On the Itineraries of Democracy: An Interview with Chantal Mouffe

Chantal Mouffe was Hooker Distinguished Visiting Professor at McMaster University in October 1994. During the course of her visit, Professor Mouffe agreed to an interview with *Plurality and Altérité: Discourses and Practices* (*PLURALT*), an interdisciplinary research group based at McMaster and one of the groups cosponsoring her visit. A substantial part of the text of that interview follows.

Mouffe's visit was initiated by *PLURALT* because of the way in which her work pursues questions that are of particular interest to the group's members (both as scholars and as citizens). Mouffe's work recalls for us that scholars *are* citizens, and therefore that the university's intellectual community, although only one community among many, has a crucial role to play in fostering the critical dissent and ethical-political reflection that she sees as necessary to liberal democracy. For *PLURALT* several issues were of particular concern: the role of pluralism in a multicultural society, the complex implications of postmodernism for ethics and political agency, the theory and practice of democracy in Europe and in the other G7 nations, and the fate of Marxism at the end of the millennium.

The issue of multiculturalism has had a major impact upon the social and political agendas of western democracies over the last decade. Ten years ago, Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau anticipated this change when they argued that frank acknowledgment of the irreducibly pluralistic and volatile makeup of modern democracies demanded a strategy beyond socialism, a radical politics of subject positions and multiple, decentred

discourses. For some, this decidedly post-Marxist vision threatened political life with what Christopher Norris dismissed as "the new ultra-relativist orthodoxy."[1] As if to respond to the charge of an unprincipled relativism, in this interview Mouffe stresses that radicalized liberal democracies indeed need to establish a hierarchy of values and to embrace defined political criteria, notably the respect of human rights and the ethically motivated recognition of cultural difference within a common understanding of what it means to be a citizen. Yet Mouffe does not hesitate to point out that this revaluation of political values has been unsettled now that the Cold War has ended by the disappearing tensions between "friend" and "foe," communism and democracy, totalitarianism and liberalism. The withering of such opposition, Mouffe stresses here and elsewhere,[2] robs normal political exchange of its vigour, weakening the boundaries according to which each party has defined its territory, and accelerating the radicalization of the Right.

Mouffe's position on this situation is doubly interesting. On the one hand, she has long been an articulate critic of the Left, both on a theoretical level (in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*), and on a pragmatic level (in *Dimensions of Radical Democracy*).[3] At the same time, she challenges the very principles upon which normal democratic practices rest (i.e., consensus and communicative rationality, as exemplified by Jürgen Habermas). The abeyance of a lively political *agonism*, the emergence of a centrist republic (in the case of France), the merging of the Right/Left options (in the case of Italy): each of these shifts in the political realities of Europe confirm for Mouffe Niklas Luhmann's insistence that real *choice* is crucial for vital popular involvement in parliamentary systems.[4] The delegitimation of political choice in the midst of the disappearance of the Right/Left distinction only spells disaster for democratic practice. Against this blunting homogenization of political difference, Mouffe insists upon the divisions and links between liberal *and* radical democracy. For her, the answer to the question of what is *left* of the Left (in the sense both of what *remains* of the Left and what lies *beyond* the Left) can be found in the pursuit of two political and intellectual

strategies: i) the promotion of a *vita activa* through open-ended oppositional thinking and relating; and ii) the resistance to unquestioned forms of universalism and rationalism.

As early as her work in *Gramsci and Marxist Theory*,[5] Mouffe examined the roots of left-wing critical analysis, an investigation that is extended in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. In a move that distinguishes her work as distinctly *post*-Marxist, the latter book summons the Left to acknowledge the irreducibly pluralistic nature of social struggle (beyond the question of capital and class-conflict), and the importance of "new" (or at least newly recognized) social movements, especially feminist, ecological, and anti-nuclear movements, as well as the protests of ethnic and nationalist minorities. The novel and enriching role played by these forms of social resistance, the differentiations that they necessarily introduced within the very struggles they were enacting, constituted nothing less than the democratic imaginary of the late 1970s and 1980s.

If Mouffe's post-Marxist credentials are obvious, her postmodernist affiliations are not nearly so sharply determined. To be sure, she has tended to side with thinkers like Jean-François Lyotard against Habermas's foundationalism, his tacit faith in Enlightenment reason and an "ideal speech situation" governed by a regulative idea of a universal subject: for Mouffe, this subject is a suspicious proposition rather than a reassuring, positive one. Yet, in this interview Mouffe asserts that to abandon the project of modernity on the grounds that it is wholly responsible for the social catastrophes of the twentieth century is to descend into sheer pathos.[6] Like Jacques Derrida, Mouffe scrupulously avoids speaking apocalyptically of postmodernity in terms of the *end* or cancellation of History, the Subject, or the West. Mouffe would remind us, *pace* Derrida, that "we cannot and we must not — this is a law and a destiny — forgo the *Aufklärung* [Enlightenment]" in the name of some imagined hyper-reality in which justice and democracy are simulated but never realized.[7] What is relevant to political theorists today is the critique of the project of modernity, which for her is also the project of democracy, both within and without postmodern critical tenets. For example, when employing

some of the arguments made by Carl Schmitt against liberalism in the Austria of the late 1920s, Mouffe is obviously not condoning the conservative German jurist's authoritarian attack on democratic principles, but is rather reproducing specific aspects of his critique in order to revitalize the idea of liberal democracy and its necessary commitment to pluralism.[8] Her re-investment of Schmitt's thinking about positive political antagonism and social difference should be of acute interest to observers of present day Canadian, Québécois, and First Nations conflictual sites. Similarly, when Mouffe reflects upon the traditions of classical liberalism and pre-modern communitarianism that underwrite Western polities and conceptions of democracy, she insists upon the importance of "not replacing one political tradition by the other but drawing upon both and trying to combine their insights in a new conception of citizenship adequate for a project of radical and plural democracy."[9] When advocating a careful recovery of the most worthwhile aspects of these traditions, Mouffe also calls for each distinct community within the social web — she does not say social "whole" — to engage in dialogical mediations and arbitrations, always with an eye to bringing about contingent and eminently re-negotiable resolutions. As such, she speaks directly to the kinds of questions that we, as citizens of North America's most lively democracy, have been struggling with for several decades.

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PLURALT: I am very impressed by your political philosophy of pluralism. In Canada, however, there has been much criticism recently of multiculturalism as a public policy and ethnic diversity as a fact of this society. Indeed, one can say there has been a campaign against it. This criticism comes from various sources, but primarily from the mainstream of society. Such critics contend that multiculturalism, i.e. any emphasis or recognition given to particular identities, is socially divisive and that the government should not pursue a policy which undermines the very basis of its own existence. Is this an acceptable argument?

Chantal Mouffe: I believe the question at stake is: how should multiculturalism be understood? Because it seems to me that many struggles for multiculturalism are in fact struggles for cultural separatism, and that is not how I understand the question of multiculturalism. The understanding of pluralism which I put forward is opposed to cultural separatism. This is because I insist on the need to have, in what I call a pluralist democracy, a consensus on ethical-political principles. There is a need for some form of political community which leaves room for differences. So, I would be in favour of much more pluralism. I am thinking of the case of Europe, and particularly of France, where there is room for much more pluralism than exists at the moment, in terms of recognition of cultural differences, such as linguistic and religious differences. But I do not think this should go so far as to put into question the political institutions which constitute the liberal democratic regime. This is why I argue that there cannot be, at the level of politics, antagonistic principles of legitimacy. There must be a consensus on what the basic institutions are in a society. There cannot be pluralism at that level. So this means we should not have different legal systems according to the different communities. There must be something common, but a form of commonality which should make room for the recognition of differences in many cultural terms. This is because it seems to me that certain forms of multiculturalism, in fact, lead to a system which is not very different from the apartheid that was criticized in South Africa.

P: So you are saying that multiculturalism should not be understood as everybody pursuing completely different values while there is no consensus on any political values; that the differences of values can remain but there could be some kind of acceptance of the political democratic structure?

CM: Yes. We need a consensus on shared, common political values. Of course, I also insist that there must, to a certain extent, be room for different interpretations of those values. For instance, there must be room for social democratic, liberal, strictly liberal, liberal-conservative or radical

democratic interpretations. I do not think of consensus as a homogeneous collective good in which we are all going to accept exactly one meaning of those values. I think there is room for a certain amount of conflict and struggle about the interpretations of those values, but nevertheless there must be a consensus about the values we are struggling to interpret. If some groups put those values into question because their culture is not one in which liberty and equality are important, those demands cannot be accommodated within a liberal democratic pluralist society. So, there must be a consensus on the principles, even while there may be disagreement about the interpretation.

This is why I insist on the limits of pluralism. There cannot be a pluralism which accepts *all* differences. We must be able to determine which differences should exist within a liberal democratic regime, because those differences are necessary for the realization of principles of liberty and equality. By negating those differences we are repressing or impeding the equality of some groups. But necessarily, there are also differences which might exist but must be put into question, or should never be accepted, because these differences would create relations of subordination which are not acceptable within a pluralist democracy.

P: I think most of those in Canada who accept multiculturalism would agree with you, but there is another aspect. That is, those values which are not contradictory to the basic liberal democracy nevertheless are different values. The question has often come up: to what extent should the government give public recognition to these differences? There are those who argue that the government should not give any public recognition to any differences because it undermines, in the long run, some basic values. Whereas, those who are for multiculturalism argue that public recognition of some differences in values is viable.

CM: Yes, I would be in favour of public recognition, and I do not think — this is another point on which I disagree with John Rawls[10] — that pluralism is only a question which exists at the level of the private, that some things can exist

as long as they do not want recognition in the public sphere. I think more and more of the democratic struggles today are about recognition in the public. This is important as long as this opposition does not put into question what I call the "principle of legitimacy" of a liberal democratic regime and will not imply a different legal system for certain groups, because that would undermine the very basis of plurality. I think — and this is the point I want to stress rather strongly since it is put into question by some people — that the kind of pluralism which I am advocating is only possible *within* the context of a liberal democracy. Liberal democracy and its institutions are the conditions of possibility of multiculturalism. So, in the name of pluralism, you cannot put into question those very institutions, because that would mean the end of pluralism. That is why pluralism must have limits.

P: In your essay, "Politics and the Limits of Liberalism," you discuss the paradox in the relationship between pluralism and liberal democracy.[11] You argue we should never expect this paradox to disappear, but rather should strive towards its resolution without ever hoping to achieve it. Yet, you end the essay with your own paradox. You assume, as Max Weber did, that values are irreducible to one another and hence, that no liberal, or free, *modus vivendi* is possible between people with some values. Are *all* values irreducible?

CM: My view of pluralism inscribes itself within the context of a certain understanding of pluralism of values that can be traced back to Nietzsche, which we find in Weber and also in Isaiah Berlin. The basic idea is, there is a plurality of values. This is to be distinguished from the relativist position, which says, finally, values are a pure question of choice, of preferences. This is not the position of Berlin. He is saying, there exist in the world objective values, but those values are multiple and it is not possible to reconcile them. However I think Berlin does not go as far as Nietzsche. Nietzsche, when speaking of the war of gods, and Weber, when speaking of the polytheism of values, recognize the fact that multiplicity implies conflict. Some see it differently.

For Rawls, the problem is one of empirical limitation. All values cannot be combined because we only have twenty-four hours a day in our lives and our lives are seventy or eighty years, so we do not have time to pursue other values. I think this is not enough. My pluralism of values is much more *agonistic* in the sense that it recognizes that some values cannot be combined because they are exclusive of each other. You cannot, at the same time, realize values which are linked to being a good husband, a good father, and being a monk, or an explorer. There are many different forms of flourishing for human beings and they are exclusive of each other. It is not that we do not have, materially, the space or the time. It is that if you choose one thing, you necessarily exclude the other. Decisions have to be made, and to decide on one alternative is to exclude the other.

In the field of politics, this has very important consequences which have not been elaborated enough. What I am saying has to do with the idea of the friend and foe. The conflict is between values: to recognize the pluralism of values means that, necessarily, there will be conflict. The democracy which I am advocating will always be a democracy to reach for but never attain, because there is no possibility of a final harmony. You cannot be a pluralist and believe in a final harmony because, if it were realized, that would be the end of pluralism. This is why radical democracy, understood in the way Jürgen Habermas interprets it, is a self-refuting ideal. If his "ideal-speech" situation were realized, pluralism would no longer exist, because harmony is the negation of pluralism. Since I am a pluralist and I think pluralism is of value, I want to accept the consequences of this, which is to admit the impossibility of harmony. We must start from this admission and then think about democratic politics in a way in which harmony is not a goal, nor even a regulative idea.

There is another point linked to the pluralism of values which I think is important for political theory. If we accept the pluralism of values, we must also accept a plurality of legitimate regimes, and that the liberal democratic regime cannot be presented as *the* rational solution to the problem of human coexistence. We must abandon the universalistic conception. I would defend

what I call a "pluralist conception." I am not saying any regime, because it exists, should be considered a good regime, but I am proposing that we envisage a plurality of good regimes. There are definitely going to be regimes which we are not going to accept as being legitimate. Nevertheless, there must be different legitimate solutions to the problem of human coexistence.

Liberal democracy, like any regime, by necessity must establish a hierarchy of values. The liberal democratic regime has put at the core of its values the ideas of liberty, freedom and equality, which means necessarily other values will suffer. For instance, the value of community. You cannot have, at the same time, individual freedom and strong community. There are other values which disappear in an individualistic framework: for instance, most traditional values, linked to other types of societies, that were centred on the question of honour. I do not see our solution as absolute progress for this reason. I think we must be aware that there are always trade-offs. I perfectly understand why some societies would say they are not prepared to pay the costs implied by individual freedom as a central value, because they would say, "We want to organize our society in a way in which finally community is going to be preserved. We do not want to destroy some forms of life which are, for us, valuable." I do not think we are in a position to say such societies are unjust or illegitimate because they do not have our understanding of what is a good regime. But I am not a relativist because I believe there should nevertheless be certain criteria to decide what is a legitimate regime.

Probably, I would accept some understanding or basis of human rights as a central criterion for accepting a regime as legitimate. But there are different ways in which human rights can be understood. Our understanding of human rights, which I would classify as the individualistic understanding of human rights, is very culturally specific. It is linked to a certain tradition, and I am not ready to say it is the only acceptable one. We must ask: what are the other understandings of human rights that are not our liberal understanding, our individualistic understanding; human rights which would make room for more collective rights? From

our point of view it would sacrifice individual freedom, but nevertheless we would not say a society does not recognize human rights because it puts forward a different understanding of human rights. There is not only one solution to the question of the just society. This conclusion, for me, derives necessarily from the acceptance of pluralism of values.

P: You talk about pluralism in the context of postmodern thought, as against modern thought. How do you envision — on a practical, everyday level — a citizen behaving in relation to other citizens in terms of pluralist values? Would his or her behaviour be any different from that of a citizen behaving in relation to others in terms of the "modern, impersonal, civilized and civil" precepts?

CM: I think the difference would basically relate to what I have just said, in the sense that the modern citizen is a citizen informed by a universalistic and rationalistic conception. That citizen believes that liberal democracy is the solution to the problem of human coexistence and that it can be grounded philosophically. So the approach is rationalist in the sense that they think the way to secure the permanence of a democratic institution and to defend democracy against possible dangers is to find an argument with which we would be able to convince people rationally that democracy is the solution. This is clearly what motivates Habermas, because he believes that in order to beat the coming back of Nazism — and I share his concern — it is important to find ways to protect democracy. But he considers that if we were able to give a philosophical argument, this would protect democracy. The only way we can protect democracy is by the multiplication of the practices and institutions which create democratic subjects whose allegiance to those institutions is strong. It is not through argument and rationality, but only through practices. So that is the point where a modernist and a postmodernist would approach the question of democracy differently.

Another aspect would also be that a modern citizen would be much less tolerant of differences than a postmodern one. Just take an example that is happening today. The French

have the typical modernist understanding of citizenship. The *laïcité* and universal values in which the French model, the French understanding of citizenship is the only one which is acceptable, leads to prohibition of the Islamic veil. There are no differences allowed at all, because there is only one way to understand citizenship. That is, for me, the typical modernist conception of individuality, and it is really something that must be put into question. A postmodern citizen would make room for recognition of plurality, while recognizing that this plurality has limits, that there are points at which we are not going to accept some demands. But between the "integrism" of the French and Muslim integrism, there is a lot of space for recognition of true differences, within a common understanding of what it is to be a citizen of a liberal democratic society.

P: Timothy Garton Ash referred to 1989, the year of the revolutions in Eastern Europe, as the year of truth.[12] What, if any, is the message that Western leftists should draw from the collapse of "actually existing socialism?" More generally, what now is left of the Left? Do you think that Marxism any longer has a future?

CM: I do not want to look too presumptuous, but in a sense the events of 1989 vindicated the position I had put forward in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, which was published in 1985. It is a book that was written in the first half of the eighties, and in it we were arguing against this understanding of Marxism, this understanding of socialism. We were already saying that this is incompatible with the democratic model, this is something which is not to be accepted. We, on the Left, cannot go on defending that model. We must reformulate the project of the Left, the project of socialism, in terms of radical and plural democracy. So when 1989 came, we were delighted. We were extraordinarily and viciously attacked by the Marxists at the time of the book's publication, but since then, all those Marxists are saying more or less the same thing we had been saying. I feel that what we said in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* is still relevant, probably more than ever, because the other alternative

has just disappeared, it collapsed. If there is a way in which the leftist project can still survive, it is definitely in terms of being reformulated as the extension, the radicalisation of democracy, as the acceptance of the liberal democratic regime and the rejection of any strategy of revolution or complete change, by redefining it within the confines of a liberal democratic regime.

There is a danger at the moment that, by reaction against the collapse of communism and the collapse of those regimes, any kind of struggle for equality has become suspicious. For some people it is as though the only alternative was what I call "really existing liberal democratic societies"; as though, if there is no more possibility of radical change, there is no possibility of change at all. We must accept the current order and any attempt to change it is presented as unreconstructed, old, traditional Marxism. That is the danger and I have very clearly seen it happening in France. The demise, which I think should be celebrated, of a Jacobin conception of politics in terms of a radical alternative to the present order, has been replaced by what I would call "mere alternance," in the sense that no real struggle for transformation of power relations can take place at all. That is why the socialist party has been moving so much to the centre and so close to the democratic right, if we want to call it that. Because of Le Pen[13] I would not want to say the right, but the centre right. In Italy the same thing has happened with the PDS.[14] It is as though there were no longer space for socialist politics at all, since socialists are afraid of appearing as old-fashioned Marxists each time they make claims for justice and for equality. That is very negative, as it only creates space for the right.

I am not saying the radical democratic project is in good shape today. Unfortunately not. The consequence of the collapse of socialism has been to discredit anything which looks like socialism. Nevertheless, I believe we should resist that. I would want to argue for what I call a liberal socialism, in the sense that it is a socialism which would be realized within the confines of a liberal democratic regime. Somebody like Norberto Bobbio[15] has been saying that for many years; C.B. Macpherson[16] adopted a similar position. They

are also being vindicated, and it has been made clear that if the socialist project has any future, it must be some kind of liberal socialism. That project is worth fighting for because, in order to foster the pluralism that is at the centre of modern democracy, we need to take account of the contribution that socialism can make. Socialism understood as radical democracy is not antithetical to the project of liberal democracy. It can be seen as an enrichment of that project. It can be seen, in fact, as a way in which the very principles of pluralism can be realized. Instead of being seen as something which is a radical alternative to liberal democracy, socialism can be seen as an enrichment of the liberal democratic project.

P: Yes, I think I see exactly what you are getting at, but it seems to me there is still an ambiguity in what you just said about the place of Marxism. You were talking, in fact, mainly about liberal socialism. One of the things "1989" signifies is the rebirth of the old eighteenth-century idea of civil society and human rights. Marxists of a traditional sort have customarily disparaged the notion of human rights and liberal values in general. Of course you have strongly endorsed the principles of liberalism. That notwithstanding, you have advocated what you call "radical democracy." Could you tell us what you understand by that term? What is the difference between radical democracy and ordinary, liberal democracy? How does what you call radical democracy relate to what many others call social democracy?

CM: I want to separate the two aspects of your question, the one concerning Marxism, the other concerning radical democracy. I think, and this was already the critique that we formulated in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, that there are many aspects of Marxism which need to be abandoned. The economism of Marxism, the essentialism of Marxism are things we cannot sustain today. I agree with you that the lack of understanding of the importance of human rights, and of the question of pluralism, are things that we should not try to recover. On the other side, there are, in Marxism, some aspects that are still relevant. One thing we find in

Marxism, which we do not find in liberalism, is the recognition of the sense of antagonism in society. The problem was that Marxism, firstly, reduced antagonism to the realm of class and did not realize that antagonism could take many more forms than just that. Secondly, Marxists believed that there was a possibility of final harmony that could be reached once the class question was solved. Of course, here I think that they were wrong. On the other side, I do not see that liberalism is at all sensitive to the question of antagonism. The whole issue of power relations is something which liberals are completely unable to think of. This whole dimension of what I call "the political" is absolutely absent from liberal thought. And there, Marxism, even in its problematic essentialist form, had some insight which needs to be kept. Of course, there are other ways to do this. I am interested in the works of Carl Schmitt[17] because he puts at the centre of his reflection, and of his critique of liberalism, the question of antagonism and the friend and foe dimension which is inseparable from social life. Thus he goes further than Marxism because Schmitt is perfectly aware that this is *not* something that can only be located in class relations. Schmitt clearly sees that this antagonism can take many forms; it can express itself in religious terms, in ethnic terms, in nationalistic terms, in many forms. This recognition of the centrality of antagonism in society in Schmitt goes much further than Marxism and that is one of the reasons for my interest in Schmitt. I think that this aspect is completely missing in liberalism and needs to be reintroduced.

Now, to consider the question about radical democracy. Radical democracy would be, precisely, an understanding of liberal democracy that would reintroduce the dimension of the political, that would recognize the centrality of power relations, and therefore uphold those struggles against the different forms of subordination, struggles which are needed for the democratic project to be pursued and developed. If there is one thing I agree on with Habermas (and it is probably the only thing), it is that the democratic revolution is not something we must abandon, not something we must relinquish and say, since Auschwitz the project of modernity had been liquidated.[18] I think this is sheer pathos which is

not very useful. I feel the democratic project is still alive, even if it is not in very good shape. But it needs to be reformulated today with the help of postmodern theory. We need to redefine it in a way that puts into question the universalism, the rationalism and the individualism in which it has been formulated. Radical democracy is a way to reformulate the democratic project in another theoretical framework which makes room for the centrality of antagonism, of power relations, and therefore implies a different type of understanding of the principle of legitimacy of liberal democracy. It is important that radical democracy not be seen as a radical alternative to liberal democracy. It is not that at some point we will abandon liberal democracy and move to a radical democratic society. A radical democratic society will still be a liberal democratic society, in the sense that we are not going to put into question the basic institution of political liberalism. The purpose of the project is to radicalize it by extending the sphere of equality and liberty to many more social relations. In a sense, it could be called radical liberal democracy. It is not an alternative to liberal democracy.

P: I find myself in agreement with what you are saying, except on one point: I am not convinced that, in order to improve upon liberal democratic theory, one needs to appeal to someone who belonged to the National Socialist Party. I can see your interest and realize the need to bring in antagonism. However, it seems to me that the very essence of classical liberal political theory is centred on an antagonism. This is what James Madison, who wrote one of the most classic texts in liberal political theory, the United States Constitution, calls "factions" in *The Federalist Papers.*[19] It seems to me that the central theme of all *The Federalist Papers* is this notion of faction and thus the question — and the liberal regime he proposes is the answer — how can one deal with, control and regulate the uses and abuses of power? That seems to be already there in liberalism at the beginning.

CM: Well, it is true to a certain extent. James Madison is obviously the one who would be important, regarding that aspect. This is a common struggle with a friend of mine, Benjamin Barber, because we disagree about democracy. He says, "The problem is that you, Chantal Mouffe, are the Madisonian while I am the Rousseauian." To which I reply, "Yes, I certainly am a Madisonian and I am anti-Rousseau." This is because, in the understanding of pluralism which I put forward, the central accent is put on the impossibility of a homogeneous collective will, and indeed Madison is one of the liberals who saw that most clearly. But, for me, the limitation of Madison is that he saw it too much in terms of competing interests. The critique Schmitt makes of liberalism is very pertinent here because he said that when liberalism tries to think of the political, it either reduces it to the domain of economics or ethics. It sees it in terms of, not a friend and foe relation, but a relation of competition, that we are competitors or *concourants*, that there are different interests which are in competition. This is the dominance of the economic model and I would put Madison under that line. There is another model, the Rawlsian model, which tries to insist on ethics and morality, but that is to think of politics under categories which are not specific to the political. What Schmitt does is to try to think of what could be the specificity of the political, separate from competition between interests in the domain of the economic, or the type of deliberation that takes place in terms of morality. That is what he called the friend and foe relation. I think this is something which is not present in Madison.

If there were a liberal who would be closer to this — if indeed we can call him a liberal — it is Thomas Hobbes with his idea that the natural condition of mankind is the war of all against all. Schmitt himself made reference to Hobbes. In a sense, my project is to derive non-Hobbesian consequences from Hobbesian premises. Hobbes was right when he said that the natural condition of mankind is war. I would reformulate this differently because I think politics is about the collective subject. Hobbes was an individualist and he thought of individuals in war against each other. But there is some truth in what he said about the natural condition

of mankind being the war of all against all, in the sense that democracy is not, contrary to what Rousseau believed, the natural condition. Democracy is the result of a process of pacification. Where I think Hobbes was wrong was when he concluded that, in order to have cohesion in society, you needed to have an authoritarian order. For him the only possibility of order was authoritarian order, order in the *Leviathan*. What I want to explore is the possibility of a democratic answer to his problem. That is why I am interested in the domestication of passion, in the way in which, recognising this element of hostility, we can try to design institutions which would mobilize or defuse the antagonistic potential which is present in human relations. The problem of democratic politics is how to transform an antagonism into an "*agonism*," and how to defuse that hostility that is ever present, so that it is made compatible with democratic institutions.

Notes

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1. Ernesto Laclau & Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985); Christopher Norris, *The Truth about Postmodernism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p. 289. For a critique of Mouffe's and Laclau's early position, see Norman Geras, *Discourses of Extremity: Radical Ethics and Post-Marxist Extravagances* (London: Verso, 1985), p. 162.
2. See especially Mouffe's *The Return of the Political* (London: Verso, 1993); and *Le politique et ses enjeux* (Paris: La Découverte, 1994).
3. Laclau & Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy...*; C. Mouffe, (ed.), *Dimensions of Radical Democracy: Pluralism, Citizenship and Community* (London: Verso, 1992).
4. See, for example, Niklas Luhmann, *The Differentiation of Society*, trans. Stephen Holmes and Charles Larmore (New York: Columbia UP, 1982).
5. C. Mouffe (ed.), *Gramsci and Marxist Theory* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979).

6. See for example Jean-François Lyotard, *Le Postmodernisme expliqué aux enfants* (Paris: Galilée, 1987), pp. 36, 52, 78.
7. Jacques Derrida, "Of an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy" in Harold Coward and Toby Foshay (eds.), *Derrida and Negative Theology*, trans. John P. Leavey, Jr. (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), p. 51.
8. Carl Schmitt (1888-1985) was a German political and legal theorist. See, for example, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1976).
9 Mouffe, *Dimensions of Radical Democracy*, p. 227.
10. See, for example, Rawls' best known work *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971).
11. Mouffe, "Politics and the Limits of Liberalism" in *The Return of the Political.*
12. Timothy Garton Ash, *The Magic Lantern: The Revolution of '89 Witnessed in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin and Prague* (New York: Random House, 1990).
13. Mouffe is referring to Jean-Marie Le Pen, President of *le Front National*, the extreme right-wing nationalist French political party associated with an anti-immigrant stance.
14. The Democratic Party of the Left, formerly the Italian Communist Party or PCI.
15. Norberto Bobbio's works include *Which Socialism? Marxism, Socialism and Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986); *The Future of Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987); and *Democracy and Dictatorship: the Nature and Limits of State Power* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989).
16. See, for example, C.B. Macpherson, *Democratic Theory: Essays in Retrieval* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973).
17. See note 8.
18. Mouffe is implicitly referring to Lyotard's *Le Postmodernisme expliqué aux enfants*, pp. 36, 52, 78.
19. See Alexander Hamilton, John Jay and James Madison, *The Federalist; or, the new Constitution* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1948). *The Federalist Papers*, eighty-five articles supporting the campaign for the ratification of the United States Constitution, were written by Hamilton, Jay and Madison and originally published in 1787 and 1788 under the pseudonym "Publius."