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## **Carnal Enlightenment: The Myth of Enlightened Reason and Two Carnal Conceptions of the State\***

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HRVOJE CVIJANOVIĆ\*\*

### *Summary*

The state in the modern sense ought to appear as the instrument of Reason able to control the passions. This is the modern myth of the state which has been fortified through the age of Enlightenment. However, the concept of 'enlightened reason' that lies behind the idea of the state is just a myth and thus is false. Rather, the modern state becomes the highest embodiment of 'carnal reason'. As such, carnal reason manifests itself through the idea of self-preservation or life-preserving in general which feeds on human desire for domination over nature and over human beings themselves. Thus, the modern state provides the framework for the carnal discharge of sadistic passions in the name of the myth of 'enlightened reason'. The argument is that the Enlightenment deceptively presented its goals as the cravings of Reason while deliberately concealing its carnal foundations. Namely, I differentiate between the sado-masochistic core of the Enlightenment and its rhetorical or intellectual mask. The life-preserving drive that inevitably transmutes into comprehensive destruction of the self, as well as destruction of the others and of the entire environment, is upheld through the legal framework of the state. I argue that it is this carnal reason that provides the foundation for the modern state, as opposed to the historically propagated ideal of 'enlightened reason'. However, if the state represents the ultimate embodiment of 'carnal reason', there are at least two possible responses to that condition. The first response recognizes 'carnal reason' as an obstacle for the fulfilment of the Enlightenment's ideals or as a betrayal of the idea of the state. This is the criticism developed by Horkheimer and Adorno in their diatribe on the Enlightenment and on the state, both of which are described as totalitarian and life-denying. On the other hand, the carnal conception of the state, separated from the burden of moral

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\*\* *Hrvoje Cvijanovic*, PhD candidate in political science at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, and research fellow and PhD candidate at the University of Zagreb.

argument, is defended by Carl Schmitt as the fact of the political. Two carnal conceptions of the state represent two different articulations which should be juxtaposed and illuminated.

*Keywords:* Enlightenment, state, carnal, Adorno and Horkheimer, Carl Schmitt

*The self-deception of the masses – for instance, in all democracies – is highly advantageous: making people small and governable is hailed as ‘progress’!*

Nietzsche

### **Introduction**

Traditionally, the Enlightenment is conceptualized as an intellectual effort where the power of Reason was uplifted above the passions and presented as a liberating force from all types of parochialism connected with tradition or authority. However, the argument is that the Enlightenment deceptively presented its goals as the cravings of Reason, while deliberately concealing its carnal foundations. The modern conception of the state is an embodiment of carnal reason. In a nutshell, the carnal should be understood as life-preserving. Therefore, the carnal understanding of life is opposed to the life of the higher ends. Since the carnal refers exclusively to the body, the whole idea of Reason lurking behind the modern state is problematic. Yet, the very interpretation of the modern state as an offspring of Reason has been dominant from the early Enlightenment period on. In fact, the modern state has been uplifted on a mythical reconstruction of Reason. It is the same Reason which was propagated during the age of Enlightenment, but much more emphatically a century or so later. In other words, we should make a distinction between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenments, and reject the claim about the Enlightenment as a universal and monolithic project. However, irrespective of this distinction, the Enlightenment and its progeny established a particular belief in ‘enlightened reason’. While reason is traditionally understood as a portal into the real nature of the world as well as the faculty for understanding and dealing with moral perplexities of life, so-called ‘enlightened reason’ has been developed as inherently instrumental in its scope. Its distinctive feature is the struggle for success or efficiency. While the idea of Reason was put on the pedestal of the Enlightenment’s rhetoric, its instrumental nature has shown a radically different face of the ‘enlightened civilization’ – a sole desire for the instinctual and its basic preoccupation (not with moral excellence, but) with bodily existence. This is why I speak of ‘Carnal Enlightenment’. In other words, enlightened reason became a trick to obtain domination, to enslave the others, and to propagate universal happiness as a mask for self-preservation and well-being at the expense of others. This very reason cloaked itself in enlightened virtue, while

at the same time developing in the shape of carnal reason through the institutional framework of the state.

The first task is to unmask this enlightened reason by showing its inherently carnal character. From Socrates on, the purpose of philosophizing was to convince of the value of reason which goes beyond bodily pleasures. The whole tradition of Western political thought has been struggling to this very day to refute the realist claim expressed by Thrasymachus in Plato's *Republic* that the body is what matters, not the soul. The second task will be to figure out how to deal with the carnal – should we continue with the politics of its displacement, or should we accept it as an irreducible content of social reality.

All in all, the myth of enlightened reason reflects what I call 'carnal reason' – a desire for self-preservation. In its specific manifestation, enlightened reason dwells on its sado-masochistic core while having a deliberate political agenda for domination over the natural world and the human world. The myth itself and its consequences have been discussed for centuries, starting with the work of counter-Enlightenment figures such as Rousseau, de Sade, or Nietzsche, and continuing through the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I found it interesting to concentrate, among all, on one of the most well-known diatribes on the Enlightenment, that of Adorno and Horkheimer. They correctly identified the problem of the myth of enlightened reason, concluding that the 'enlightened' or carnal reason and its ramifications are inevitably life-denying. In contrast, carnal reason should not be considered as such by default, but only in particular circumstances.

There are two carnal dynamics, and thus two carnal conceptions of the state. The first operates under the veil of the Enlightenment's philosophy of life, aims to be life-preserving, yet disregards the price which should be paid for obtaining its ends. I found the second one in Carl Schmitt's conception of the political and the state which deals more transparently with this carnal reason. I will start with the nature of contemporary understanding of the Enlightenment, then move on to Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of the state as a malevolent creation of 'enlightened reason', and finally offer my interpretation of Carl Schmitt's affirmation of the state which runs on carnal reason as its formative potentiality.

### **The Enlightenment(s)**

There are many different interpretations of the Enlightenment. Yet, we can roughly group them in two different tenets – the one which conceives the Enlightenment as a liberating movement in human history, and the other which connects it quite oppositely with enslavement, oppression, subjugation and domination over nature and human beings. Immanuel Kant usually stands as the representative of the first view. The origin of the second view is established by counter-Enlightenment thinkers

such as Rousseau, but it was especially revived and articulated in the 20<sup>th</sup> century starting from Adorno and Horkheimer up to thinkers such as Isaiah Berlin, Michel Foucault, Alasdair MacIntyre, John Gray, Rajani Kanth, etc. What is inherent to both arguments is the conception of the Enlightenment as a monolithic movement or project having a strong intellectual core, which contemporary critique connects with an overestimated trust in Reason. This is the basic myth of the Enlightenment. To ascribe to such a myth, to accept the assumptions that the movement was unified or progressing from an intellectual core, is to foreclose the possibility of greater understanding. Rather than viewing it as a singular movement, we should instead talk about Enlightenments, roughly that of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, its mythical reconstruction which was related to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, along with its ideological projects of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

First, as I have already mentioned, the Enlightenment was never a unified project. According to Peter Gay, the Enlightenment was “a volatile mixture of classicism, impiety, and science”; the philosophers, in a phrase, had a kind of satanic spirit of “men who were bringing light to others” by the power of knowledge (Gay, 1977: 21).<sup>1</sup> As a by-product of this messianic belief, rationalization appears as a totalizing force exercised over man and nature to benefit all. The power of Reason was presented as a liberating and disenchanting momentum from any tutelage connected with tradition, authority, or passions. Even though the philosophers were united in their epochal illusions, they differed among themselves in the scope of their unreserved trust in Reason. Namely, it was common in the 18<sup>th</sup> century not to trust Reason exclusively. Actually, some of the prominent figures of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Enlightenment like Voltaire, and even Kant, Diderot, d’Alembert or Hume, accepted the fact that reason is not the only source of man’s action. While Voltaire was mocking this worshiping of reason in his *Memnon*, the story of “a self-satisfied rationalist who conceives the foolish notions of being wholly wise and of establishing the supremacy of reason over passion”, Memnon was actually, as Peter Gay pointed out, wrongly interpreted later on as “the ideal representative of an age of reason, but he is an anti-Voltaire; he is the very type that the Enlightenment repudiated and that its critics later took as its embodiment” (*ibid.*: 143).

Thus, overconfidence in reason is not something which should be easily attached to the Enlightenment as such. Rather, as I stated earlier, this trust in reason became the core of the Positivist understanding of the world embodied in the technical reason, and thus a residual projection of what has been considered as the true

<sup>1</sup> This depiction of Satan or Lucifer (lux = light; ferro = to bring) is the motive of Baudelaire’s poem “Les Litanies de Satan”. There “Satan appears with his Luciferian halo as the keeper of profound knowledge, as an instructor in Promethean skills, as the patron saint of the stubborn and unyielding” (Benjamin, 2003: 10).

nature of the Enlightenment's thought. Nevertheless, the mythological story of liberation remained in both versions. The 18<sup>th</sup> century articulated the rhetoric of the Enlightenment, while later projects were more concerned with the adaptation of this rhetoric to more palpable purposes. The vulgar instrumentality of this 19<sup>th</sup>-century positivist Enlightenment climaxed in its equation of the moral progress with technical developments in science. It reflected the belief that technology, as an offspring of science, was going to solve all human problems and thus, as a liberating force, abolish institutionalized domination and all existing social hierarchies and dependencies blamed for man's intellectual downfall. Even though this myth has been persistently perpetuated, its promises have never been realized.

While emancipation from any tutelage was a pillar of Kant's notion of the Enlightenment, for some other figures, such as Isaac Papin, a dissident Huguenot theologian, this overconfidence in reason hardly corresponds to social reality. Even though he at first supported this confidence in reason, he figured out later that it was a delusion projected by the Enlightenment's naïve optimism.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, Kant's *sapere aude* dictum – the call for emancipation – was not possible without personal subjugation. My point is that this subjugation would not allow the tutelage to become diminished, but rather deepen it in different directions while making it more fragmented and concealed. According to Kant, Reason is exercised through the process of moral self-constitution. Kant argues that self-legislation is necessary to maintain a balance between individual interests and the interests of society. But, according to my view, the sado-masochistic character is revealed exactly in this self-imposition of the rules. Self-rule or self-mastery does not serve merely as a constraint to natural instincts, but rather as an entitlement to rule the environment. Only those able to subdue their drives masochistically would be able to employ their mastery in more efficient control of the environment. In other words, a masochistic pleasure in self-mastery leads to the mastery over the environment and over the people through sadistic discharge of previously accumulated layers of self-discipline. This is why Carnal Enlightenment is Janus-faced.

On the one hand, it closely refers to the Nietzschean "ascetic ideal" revealing the masochistic tendencies of modern man, while on the other hand it reflects a type of critique present in Rousseau's writings, and connected with certain development of sadistic discharges through the usage of knowledge and technology. Namely, for Nietzsche, "the ascetic ideal springs from the protective and healing instincts of a degenerating life which uses every means to maintain itself and struggles for its

<sup>2</sup> Papin claimed that "there is scarcely one in every hundred thousand people who can follow the way of reasoning and investigation. Life is too short and the difficulty too great... for the vast majority to be able to choose their religion, or establish their views, on the basis of independent critical thinking and sound reasoning" (Israel, 2006: 39).

existence” (Nietzsche, 2006: 93). Observed from the Nietzschean standpoint, the Enlightenment, by being carnal, possesses two qualities – first, it is cunning, namely while it propagates Reason, it aims at the body; second, it is degenerating – aiming at the body causes a “total dampening of the awareness of life, mechanical activity, the small pleasure, [...] this bestialization of man into a dwarf animal...” (*ibid.*: 107; also Nietzsche, 1998: 82).

For Rousseau, on the other hand, human perfectibility or usage of reason unleashes the type of carnal passions of boundless, insatiable and sadistic tendencies. According to the myth of the Enlightenment, both the natural world and the human world are perceived as plastic or mouldable. Reason is licensed to leave a human imprint on the world. But this is the cause of all discontent in our life. For Rousseau, man’s faculty of perfectibility “is the source of all of man’s miseries; that it is the faculty which by dint of time, draws him out of that original condition in which he would spend tranquil and innocent days; that it is the faculty which, over the centuries, causing his enlightenment and his errors, his vices and his virtues to bloom, eventually makes him his own and Nature’s tyrant” (Rousseau, 1997: 141). Thus, the perfection of reason goes hand in hand with the perfection of man’s carnal psychopathology.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps the most powerful description of man’s carnal psychopathology connected with developments of reason is Rousseau’s opening paragraph of *Emile*, where he states:

...everything degenerates in the hands of man. He forces one soil to nourish the products of another, one tree to bear the fruit of another. He mixes and confuses climates, the elements, the seasons. He mutilates his dog, his horse, his slave. He turns everything upside down; he disfigures everything; he loves deformity, monsters. He wants nothing as nature made it, not even man; for him, man must be trained like a school horse; man must be fashioned in keeping with his fancy like a tree in his garden. (Rousseau, 1979: 37)

Rousseau’s critique of the by-products of so-called ‘enlightened reason’ is devastating for this reason itself. While deeply selfish in self-preservation, the carnal aspects of ‘enlightened reason’, according to Rousseau, encouraged man to act al-

<sup>3</sup> Foucault’s argument in *Madness and Civilization* (Foucault, 2001) runs along these lines. He points out: “Civilization, in a general way, constitutes a milieu favourable to the development of madness... The more abstract or complex knowledge becomes, the greater the risk of madness” (*ibid.*: 206). “Knowledge thus forms around feeling a milieu of abstract relationships where man risks losing the physical happiness in which his relation to the world is usually established... But it is not only knowledge that detaches man from feeling; it is sensibility itself: a sensibility that is no longer controlled by the movements of nature, but by all the habits, all the demands of social life” (*ibid.*: 207). “... madness becomes possible in that milieu where man’s relations with his feelings, with time, with others, are altered” (*ibid.*: 209).

ways on the surface, in an actor-like fashion – being never in himself, judged by the appearance, applauded (or not) for the performance (Rousseau, 1968: 122-123). Man eventually becomes ruthless, perceiving others as obstacles to his self-realization. Not only for Rousseau, but for all pre-20<sup>th</sup> century critics of enlightened reason, modernity represents a life that has been devaluated, and not only by the estrangement through technology, but also, more profoundly, through a particular philosophy of life.

The 20<sup>th</sup>-century critique of the Enlightenment and the state was erected upon these views. In the following part, I will show how contemporary critique of the Enlightenment and its legacy severely criticized its residual effects, showing that there was nothing enlightening in the Enlightenment and in its heritage. The carnal aspects of the Enlightenment were almost unanimously condemned. In such a constellation, the state was perceived as the most powerful weapon for the carnal discharges.

#### **Criticism: Adorno and Horkheimer et al.**

In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx wrote: “Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living” (Marx, 1972: 15). Similarly, a heavy burden of the Enlightenment’s promises and their residual effects shaped the whole anti-Enlightenment discourse of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Before I move on to Adorno and Horkheimer’s criticism of the state, perceived as the most palpable embodiment of the philosophy of the Enlightenment and its totalitarian ideological manifestations, it would be interesting to briefly mention the other contemporary accusations toward enlightened reason. For instance, Jacob Talmon and Isaiah Berlin highlighted that enlightened reason ends up as oppression. It happens due to the nature of reason’s perfectibility or desire to uplift the most harmonious political order whose shining is going to be universally recognized. While propagating the gospel of universal liberation, far away from this rhetorical beauty, we have witnessed the carnal discharge of the state power manifesting itself through totalitarian movements. Similarly, in Michel Foucault’s writings the carnal expression of the Enlightenment’s ideals was present through diversity of disciplining techniques. Foucault’s notion of biopolitics emphasizes the role of the modern state and its institutions obsessed with the body – a particular way of nurturing and control which goes beyond previous disciplining techniques. For John Gray, liberalism represents a cloaked version of the Enlightenment project. Gray’s view of the Enlightenment and its liberal disciples shows that “the Westernizing

project of Enlightenment humanism has desolated traditional cultures in every part of the globe and visited devastation on their natural environment” (Gray, 1995: 178). Many post-colonial scholars, such as Edward Said or Rajani Kanth, developed the cultural critique of the Enlightenment, blaming it for the Western domination and exploitation of non-Western cultures. For example, in his book *Breaking with the Enlightenment*, Rajani Kanth attacks this carnal reason embodied in the Enlightenment’s understanding of the world, by claiming that “the doughty warriors of the Enlightenment... torched, raped, pillaged, and plundered the world, and all in the name of progress” (Kanth, 1997: 119). All these views represent a critique of carnal understanding of the Enlightenment. According to them, the Enlightenment offers nothing but a lie: the lie of an ‘enlightened’, unified and progressive world. What differentiates these arguments from Adorno and Horkheimer’s view is their ultimate and irreconcilable ‘goodbye’ to the Enlightenment ideals. On the contrary, when Adorno deploys his critique of carnal reason, he still believes that the light of enlightened reason has not completely faded. In other words, Adorno and Horkheimer’s attack on the Enlightenment has to do with their deep conviction that the state, as the contemporary embodiment of the carnal, can be reinvented and liberated from these ‘inverted’ Enlightenment ideals.

Adorno and Horkheimer correctly identified the problem of the myth of enlightened reason. However, their conclusion about the consequences of that reason is somewhat different than mine. Namely, they consider the Enlightenment and its ramifications as inevitably life-denying. For them, the dialectic of the Enlightenment leads from self-preservation to self-destruction. In this view, the state and culture serve as proliferators of carnal aspirations, or those aspirations connected with the mass consumerist society, not those attached to the individualized (intellectual) goals. In other words, the Enlightenment’s philosophical foundations have been articulated dominantly to legitimize the carnal worldview over the spiritual one, not vice versa. According to this view, despite its homage to intellectual aims, the Enlightenment failed by trying to mask its inherent carnal character embedded in the desire for self-preservation. It used reason as a medium for transformation of knowledge into power, in order to empower the elites to use the masses for appropriation of wealth and enjoyment. In their book *Dialectic of Enlightenment* they write:

Knowledge, which is power, knows no limits, either in its enslavement... Technology is the essence of this knowledge. It aims to produce neither concepts nor images, nor the joy of understanding, but method, exploitation of the labor of others, capital... Power and knowledge are synonymous... Enlightenment stands in the same relationship to things as the dictator to human beings. He knows them to the extent that he can manipulate them. The man of science knows things to the



extent that he can make them... In their transformation the essence of things is revealed as always the same, a substrate for domination. (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002: 2, 6)

Previously, nature had been experienced as harmonious. Now the Enlightenment's philosophy and science revealed nature as chaotic. According to this belief, the 'Man of reason' emerged from the chaos of nature with a historical mission – to make sense of these chaotic forces of nature. Horkheimer and Adorno write: "What human beings seek to learn from nature is how to use it to dominate wholly both it and human beings. Nothing else counts. Ruthless toward itself, the Enlightenment has eradicated the last remnant of its own self-awareness. Only thought which does violence to itself is hard enough to shatter myths" (*ibid.*: 2)

Finally, technological mastery became an expression of human power over nature. This mastery in the hands of the state should be regarded, according to Adorno, as a totalizing power. The Enlightenment's disenchantment from the myth became myth itself. As every other myth, the Enlightenment was dealing with the essential human needs – survival and fear. From the very beginning, the Enlightenment was concerned more with satisfying these needs on the palpable, material level, while the philosophical foundations served dominantly to legitimize the carnal worldview over the spiritual one. In other words, Reason liberated the 'beast' in human beings by institutionalizing their instinctual cravings. That is why the same Reason was employed into the process of domination and subjugation, the process Adorno connected with the very premise of the Enlightenment.

"Enlightenment is totalitarian" (*ibid.*: 4) in the way the state and culture are organized. Almost nothing can be left without the tutelage of organizational Reason. It is, therefore, totalitarian as the sado-masochistic practice is totalitarian – namely, a complete surrender of particular will to a common denominator, while at the same time it is perfectly rationally conducted for the sake of attaining carnal enjoyment through domination and subjugation. In addition, the sado-masochistic role-playing is predetermined since both sides know their roles. Horkheimer and Adorno write: "For Enlightenment is totalitarian as only a system can be. Its untruth does not lie in the analytical method, the reduction to elements, the decomposition through reflection, as its Romantic enemies had maintained from the first, but in its assumption that the trial is prejudged" (*ibid.*: 18). In his essay *On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression of Listening*, Adorno claims that modernity along with the Enlightenment did not offer anything but a culmination of the vulgar understanding of the state and culture concerned mostly with self-preservation, or with the carnal, thus absorbing all other aspects of life to this utility. In that way nothing was spared from the sado-masochistic discharge of the drives of civilized man. Another linkage outlined in this essay is the linkage between the Enlightenment and the totalitar-

ian political movements. For instance, Adorno sees a link between the totalitarian Führer and the conductor of the orchestra (Adorno, 1982: 285). They both resemble the same fate of modern mass society – one in political, the other in cultural terms. The exercise of totalitarian power is perceived as sadistic and at the same time providing a false consolation for suffering. On the other hand, Adorno's discussion on music as one of the most powerful tools of control portrays the liquidation of the individual (*ibid.*: 276). The listener's role is predetermined as passive, receiving stimuli from the authority, acting out of convention, acting out of an expected etiquette; in a word – he is trained to masochistically endure whatever is delivered to him. Therefore, in political terms, the source of power, the state, tacitly legitimizes this masochism through permanent reaffirmation of the fragility of the political order, and by doing that, potentiates desire for self-preservation. Adorno says: "Masochism in hearing is not only defined by self-surrender and pseudo-pleasure through identification with power. Underlying it is knowledge that the security of shelter under the ruling conditions is a provisional one, that it is only a respite, and that eventually everything must collapse" (*ibid.*: 294-295).

According to this understanding, the political order dwells on the sado-masochistic carnal principle which fosters a dependence relationship between those who demand satisfaction of their needs (self-preservation) and those who offer this satisfaction. What stays permanent in this relationship is its incompleteness – both needs are insatiable, and on this insatiability the reason of the political has been established. For Adorno, what I call the carnal principle is always self-devouring, even though it advocates self-preservation:

The human being's mastery of itself, on which the self is founded, practically always involves the annihilation of the subject in whose service that mastery is maintained, because the substance which is mastered, suppressed, and disintegrated by self-preservation is nothing other than living entity, of which the achievements of self-preservation can only be defined as functions – in other words, self-preservation destroys the very thing which is to be preserved. The antireason of totalitarian capitalism, whose technique of satisfying needs, in their objectified form determined by domination, makes the satisfaction of needs impossible and tends toward the extermination of humanity... The history of civilization is the history of the introversion of sacrifice – in other words, the history of renunciation. All who renounce give away more of their life than is given back to them, more than the life they preserve. (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2002: 43)

The implication of this sado-masochistic character of the state is the production of an inherently destructive social milieu. Due to the masochistic sacrifice of all other potentialities and qualities of life, the desire for self-preservation leads to self-destruction. On the other hand, the sadistic discharge of drives leads to destruc-

tion of others. Both dynamics are harboured by the state leading to self-destruction. In Adorno's own words:

The dialectic of enlightenment is culminating objectively in madness. This is also a madness of political reality... humanity is... divided into a small number of power blocs. They compete more pitilessly than the firms involved in the anarchy of commodity production ever did, and strive toward mutual liquidation... [...] self preservation... had become the reified drive of each individual citizen and proved to be a destructive natural force no longer distinguishable from self-destruction. (*ibid.*: 169, 171)

All those and other, different critical standpoints share a very similar disappointment with the Enlightenment and its legacy. They want to turn our attention towards the origins of the Enlightenment's philosophy and detect why, how and when something went wrong. On the contrary, according to my view, this effort is futile. Instead of lamenting on how we were betrayed by the Enlightenment and its disciples, we should rather recognize the ever-present pattern underlining the whole Enlightenment's legacy – its carnal embodiment. As I have mentioned earlier, this carnal principle should be regarded as self-preserving as well. Horkheimer and Adorno's understanding of the state power represents one possible, yet bleak, concept of carnal reason. Carl Schmitt's concept of the political and the state might also be regarded as carnal, but having a different trajectory. Instead of perceiving carnal reason as a self-preserving impulse which is paradoxically life-denying, I argue that Schmitt's understanding of the modern state starts up from the premise of the state as an embodiment of the same self-preserving drive, but ending up differently, namely through the idea of the state as a proliferator of group identity and thus a life-affirming power.

### **Schmitt**

Even though Carl Schmitt was an obscure figure of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, his theorizing on the state left no one indifferent. What brings me to Schmitt is his relationship toward the modern state, which is, in my judgement, unique. Up to now we have seen that all counter-Enlightenment and anti-Enlightenment perspectives linked the state with the oppressive instrumental rationality blamed to be inherent to the Age of Reason. For Schmitt, the umbilical cord between the state and philosophy of the Enlightenment was neither logical nor necessary. According to my view, Schmitt is not interested in lamenting about the carnal core of the Enlightenment worldview. The carnal principle had always been there, much before the Enlightenment itself. The catastrophic defeat of the ideals of the Enlightenment should not be perceived as a defeat of the state. Surely, the concept of the modern state suffered the most, and, according to Schmitt, it is in crisis, but this happened due to the self-imposed

discrepancy between myth and socio-political reality. The popular discontent of the masses can be healed by reaffirming the existential or life-affirming potentiality of carnal reason. What does this mean?

The whole concept of falsely worshiped enlightened reason relies on the feigned neutrality of Reason itself. However, if this neutrality along with its pretentious universal judgments were proved to be false, similarly, all ideologies and affiliations pretending to defend universal principles of life should be unmasked as false too. Behind the mask of enlightened reason is pure self-interest for self-preservation known as the carnal principle of life – aiming at the body and power. For Schmitt, there would be nothing wrong with this carnal affirmation of politics. The problem is the fact of concealing it, namely by presenting someone's subjugation as her liberation. This concealed carnal concept of the state with false neutrality was discussed much earlier by Rousseau in his *Second Discourse*. Rousseau was arguing that those able to control the means of power took the institutions of the state to present their particular carnal cravings as objective, universal, and more importantly, as neutral interests of humanity as a whole, while actually conceiving "the most well-considered project ever to enter the human mind; to use his attackers' forces in his favour, to make his adversaries his defenders, to instil in them other maxims and to give them different institutions..." (Rousseau, 1997: 172-173). This concealed and cunning carnal reason and its fake neutrality institutionalized political and economic inequalities where, as Starobinski pointed out, "economic usurpation becomes political power while draping itself in the trappings of legality and peace... We are the heirs of this fool's bargain, which eliminated overt violence by ending the war of all against all but replaced it with the hypocritical violence of conventions favourable to the rich" (Starobinski, 1988: 299). According to Schmitt's argument, this particular cunning carnal conception of the state is inherent to the liberal worldview. While spreading the gospel of the Enlightenment, the liberal state aimed at securing its particular carnal interests; subjugating and exploiting in the name of progress.

Schmitt's attack on liberalism as well as his affirmation of the political is conducted in order to strip off the enlightened face of feigned neutrality from the concept of the state. The state has to deal with the carnal. It needs to employ the carnal passion of self-preservation to fortify life, not to fragment it and destroy it through individual oppositions inherent to the competitive liberal society. Schmitt's carnal conception of the state is not dealing with the people as they ought to be, but with the people as they are, drenched in their everyday existential and irrevocable hopes and fears. He says: "All historical knowledge receives its light and intensity from the present; all historical representations and constructions are filled with naïve projections and identifications; only a consciousness of our own historical situation

will provide historical insight” (Schmitt, 1963: 17). Schmitt opposes the liberal meta-narrative and its reliance to the Enlightenment’s philosophy of history. The state does not represent a culmination of progressive ideals of humanity, but a particular expression of carnal will. As Gopal Balakrishnan, a scholar on Schmitt, articulated: “Schmitt attempted to capture the harsh objectivity as well as the phantasms of the political – that is to say, the necessity of conflict and the surplus of violence and passion” (Balakrishnan, 2000: 261).

The heart of the political manifests itself as an irreducible potentiality of friend/enemy groupings. Namely, the political must reflect the carnal, since it deals with the instincts of self-preservation. It must be highlighted that Schmitt, in opposition to Adorno and Horkheimer, does not attach any moral attributes to the concept which I recognize as carnal. The carnal is simply the essence of political life as well as the essence of life as a whole. Accordingly, the friend/enemy distinction is a political distinction, not a moral one. It means that the enemy is not necessarily “morally evil, aesthetically ugly or economically damaging” (Schmitt, 1996: 27).<sup>4</sup> So when liberals hide the carnal principle behind the notion of neutrality, they want to mask the inherently antagonistic existential drives of the political, presenting it as merely agonistic or competitive. Schmitt writes: “Liberalism... has attempted to transform the enemy from the viewpoint of economics into a competitor and from the intellectual point into a debating adversary” (*ibid.*: 28). Therefore, liberalism is essentially anti-political, since it deliberately portrays political antagonisms merely as political agonisms.

Perhaps war is the ultimate expression of the carnal. Even though the carnal is always already present, it should be defined and articulated as a collective enterprise of the state. In that respect, Schmitt’s view of the state and its apparatus somewhat resembles Plato’s Spartan-like construction of the state. In his project in the *Republic*, the desires of the masses are held in check by the virtue of the wisdom/power of the superior few, where the education of the masses is insufficient for ruling over themselves and keeping their carnal desires at bay (Plato, 2004: 117). Therefore the state is the ultimate formative power in the protection and enhancement of life, while at the same time the only political subject able to demand this life back, if necessary, as a sacrifice for the common cause. Schmitt writes:

<sup>4</sup> It is important to note that Schmitt relies on Plato’s distinction between the public enemy and the private one. The Greek word *pólemos* [πόλεμος] should be contrasted with *stásis* [στάσις], where the former means war in the public sense (between the Greeks and non-Greeks), and the latter means a quarrel on the personal level (for Plato can be only among the Greeks themselves). Schmitt writes in one of his footnotes: “a private enemy is a person who hates us, whereas a public enemy is a person who fights against us” (Schmitt, 1996: 29).

The state as the decisive political entity possesses an enormous power: the possibility of waging the war and thereby publicly disposing of the lives of men. The *jus belli* contains such a disposition. It implies a double possibility: the right to demand from its own members the readiness to die and unhesitatingly to kill enemies. The endeavour of a normal state consists above all in assuring total peace within the state and its territory... A human group which renounces these consequences of a political entity ceases to be a political group, because it thereby renounces the possibility of deciding whom it considers to be the enemy and how he should be treated. By virtue of this power over the physical life of men, the political community transcends all other associations and societies. (Schmitt, 1996: 46, 47)

Schmitt actually argues that the very instinct of life contains a potentiality of destruction and total negation of the body. In addition, the political only means that the carnal has been shaped around a particular existential threat where “a politically united people is prepared to fight for its existence, independence, and freedom on the basis of a decision emanating from the political entity” (*ibid.*: 45-46). By saying that, Schmitt does not promote bloodlust or any type of warlike behaviour: “The definition of the political suggested here neither favours war nor militarism, neither imperialism nor pacifism” (*ibid.*: 33). On the contrary, by negating or concealing the carnal aspect of the political, namely by negating the fact that existential conflicts can be fought for the sake of and in the name of a particular political entity alone, and not for some self-declared “higher” principles, it is to uplift a particular rationality and admire its supremacy. This was exactly the purpose of the Enlightenment and their ideological disciples. Schmitt actually attacks the liberal rhetorical manoeuvre whose purpose is to drag non-liberals into a liberally shaped rational argument, thus closing the possibility to argue from an incommensurable political universe.

Schmitt’s famous example is the usage of the notion of humanity. Let us take the example of the war on terror. Immediately after the terrorist attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, most of the world leaders were united in condemning this act. What became a distinctive feature of the Western powers, along with the Vatican, was their denouncement of these events as crimes against humanity. Hence, the war on terror has been legitimized to be waged for the sake of humanity. For Schmitt, the problem would not be the war itself, since the attack represented an existential threat for the American people. Thus, to engage with the enemy in an existential struggle is the political principle *par excellence*. What becomes problematic is the usage of the concept of “humanity” in the particular context of terrorism and against a particular political entity. Why so? Since every political entity operates within the friend/enemy distinction, saying that humanity is waging war against an enemy means nothing else but a war between the human and non-human races,

since the notion of “humanity” does not presuppose any other opposition but a non-human entity. To clarify, Schmitt is making a powerful point in the following paragraph:

When a state fights its political enemy in the name of humanity, it is not a war for the sake of humanity, but a war wherein a particular state seeks to usurp a universal concept against its military opponent. At the expense of its opponent, it tries to identify itself with humanity in the same way as one can misuse peace, justice, progress, and civilization in order to claim these as one’s own and to deny the same to the enemy. The concept of humanity is an especially useful ideological instrument of imperialist expansion, and in its ethical-humanitarian form it is a specific vehicle of economic imperialism... To confiscate the word humanity, to invoke and monopolize such a term, probably has certain incalculable effects, such as denying the enemy the quality of being human and declaring him to be an outlaw of humanity; and a war can thereby be driven to the most extreme inhumanity. (*ibid.*: 54)

Thus, by hiding behind the mask of humanity or other self-proclaimed universal aspirations, the liberal bourgeoisie, as Schmitt was constantly emphasizing,<sup>5</sup> is trying to neutralize the political or, in other words, to de-legitimize only non-liberal articulations of carnal reason. What drives liberal carnal reason is the primacy of the economic over the political sphere. Namely, Schmitt argues that liberal politics is aligned with the logic of capital against the state. Accordingly, the modern state has become “a huge industrial plant” (Schmitt, 1985: 65).

### Conclusion

If the task of the philosophical foundations of the Enlightenment was to deliver man from domination and subjugation, then the Enlightenment has failed. According to Adorno and Horkheimer, as well as an entire army of other scholars, it should be blamed for the impoverished life, wrapping up everything into a ‘shiny’ but deceptive reality. For all of them, the bourgeois ideals of the Enlightenment era have been implemented through institutional settings of the state and its legal framework, finally ending up in life-denying totalitarian practices. The dream of a harmonious, universal and rational civilization faded away, causing the awakening to be bitter while echoing in our contemporary anti-Enlightenment rhetoric. The unmasking of the myth of enlightened reason brought up the conclusion that something went wrong with putting the ideals into practice, but not with the ideals themselves. The purification of the Enlightenment from itself was considered as the ability to abolish

<sup>5</sup> See *The Concept of the Political*; *Roman Catholicism and Political Form*; *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes*; *Political Theology*.

its carnal core. Adorno and Horkheimer blamed the modern state as being beyond redemption, as an engulfing institutional monster whose carnal ideology of self-preservation is causing the annihilation of life of those who ought to be preserved, and the whole environment. The state became the darkest progeny of totalitarian Enlightenment. However, they were unable to accept the fact that the Enlightenment was inherently carnal, as almost every other myth. They thought there was a living kernel of our uncorrupted humanity laying there somewhere, and this kernel might be somehow redeemed if able to reconstruct the causal chain of events influencing its degeneration. On the other hand, I perceive Schmitt's political theory as an important and lucrative argument about the irreducibility and permanence of carnal reason. The potentiality of this reason is always already there, lurking behind every political project, especially behind the Enlightenment. Liberal politics, which takes the Enlightenment tradition as its blueprint, was aiming to shape the political struggles into agonistic tensions between interests, ideas, and values. This attempt was futile. The carnal aspects of life always escape rationalizing, thus invoking a spectrum of irrevocable existential struggles. Moreover, these struggles cannot be harmonized. If we start from the premise that the political conflicts are deeply entrenched, then the conflicts of interests cannot be resolved by compromising, the conflicts of ideas by rational discussion, or the conflicts of values by withdrawing to the private sphere. Quite contrary, what we can find in Schmitt's political testament is an awakening insight that the social conflict might be irrational since it is occasionally backed up and driven by carnal reason and its existential dictums.

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Hrvoje Cvijanović

KARNALNO PROSVJETITELJSTVO:  
MIT O PROSVJETITELJSKOM RAZUMU  
I DVIJE KARNALNE KONCEPCIJE DRŽAVE

*Sažetak*

Država u modernom smislu trebala bi se pokazati kao instrument Razuma sposoban kontrolirati strasti. To je moderni mit o državi koji se potkrepljuje tijekom doba prosvjetiteljstva. No pojam "prosvjetiteljskog razuma" koji je u pozadini ideje države samo je mit, te je stoga pogrešan. Moderna država zapravo postaje najviše utjelovljenje "karnalnog razuma". On se kao takav očituje u ideji samoodržanja ili održanja života općenito, koje se hrani ljudskom željom za prevlasti nad prirodom i samim ljudima. Prema tome, moderna država pruža okvir za karnalno otpuštanje sadističkih strasti u ime

mita "prosvjetiteljskog razuma". Argumentacija glasi da je prosvjetiteljstvo lažno predstavilo svoje ciljeve kao čežnje Razuma i da je hotimično prikrilo svoje karnalne temelje. Naime autor pravi razliku između sadomazohističke jezgre prosvjetiteljstva i njegove retoričke ili intelektualne krinke. Nagon za održanjem života koji se neizbježno pretvara u obuhvatno samouništenje te uništenje drugih i cijelog okoliša održava se pravnim okvirom države. Autor ustvrđuje da se moderna država temelji na tom karnalnom razumu, nasuprot povijesno propagiranom idealu "prosvjetljenog razuma". Ako je međutim država najviše utjelovljenje "karnalnog razuma", postoje barem dvije moguće reakcije na takvo stanje. Prva prepoznaje "karnalni razum" kao prepreku ispunjavanju idealā prosvjetiteljstva ili kao izdaju ideje države. Takvu su kritiku razvili Horkheimer i Adorno u svom žučnom napadu na prosvjetiteljstvo i na državu, koje su opisali kao totalitarne i protivne životu. S druge strane, Carl Schmitt branio je karnalnu koncepciju države, oslobođenu od opterećenja moralne argumentacije, kao činjenicu političkoga. Dvije karnalne koncepcije države dvije su različite artikulacije koje valja usporediti i rasvijetliti.

*Ključne riječi:* prosvjetiteljstvo, država, karnalno, Adorno i Horkheimer, Carl Schmitt

Kontakt: **Hrvoje Cvijanović**, Fakultet političkih znanosti, Lepušićeva 6, HR 10000 Zagreb. E-mail: [hcvijano@polsci.umass.edu](mailto:hcvijano@polsci.umass.edu)