management, and usage of what has been obtained as a result of the division, i.e., production and consumption. Appropriation, distribution, and production are the primal processes of human history, three acts of the primal drama.⁹

Following this interpretation, the power to take things, the power to name things, and the use of violence precedes the order which allows such concepts as justice and morality to come into being. The appropriation of land, sea, and space comes prior to the law. Those who morally condemn the violence of appropriation and conquest have forgotten how central appropriation is to the establishment of order.

So when we meet together in conferences, we can do so peacefully. And we promote ideals concerning peace only because we have forgotten the violence of appropriation that makes our gathering possible in the first place. This is an idea first expressed by the German philosopher Walter Benjamin, by whom Schmitt was influenced.¹⁰

⁹ Carl Schmitt, *Nomos of the Earth: In the International Law of the Jus Publicum Europaeum*, trans. G. L. Ulmen (New York: Telos Press Publishing, 2006), 351.

¹⁰ Benjamin asks in his essay “Critique of Violence”:

A society that forgets this initial reality of appropriation becomes merely commercial. Schmitt laments, “like bees, mankind finally found its formula in the beehive.”¹¹ Likewise, the establishment of a world-order that outlaws war creates a dangerous monopoly of power, where those in power claim to govern for the sake of “humanity.” Those who resist become an enemy of humanity, and are considered as

Is any nonviolent resolution of conflict possible? Without doubt. The relationships among private persons are full of examples of this. Nonviolent agreement is possible wherever a civilized outlook allows the use of unalloyed means of agreement . . . Courtesy, sympathy, peaceableness, trust, and whatever else might here be mentioned are their subjective preconditions. Their objective manifestation, however, is determined by the law that says unalloyed means are never those of direct solutions but always those of indirect solutions. They therefore never apply directly to the resolution of conflict between man and man, but apply only to matters concerning objects. The sphere of nonviolent means opens up in the realm of human conflicts relating to goods. For this reason, technique in the broadest sense of the word is their most particular area. Its profoundest example is perhaps the conference, considered as a technique of civil agreement. For in it not only is nonviolent agreement possible, but also the exclusion of violence in principle is quite explicitly demonstrable by one significant factor: there is no sanction for lying. Probably no legislation on earth originally stipulated such a sanction. This makes clear that there is a sphere of human agreement that is nonviolent to the extent that it is wholly inaccessible to violence: the proper sphere of “understanding,” language. (2004, 244–245)

¹¹ Schmitt writes:

As a consequence, appropriation becomes outmoded, even criminal, and division is no longer a problem, given the abundance. There is only production, only the problem-less fortune of pure consumption. No longer are there wars and crises, because unchained production no longer is partial and unilateral, but has become total and global. In other words, like the bees, mankind finally has found its formula in the beehive. Things govern themselves; man confronts himself; wandering in the wilderness of alienation has ended. In a world created by man for himself—a world of men for men (and unfortunately sometimes against men) —man can *give* without *taking*. (2006, 347)

“inhuman.” Such a global world order has the potential for an even greater form of savagery.¹²

Land, Sea, and Air

But what is the significance of the earth in this reading? In Schmitt’s late work entitled “Dialogue on New Space,” written in 1954, a historian named Altman debates with a scientist named Neumeyer over the significance of the ancient elements of earth, water, and air for contemporary global politics. Within this dialogue, Altman, who represents Schmitt’s views, argues that the opposition of Sea and Land is important for the understanding of human history and the stakes involved.

When a world-historical opposition approaches its climax, then on both sides all material forces, all forces of soul, and all intellectual forces are brought to bear in the conflict to the greatest

¹² Speaking of the process of humanitarian intervention in global crisis, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri write in their work *Empire*:

As Carl Schmitt has taught us, however, crisis on the terrain of the application of law should focus our attention on the “exception” operative in the moment of its production. Domestic and supranational law are both defined by their exceptionality. The function of exception here is very important. In order to take control of and dominate such a completely fluid situation, it is necessary to grant the intervening authority (1) the capacity to define, every time in an exceptional way, the demands of intervention; and (2) the capacity to set in motion the forces and instruments that in various ways can be applied to the diversity and the plurality of the arrangements in crisis. Here, therefore, is born, in the name of the exceptionality of the intervention, a form of right that is really a *right of the police*. (2000, 17)

extreme. Then the battle extends across the whole environment of the participating powers. At this point, the elementary opposition between land and sea is itself brought into the confrontation. The war then appears as the war of the land against the sea and the war of the sea against the land, in other words: as a war of the elements against one another. You need only open your eyes and look at our own contemporary world situation. We live today under the pressure of a global tension, of an opposition of East and West. Manifestly, this contemporary opposition between East and West is simultaneously an opposition between land and sea.¹³

Here, Altman refers to Mackinder:

For Mackinder, the monstrous landmass of Asia is a giant island and the heartland of the earth. Human civilization develops on the coast of the sea. According to Mackinder, the great masses of population from the barbarian heartland constantly press upon the coasts and seek to overrun civilization. According to this English geographer, the opposition between land and sea in its innermost core is an opposition between

¹³ Carl Schmitt, "Dialogue on New Space," in *Dialogues on Power and Space*, trans. Samuel Garrett Zeitlin (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), 60.

civilization and barbarism, between unfreedom and freedom, with civilization and freedom standing on the side of the sea and the coasts.¹⁴

The sea represents fluidity, a movement beyond terrestrial boundaries and cultures. Sea warfare is different than land warfare. It involves blockades and economic warfare, which target entire populations. It also represents the political movement toward liberalism. According to Schmitt, it is England, the island and the sea power, where the industrial revolution and the political development of liberalism took place. This gives birth to international law.¹⁵

Later in the dialogue, Altman and Neumeyer meet a third person by the name of MacFuture, who represents the North American. He is asked his opinion of the opposition of East and West, and he replies:

The contemporary global opposition between East and West is concerned with nothing other than different levels and degrees of technical industrialization. The West, with its maritime peoples, has a certain advantage technologically

¹⁴ Schmitt, "Dialogue on New Space," 62.

¹⁵ Schmitt also resists the legal philosophy of Hans Kelson which he submits to the same interpretation. This is in a large degree the product of his anti-Semitism which he expresses in such works as *Judaism in Jurisprudence*, but it is also related to the rejection of international liberalism which he believes does not recognize the dignity and productivity of individual cultures. The liberal law of the new world order is related to the complete triumph of sea over land and an undermining of cultural determination, identity, and ethics.

and industrially. This is related to the industrial revolution and the progress of technology. In the maritime West, the industrial revolution has progressed further than in the terrestrial East. That is all. This East must allow itself to be developed by us.¹⁶

Altman agrees. But then, MacFuture introduces the element of space to the dialogue. He sees the conquest of space as being the future of humanity. But Altman, the historian, argues that MacFuture is only applying the discovery of the New World to the idea of space. He asserts:

An historical truth is only true *once*. But also the historical call, the challenge that introduces a new epoch is only true *once*. It follows, too that the historical answer that is given to a unique call is only true once and only right *once*.¹⁷

That is, the idea of conquering the frontier (and dominating the earth in a single order) was only true once. While MacFuture, the American, believes in space (and today we can add cyberspace) as a new frontier based on its own geographical history, Altmann, the old historian and the cipher for Schmitt, wishes to keep to the opposition of land and sea to stay rooted in the earth.

¹⁶ Schmitt, "Dialogue on New Space," 67.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 79.

The new spaces, out of which the new call comes, must therefore be found upon our earth and not outside in the cosmos. The one who manages to restrain the unencumbered technology, to bind it and to lead it into a concrete order has given more of an answer to the contemporary call than the one who, by means of modern technology seeds to land on the moon or on Mars. The binding of the unencumbered technology—that, for example, would be the labor of a new Hercules. It is from this direction that I hear the new call, the challenge of the present.¹⁸

We can interpret this to mean that the more traditional communitarian cultures of Asia conflict with the more liberal culture of the West. The tension between the two is, in the deepest sense, a tension between the elements of the earth.

For Schmitt, some identification with the land and territory remains significant. But such an identification is something that French philosopher Jacques Derrida calls into question. Responding to Schmitt's book *The Theory of the Partisan*, Derrida writes:

. . . this speed of motorization, and hence that of tele-technical automation, produces a break with autochthony . . . this means that this territorial drive

¹⁸ Schmitt, "Dialogue on New Space," 80.

has itself always been contradicted, tormented, displaced and delocalized. *And that this is the very experience of place.* That is what Schmitt does not acknowledge explicitly. In any case, he draws not visible and conceptually rigorous consequence from it. He shows no interest in the fact that telluric autochthony is *already a reactive response to a delocalization and to a form of tele-technology*, whatever its degree of elaboration, its power, or its speed.¹⁹

Telluric autochthony would be the identification of a race or religion with place. Derrida recognizes that this is complicated by tele-technology, which in a sense uproots our sense of belonging to a place. The insistence on the identification of a people with a geographical land is a “*reactive response to a delocalization and to a form of tele-technology.*”²⁰ Certainly, this plays a great role in the problems within the Southeast Asian countries today.

But Schmitt’s insistence on a close cultural connection with the Earth corresponds with his political theology. In his final published work, *Political Theology II*, he writes:

The main structural problem with Gnostic dualism, that is, with the problem of the God of creation and the God of salvation, dominates not

¹⁹ Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (London: Verso, 1997), 142.

²⁰ Ibid.

only every religion of salvation and redemption. It exists inescapably in every world in need of change and renewal, and it is both immanent and ineradicable. One cannot get rid of the enmity between human beings by prohibiting wars between states in the traditional sense, by advocating a world revolution and by transforming world politics into world policing. Revolution in contrast to reformation, reform, revision and evolution, is a hostile struggle. Friendship is almost impossible between the lord of a world in need of change, that is, a misconceived world—a lord who is guilty of this need for change because he does not support but rather opposes it—and the liberator, the creator of a transformed new world. They are, so to speak, *by definition* enemies.²¹

Humans are the bridge between the God of creation and of redemption. It is the duty of human beings to carry out the realization of God's will on earth.²²

Schmitt attempts to defend the possibility of political theology against Protestant theologians like Erik Peterson, who deny the possibility of a Christian political theology, and

²¹ Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology II: The Myth of the Closure of Any Political Theology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), 125.

²² This passage is a meditation on the so-called “extraordinary saying” which introduces Goethe’s *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, “Nemo contra deum nisi deus ipse” (None stand against God except a God).

defend the separation of the secular and the religious. He also defends himself from writers like Hans Blumenberg, who follow a polytheistic or pluralistic balance of powers. Moreover, he criticizes Karl Löwith, who contends that secularism is the historical outcome of Hebrew and Christian beliefs. These are various responses to the gnostic problem of the connection of our ideals with reality.²³

Schmitt insists on the need for a Christian direction to history. This is understood in three ways. The first is a kind of “great parallel,” which would be the relationship of the present with a finite historical event of the life of Christ. The second is the idea of a “Christian Epimetheus.” This is a

²³ Notice that Pope Benedict was involved in a similar project when he emphasizes the Trinitarian interpretation of God. It provides a kind of relatedness which places history in motion as a kind of striving or growing toward something.

This has the important consequence that the model of unity to which creatures should strive is not an ‘inflexible monotony’ but the unity created by love, the ‘multi-unity which grows in love.’ Secondly, Trinitarian faith confirms the insight that in confessing the Absolute as personal, we are necessarily saying that It is not an ‘absolute singular.’ The prepositional features of the Greek *prosōpon* and the Latin *persona: pros*, ‘towards’; and *per*, ‘through’ already indicate relatedness, communicability, fruitfulness. ‘The unrelated, unrelatable, absolute one could not be a person.’ Thirdly the Trinitarian dogma makes it clear that *relation*, which for Aristotle had been simply among the ‘accidents’ or contingent circumstances of being, by contrast with ‘substance’, the sole sustaining form of the real, in fact stands beside substance as an ‘equally primordial form of being’. With this discovery, it became possible for man to surmount ‘objectifying thought’: a new plane of being came into view. Aidan Nichols, *The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2005), 119.

Other mechanisms to achieve this are the emphasis on St. Paul and the idea of “universalism” developed initially by scholars like Jacob Taubes and taken up by many others. This seems to be a response to Schmitt as well.

reference to Epimetheus in Greek mythology, who was a brother to Prometheus.²⁴ It suggests a material reality prior to human activity. The last way is the idea of the “Kat-echon.” This idea has its roots in the writings of St. Paul. The role of the scholar becomes what is known as the *katechon*, or the one who restrains or delays the apocalypse.²⁵ And so the emphasis on land is also an emphasis on a connection of earthly history with redemption.²⁶ The problem is similar in a way to the river poetry of Friedrich Hölderlin. Humanity, with the course of history, loses its direction and destiny.

Ideals uprooted from their theological basis and purpose become destructive. Schmitt is not an immoralist, but is pursuing an implicit morality where our ideals and values and the way they play out in history are harnessed to a kind of faith, which connects human history with some divine purpose or direction. Heinrich Meier writes:

When he denounces the “illusion and deception”
of a supposed substitution of politics with
morality, with one that serves only the veiling and

²⁴ It is sometimes difficult to understand the precise meaning or interpretation for these sometimes mystical references. But consider that the titan Epimetheus was the one responsible for handing out to the animals their respective abilities. When it came time to give humans a special ability, due to his lack of foresight, he had run out. This is why his brother Prometheus stole fire for man from the Gods. Epimetheus means a thinking back rather than a thinking forward. So when Schmitt calls himself a “Christian Epimetheus,” he seems to be suggesting his recognition that the earth precedes morality and provides a terrain upon which the historical drama of eschatology can unfold.

²⁵ 2 Thessalonians, 2: 6–7

²⁶ See Mehring, *Carl Schmitt: A Biography*, 441–444.

even more effective achievement of political or economic interests, his moral indignation virtually leaps to the eye. Generally speaking, the unmasking gesture with which Schmitt opposes the deceitfulness of conducting politics under moral pretexts, in the guise of the unpolitical, and with underhanded methods, is so pronounced, and moral judgements and viewpoint, the high regard for honesty and visibility, the condemnation of cunning and disguise, permeate his political attitudes and preferences to such an extent . . .²⁷

A morality that is one merely of deception and manipulation for the sake of geopolitics would be the apocalyptic condition Schmitt is trying to delay. And yet, this is the direction we are pushed toward by our technologies and economic systems. At the end of *Nomos of the Earth*, he writes concerning globalization:

A widespread, purely technical manner of current thinking knows no other possibility, because, for it, the world has become so small that it can be overseen and managed easily. Given the effectiveness of modern technology, the complete unity of the world appears to be a foregone conclusion. But no matter how effective modern

²⁷ Meier, *The Lesson of Carl Schmitt*, 21–22.

technical means may be, they can destroy completely neither the nature of man nor the power of land and sea without simultaneously destroying themselves.²⁸

That is, the development of history and humanity continues only where the struggle between liberalism, on one hand, and the traditional connection with the earth, on the other, continues to be played out. Once everything disappears into a single order, the human disappears, and history ends. The apocalypse is here understood as a final revelation, so the complete encoding of the human is the end of the human.

But do we need to consider this from a merely Christian political theological perspective? We should remember that Schmitt was also in dialogue with the work of Jewish philosophers such as Jacob Taubes, Franz Rosenzweig, and Walter Benjamin, whose essay “Critique of Violence” influenced Schmitt. Benjamin wondered about the possibility of a “divine violence” that would usher in a final or true law beyond the ones artificially imposed by the cycles of power in history.²⁹ We can also read it in the Islamic philosophy of al

²⁸ Schmitt, *Nomos of the Earth*, 354–355.

²⁹ Of course, political theology takes a different shape in these writers. In Taubes, it is in the form of a negative theology, where the worldly and the spiritual are kept separate. In Rosenzweig, in contrast to Schmitt’s late writings, it seems to be the unification of the globe. In Benjamin it appears even more abstract, an idea, which leads to Schmitt’s early work. Benjamin writes at the end of his essay “Critique of Violence”:

But all mythic lawmaking violence, which we may call “executive,” is pernicious. Pernicious too is the law-preserving, “administrative” violence that

Farabi and his musings on the possibility of the “virtuous city.” We can see it in various forms in Buddhist eschatology, Javanese thought, and Indian thought.

We see a secularized version of this in Derrida as well when he speaks of the “messianic without messianism” in his work *Spectres of Marx*:

. . . what remains irreducible to any deconstruction, what remains as undeconstructable as the possibility itself of deconstruction is, perhaps, a certain experience of the emancipatory promise; it is perhaps even the formality of a structural messianism, a messianism without religion, even a messianic without messianism, an idea of justice—which we distinguish from law or right and even from human rights—and an idea of democracy—which we distinguish from its current concept and from its determined predicates today.³⁰

So we can perhaps suggest that Schmitt’s ideas are relevant beyond the boundaries of Christian eschatology. In a way, they point to a faith or theology peculiar to the scholar.

serves it. Divine violence, which is the sign and seal but never the means of sacred dispatch, may be called “sovereign” violence (2004, 252).

³⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994), 59.

Segalen (French)



Figure 3. The journeys of Segalen through China³¹

But how is such a thing possible? How can there be a trans-religious political theology of the scholar? When scholars meet together when they write, they address themselves to one another across boundaries. They address themselves to the future. Perhaps this is not a secular eschatology (as hinted at by Derrida), but one refracted through many cultural and religious prisms.

Perhaps we can clarify this further if we consider that our belief systems are partly based upon our character as Nietzsche recognized. Here today, why do we study philosophy, religion, or the humanities? What kind of person

³¹ Philippe Saget, “File:Segalen-Expeditions-Chine.jpg,” November 4, 2014, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Segalen_-_Expeditions-Chine.jpg.

enters the international world of academia, meeting together in classes and conferences, overcoming their status as enemies?

Victor Segalen, the French novelist, also lived in the early twentieth century and travelled extensively in China. He wrote some beautiful books about Chinese steles and paintings. But his most interesting book to come out of his experiences in China is called *The Essay on Exoticism: An Aesthetics of Diversity*. Exoticism here is not used as a negative term. Instead, it represents our attitude toward cultural diversity, which Segalen believed to be under threat.

Victor Segalen reflects on his own character and contrasts it with the typical idea of the “wise man.” Segalen writes:

“The wise man . . . recognizes that he almost took a particular liking for something as a principle of certainty, and that in the space of an instant he has conceived his desire as the center of the universe; he is all too aware of the passionate origin of the theory which has overwhelmed him. This is how he recognizes its relativity . . . he knows the precise place where this theory has broken the chain of causality to attain his support by leaning on his will . . .”

(But as for me, my particular aptitude is the ability to sense diversity, which I strive to erect as an aesthetic principle deriving from my knowledge of the world. I know where it comes from—from

within myself. I know that it is no more valid than any other principle, but also that it is no less valid. I believe only that I am that individual whose duty it is to bring it to light, and that in doing so I will have fulfilled my mission. “See the world, then put forth one’s vision of the world,” I have seen the world in its diversity. In turn, I wished to make others experience its flavor.)³²

Notice that in the first instance, one is certain of one’s position through understanding other positions. One realizes that one’s faith is supported by their will. This would be closer to the character of someone like Schmitt who would reject an aesthetics of diversity. But in the second case, one recognizes within oneself a character that feels comfortable with differences between cultures. The friend-enemy distinction does not emerge.³³

³² Victor Segalen, *Essay on Exoticism: An Aesthetic of Diversity*, trans. Yael Rachel Schlick (London: Duke University Press, 2002), 26.

³³ This connects to the debate between Schmitt and Hans Blumenberg. In such works as the *Legitimacy of the Modern Age* and the *Work on Myth*, Blumenberg develops an alternative political theology to support a kind of polytheism. This is presented as an alternative to the monotheistic political theology of Schmitt. The Modern Age becomes a kind of new polytheism in reaction to the age of Christian sovereigns. In such a polytheist political theology, we acknowledge the reality of the Other’s gods. We can complicate this with a third alternative, that of Walter Benjamin in his work “Critique of Violence” who creates a monotheistic political theology based upon a promise of divine law, and not an earthly decision as one finds in Schmitt. Cf. Richard Farber “The Rejection of Political Theology: A Critique of Hans Blumenberg,” *Telos* 72 (Summer 1987).

The Intellectual (Global)

So where does this leave us, we enemies who meet together?³⁴

In a sense, we are caught in the middle. We are, in some ways, both pluralists and traditionalists. On one hand, we appreciate the weight and guidance of traditions, mythologies, and religious rituals. Outside the West, we are often committed believers in our religious traditions. On the other hand, we can stand in some way outside of this and embrace progressive causes and reforms. It is the tension between these two tendencies that puts us in a unique position.

On one hand, we are attracted to democratic and individualist values that transcend boundaries and circumnavigate the globe. On the other, we can appreciate the more organic conception of a culture as being cultivated within a specific place. The struggle taking place today is more than a competition between superpowers over resources. It is also a struggle between the fluidity of liberalism, the flows of information and global capitalism, on the one hand, and national identities and traditional cultures, on the other.

Power uses ideals associated with telluric autochthony, such as cultural and religious identity, to mobilize proxy armies. But it also uses the more liberal flows of ideals of

³⁴ Derrida (1997) questioned how Schmitt can define the political negatively. For Schmitt it is the enemy who makes the friend possible, but who is the enemy? And who is the friend? That is why he begins his book with a quote from Aristotle which emerges through Montaigne: "O my friends, there is no friend."

freedom, democracy, and identity politics to mobilize intellectuals and the media in order to justify hostilities. Our philosophical ideals have been militarized across the spectrum of political belief.

But this manipulation by political propaganda is also necessarily imperfect and allows itself to be exposed by those who know philosophy, history, and geography. This is what the philosopher Paul Virilio called “stereo-reality.”

As with *stereoscopy* and *stereophony*, which distinguish left from right, bass from treble, to make it easier to perceive audiovisual relief, it is essential today to effect a split in primary reality by developing a *stereo-reality*, made up on the one hand of *the actual reality* of immediate appearances and, on the other, of the virtual reality of media trans-appearances. Not until this new ‘reality effect’ becomes generally accepted as commonplace will it be possible really to speak of globalization.³⁵

This would be visible to those (like us?) who can follow an aesthetics of diversity. If we are to be faithful to what we believe as scholars, we need to be the ones who insist on the integrity of our ideals and values, to protect them from abuse, and to tolerate the necessity of the age-old conflicts between tradition and progressivism.

³⁵ Paul Virilio, *The Information Bomb* (London: Verso, 2000), 15.

Even as they are manipulated by underlying currents of the earth and geo-politics, our ideals still have a certain power. It is this possibility that allows us to define our humanity, to maintain our humanity, and to struggle to refine our humanity. Otherwise, our humanity merely disappears within our power manipulations and our technologies. The remembering of the earth, the awareness of the earth, and the understanding of how our ideals are manipulated based on earthly considerations is increasingly important.

Mackinder at the end of his book *Democratic Ideals and Reality* wrote:

Do you realize that we have now made the circuit of the world, and that every system is now a closed system, and that you can now alter nothing without altering the balance of everything, and that there are no more desert shores on which the jetsam of incomplete thought can rest undisturbed? Let us attempt logical, symmetrical thought, but practical, cautious action, because we have to do with a mighty Going Concern. If you stop it, or even slow down its running, it will punish you relentlessly. If you let it run without guidance, it will take you over the cataract again. You cannot guide it by setting up mere fences and by mending those fences if it breaks them down, because this Going Concern consists of hundreds of millions of human beings who are “pursuing” happiness, and they will swarm over all your

fences like an army of ants. You can only guide humanity by the attraction of ideals. That is why Christianity wins on, after nineteen centuries, through all the impediments set up by criticism of its creeds and its miracles.³⁶

Our future battles will take place in this space between the attraction of ideals and the realities of the Earth.

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³⁶ Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality*, 141.

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