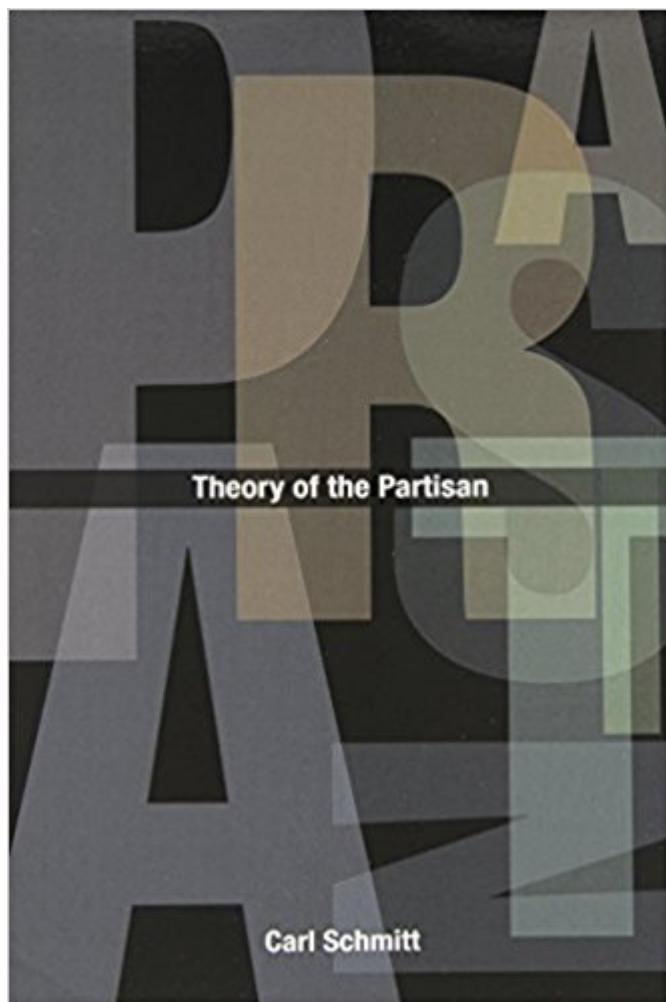


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Theory Of The Partisan: Intermediate Commentary On The Concept Of The Political



Synopsis

Carl Schmitt (1888-1985), one of the great legal and political thinkers of the 20th century, thought long and hard about the role and significance of war. He saw how the international law of the Eurocentric era of world history began to falter at the end of World War I and founder at the end of World War II. Following World War II, belligerent acts around the world began to assume a distinctly partisan character, and the belligerents were increasingly non-state actors. His Theory of the Partisan originated in two lectures that Schmitt delivered in 1962, which addressed the transformation of war in the post-European age. Schmitt concludes Theory of the Partisan with the statement: "The theory of the partisan flows into the question of the concept of the political, into the question of the real enemy and of a new nomos of the earth." Theory of the Partisan analyzes a specific and significant phenomenon that ushered in a new theory of war and enmity. It contains an implicit theory of the terrorist, which in the 21st century has ushered in yet another new theory of war and enmity. Consequently, this work is not only of historical interest, but is relevant to contemporary political and military developments and concerns.

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Customer Reviews

"Despite certain signs of ironic distrust in the areas of metaphysics and ontology, The Concept of the Political was, as we have seen, a philosophical type of essay to 'frame' the topic of a concept unable to constitute itself on philosophical ground. But in Theory of the Partisan, it is in the same areas that the topic of this concept is both radicalized and properly uprooted, where Schmitt wished to regrasp in history the event or node of events that engaged this uprooting radicalization, and it is

precisely there that the philosophical as such intervenes again." Jacques Derrida, from *The Politics of Friendship* "Carl Schmitt's Theory of the Partisan is a must-read to understand our age of terrorism, in which adversaries are degraded as criminal and subhuman. Schmitt traces the transformation of the enemy concept that had governed limited warfare for the European sovereign states into the dogma that defines the political foe as a target of complete annihilation." George Schwab President, National Committee on American Foreign Policy Professor emeritus, City University of New York

This book, the 'Theory of the Partisan', grew out of two lectures delivered March of 1962, fittingly, in Spain. I say 'fittingly' because it was in Spain, during the resistance to Napoleon, that we first encounter the full figure of the partisan fighter. Schmitt observes that 'regular' warfare (which is contrasted with the irregular warfare of the partisan throughout this text) only emerged with (that is, in opposition to) Napoleon and the armies of the French Revolution. It is as if, from the very beginning, modern 'enlightened' politico-military order called forth its demonic other. We are reminded that Napoleon had 250,000 troops who were held in check by 50,000 partisans. ...What? How? - This is Napoleon for God's sake! Well, yes, but in order to be a great General one needs at least two things: an army that will competently obey, and an enemy who will stand and fight. Even though the French Revolutionary troops provided the former, the Spanish partisans refused to provide Napoleon the latter...From these beginnings Schmitt traces the History and Theory of the Partisan in a very terse manner. (Schmitt's book, really only an essay, is only 95 pages long.) After the defeat of Napoleon the victors, at the Congress of Vienna, "reestablished the concepts of European laws of war." However, as Schmitt points out, with "the introduction of compulsory military service, all wars become in principle wars of national liberation..." Thus Schmitt implies that to lose a war now means to lose the right to be a self-determining people. Since every war is now, at least potentially, a fight for national survival, there can be (in fact) no more limited wars... Naturally, along the way, we learn something of civil wars and colonial wars, both of which always had a partisan presence. Our author also reminds us that the Russian Empire, throughout the 19th century, fought various irregular wars against numerous mountain people it sought to subdue. Russia is important to Schmitt's thesis because it is from Russia (i.e., from Lenin and Communism) that, according to our author, a most pernicious form of Partisan warfare (communist internationalism) would eventually arise. Schmitt reminds us that Napoleon also fought partisans in Russia, and that Napoleon also lost there. In frustration, Napoleon reportedly said, that "in fighting the partisan anywhere, one must fight like a partisan". But who is the Partisan? Anyone? No. Early on in this essay Schmitt concedes that

one can say that 'to be a man is to be a fighter', and adds that "the consistent individualist does indeed fight on his own terms and, if he is courageous, at his own risk. He then becomes his own party-follower. (p. 19)" Though noting this possibility he dismisses this anarchy vaguely as merely a "sign of the time". So then, who are the Partisans that we are to be interested in? Schmitt defines them thusly, they are:1. Irregular Troops (no uniforms, weapons hidden, e.g.)2. Mobil (flexibility, speed, the ability to quickly attack and retreat)3. Intensely Political (unlike, say, pirates, - who are really only unpolitical 'businessmen'!)4. Telluric (a local movement, rooted to a given 'land') Or, at any rate, that is who Schmitt wishes they were. You see, the partisan "changes his essence once he identifies with the absolute aggressivity of a world-revolutionary or a technicistic [sic] ideology. (p. 20)" But of course the 'old-school' partisans described above will always be with us. "For at least as long as anti-colonial wars are possible on our planet, the partisan will represent a specifically terrestrial type of active fighter." So, you see, it is not only communist universalism that is changing the nature of the Partisan (for the worse), but progressive technocratic modernity itself. Modern weapons and communications allow telluric partisans to be easily used as pawns in the various chess matches of the Great Powers. But who really is using whom? ...Huh? Don't the Great Powers, especially the nuclear powers, seemingly by definition, always have the "upper hand"? ...So it would seem. But the following remark of Schmitt does make one wonder: "...belligerent actions after 1945 had assumed a partisan character, because those who had nuclear bombs shunned using them for humanitarian reasons, and those who did not have them could count on these reservations - an unexpected effect of both the atomic bomb and humanitarian concerns. (p. 24)" The Geneva Conventions (which "widened the circle of persons equated with regular fighters [...] and in this way [the partisans] were granted the rights and privileges of regular combatants") and nuclear weapons had the unexpected side effect of placing the Partisan at the center of World History. What no great power dared to do on its own could now be done by surrogates fighting for them. If this book were written only yesterday, instead of originating in talks delivered in the early sixties and first published then too, Schmitt would undoubtedly here say something smart about the Soviet Union destroying itself in Afghanistan fighting 'partisans' armed by America, only so the latter could then be slowly consumed in a war with its own creatures. - But that is exactly what is so astonishing about this book! At the height of the cold war Schmitt foresaw, however darkly, the utter futility of being a 'superpower'. And he sees this at a time when the 'best and the brightest' in both camps (i.e., that is, capitalists and communists) were certain that they were in a bi-polar world and that it was either "them or us

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