

Political Theology and Early Modernity

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Introduction

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1. The Problem

Let's get this straight. Political theology is not the same as religion. Instead, we take it to name a form of questioning that arises precisely when religion is no longer a dominant explanatory or life mode. Political theology reflects and feeds on a crisis in religion, whether that crisis is understood historically (as Reformation) or existentially (as doubt, skepticism, or boredom). The last two decades have seen excellent work on the centrality of religion in the English Renaissance, from the groundbreaking historical work by Debora Shuger on the Renaissance Bible to the fine collection by Ewan Fernie on *Spiritual Shakespeares*, which explores the varieties of religious experience presented on the English stage.¹ The norms and forms of religious life are, however, not exactly what concerns political theology, which finds its questions rather in the moments where religion is no longer working—but neither are the secular solutions designed to replace it. Such moments include the uncanny transformation of icons into idols under the pressure of reformation, the jarring encounter with strange forms of belief abroad and at home, and the disorienting friction between sacred and secular jurisdictions, calendars, economies, membership protocols, textual operations, and styles of violence.

We take the phrase “political theology” to identify the exchanges, pacts, and contests that obtain between religious and political life, especially the use of sacred narratives, motifs, and liturgical forms to establish, legitimate, and reflect upon the sovereignty of monarchs, corporations, and parliaments.² Political theology is less a concept like sovereignty or the state of exception; or a form of government like monarchy, theocracy, or republicanism; or even a moment of historical transition from a worldview that is primarily theological to one that is primarily political. Rather, it is more like a coupling

or entanglement of ostensibly discrete domains—the political and the theological—out of which early modern and modern concepts, forms of government, and views of history are born. Although political theology is strongly associated with state formation, its mechanics are also at work in the charters of towns, the operations of guilds and livery companies, the principles of household management and animal husbandry, and even the hieratic clustering of home furnishings.³ In both Reformation and Counter-Reformation settings, the cumbersome and incomplete transfer of iconographic capital and organizational capacities from the church to a range of civic and civil bodies not only defined and strengthened new centers of authority but also helped transform traditional religious practices and institutions by draining them of a portion of their aura. Bankrupting the Peter of the medieval church in order to pay off the Paul associated with new forms of secular authority also produced subterranean and symptomatic forms of alliance between religion and politics in a modernity founded on their putative division. (On the Peter-Paul alliance, see Julia Lupton's essay on Raphael's cartoons.)

In the study of early modern Europe, political theology is often used to name a gallery of icons, rites, and narratives associated with sacred kingship and the evolving offices of the state, themselves often drawn out of the administrative care of the royal household. In this collection, however, political theology takes on a second, more polemical meaning, in which politics and theology, understood as contest rather than alliance, delineate the schism around which early modernity is constituted. Less an ideology and more of a recursive crisis, political theology unlocks the occasion in which personal sovereignty transforms into its opposites: as citizenship, the *corpus mysticum*, the multitude, or civil society. Political theology is thus bound up in epochal breaks and period definitions: whereas "Renaissance" engages primarily with the challenge of antiquity, "Early Modern" concerns the wars of religion and the attempt to resolve the new heterodoxies and troubling new pluralisms of the Reformation in a secular key.

Political theology, then, is neither a set of themes nor a particular form of government, but rather a scene of recurring conflict—both that which defines the early modern period as the attempt to resolve the challenges of the Reformation and that which continues to unfold today as the impossibility of the state to totalize politics. There are many political theologies, Western as well as non-Western, ancient as well as modern, that could be associated with civil religion—the use of religious belief to ensure obedience to the state or other kinds of political community. In early modern Europe, however, political theology has the status of a founding event—an event that, from the backward glance of the twenty-first century to be sure, makes

early modernity *modern*. In post-Reformation Europe, when multiple states and sects individually claimed to embody the one true universal church, a theology that should have led to peace turns into a source of civil war and transnational conflict. Political theology isolates the knot binding religious and secularizing impulses in early modern texts in order to confront the unexpected recurrence of the same conjuncture today. For some writers in this volume, including Victoria Kahn, Étienne Balibar, and Paul Kottman, this means claiming the secular with renewed intellectual vigor and vigilance, while for other writers, including Jennifer Rust and Julia Lupton, this means mining the remainders of theology for conducts of living and styles of comportment that are neither secular nor religious. Whether taken up critically or creatively, political theology confronts its readers as crisis and not content, as recurrent question rather than established doxa.

Although the phrase enjoys a much longer lineage, in contemporary scholarship “political theology” is associated above all with the troubled legacy of the German jurist and sometime Nazi Carl Schmitt, whose short book, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, declares the homology between religious and political concepts in order to establish the exceptional relationship of the sovereign to a law whose normative legitimacy he is nonetheless dedicated to safeguard.⁴ For Schmitt, political theology involves a double movement. Secularized theologies of the state emerge as a solution to the problem of religious division in the writings of Bodin, Hobbes, and the Treaty of Westphalia. But Schmitt also underscores the inadequacy of this resolution, showing how early modern and modern jurisprudence reinforces division and conflict among states, both within Europe, where conflict is provisionally bracketed, and in the New World, which becomes a space of unregulated, wild violence.⁵ At first glance, the modern age appears to leave its theological past behind; sacred kingship and its attendant regalia no longer concern the liberal citizen. But upon closer inspection, the modern age redefines and rebinds politics and theology in an attempt to manage its deepest tendencies toward chaos and dissolution. For Schmitt, Hobbes resolves the crisis of political theology by ceding authority to the sovereign who has the capacity to constitute the public as a space free of religious division, while Spinoza founds community on the possibility of heresy and dissensus. Schmitt attempts to foreclose Spinoza’s account of political theology by emphasizing Hobbes.⁶ Contra Schmitt, the writers in this volume are eager to recapture the democratic promises of Spinoza borne by his iconoclastic re-reading of Scripture. If, as Carlo Galli argues, political theology should be understood as an eruption, or as Jacques Lezra posits, political theology is an always incomplete confrontation between two modes, the political and the

theological, then how might this moment be thought in the service of new forms of political community, social life, and artistic invention? A political-theological as well as a biopolitical dimension animates aspects of environmentalism, social media, and DIY labor and community formations, as well as efforts at reading, making, and performance that border on the exegetical in their search for something binding, real, or true.

In literary and cultural criticism, Schmitt's work is often read in tandem—for purposes of decontamination and quarantine as well as comparison—with other figures on the scene of modern German letters, including the German-Jewish lines of thought associated with Ernst Kantorowicz, Walter Benjamin, Leo Strauss, Hannah Arendt, and Sigmund Freud, a list elastic enough to include Benjamin's Italian editor, Giorgio Agamben. In the work of these seminal thinkers, and in the studies pursued by the scholars and critics who have variously taken up their lines of thought, political theology represents not a simple synthesis or transfer, but rather the rendezvous with a constitutive impasse.⁷ What is it about politics that finds itself bound up in the archaic charisma of the sovereign? How does politics remain distinct from the content and practices of ethics, economics, and culture while nonetheless bearing on them, and how does politics share this difference with religion, whose irreducibility to culture is exposed precisely in the display, decay, and persistence of political-theological formations? How is "life" in its creaturely and biopolitical dimensions at stake in the differences that obtain between politics, religion, and their others? Finally, what is it about modern and early modern politics that both courts and resists theology, catching civic and religious forms of life in a macabre dance of failed separation and catastrophic rapprochement, skirting the Scylla and Charybdis instanced by the dream of total secularization on the one hand and the nightmare of theocracy and fundamentalism on the other?

Within the lines of inquiry posed by these questions, some scholars focus on political theology as an ideological lure and permanent temptation that requires continued resistance and demystification. (In this volume, see for example the lead essay by Kahn.) For other authors, political theology shelters existential truths about the nature of collective life; if political theology deposits a deep conservatism at the phantasmatic heart of sovereignty, the uneven development of secularization provides openings for the retooling of contemporary existence in response to what Eric Santner has called "the psychotheology of everyday life."⁸ (In this volume, see especially the essay by Rust.) Art and literature, moreover, have a role to play in freeing up the hardened nodes of political-theological fantasy so that they can be summoned to perform new cultural and psychic work. We might speak here of a *political*

*theology*₁ (inveterate, entrenched, phantasmatic, and reactionary, the stuff of Nazism, racial panic, and the *arcana imperii*), and a *political theology*₂ that would rework and refigure those disturbing anchors of psychic life, not only in order to create an easement from their tenacious claim, but also to recover and repurpose whatever it is that makes them so resilient.⁹

Political theology, then, is not itself a politics so much as it is the condition for a range of modern political positions and socio-poetic experiments. Political theology delineates the problem space between dispensations (Old and New Testaments; prophetic and priestly impulses; sacred and profane precincts) where certain kinds of obsessive ratiocination and congregational thinking are allowed to take place and sometimes take flight.¹⁰ What is at stake for political theology is not the truth of religion but the status of theology as operative fiction, whether conceived as an instrument of civil religion, a thesaurus of absolute metaphors, or the part played by myth, fantasy, and affect in the founding and sustaining of collectives. Relevant here is the work of Hans Blumenberg, one of Schmitt's strongest critics, on metaphor and concept formation. (For a discussion of Blumenberg's critique of Schmitt, see Graham Hammill's essay in this volume.) Read from Blumenberg's orientation, the sovereign person of the modern state—whether king, magistrate, or citizen—is not a concept but a metaphor, a fantasmatic crystallization that remains to be thought through, a moment of “imprecision” or a case of “nonconceptuality” that accommodates the real by symbolizing it “without helping us to reach it.”¹¹ In both the literary and the social responses that take shape in this nonconceptual region of disarray, rearrangement, and persistent personation, imagination plays a key role: poets like Shakespeare, Donne, and Milton as well as political theorists such as Spinoza, Hobbes, Bodin, Machiavelli, and Pascal variously reshape the sovereign's capacity to decide, itself linked to the creator's capacity to create, in order to stage new scenes of political making. In some cases, this might mean legitimating imagination on the grounds that it is analogous to sovereignty, as Sidney does in *The Defence of Poesy*, or legitimating literature on the grounds that it is analogous to Scripture, as Dante does in *The Divine Comedy*. Political theology on the scenes of early modernity takes its departure from compromise formations that largely avoid, however, legitimation by analogy, issuing instead in moments in which imagination reclaims the force of making against sovereignties both statist and divine by staging the very effects of sovereign power in and as what literature does.

We began with the proposition that political theology is not religion. Although political theology is sometimes described as a “turn to religion,” this is not exactly right: first, because we cannot go back to a religion of the past

without devastating consequences, as the brutal delusions of fundamentalism reveal daily; and second, because even if we could time-travel, the religions of the past would fail to meet our expectations of coherence and community. In effect, we have never been religious. The essays in this volume demonstrate that accounting for political theology leads just as readily to a critique of the “religious turn” as it does to its validation. Yet the elusiveness of the religious object also helps us to distinguish political theology from cultural analysis. Cultural studies would take religion to be one element in a series of identifiers, putting religion in its place by turning it into another sign of otherness alongside race, class, and gender. Cultural critique would see religion as a form of mystification either supported or exposed by literary texts. For cultural studies, religion is a positive form of identity; for cultural critique, religion is a negative force of manipulation.¹² Although political theology does not necessarily deny either of those positions, it stakes a third way that conceives of religions as composed of persistent sets of hermeneutic, juridical, and subjective processes that jump group lines and are generated from below as well as above. Of course, religions participate in culture, but what distinguishes religions from culture is their survival beyond the local habitations of custom, practice, and power. Political theology takes seriously the recurrence of formal patterns, exegetical habits, narrative types, and metaphysical questions (what Hannah Arendt, following Kant, called the “thought-things” of God, freedom, and immortality)¹³ that continue to animate forms of thinking, social organization, and everyday life in modernity, and which had peculiar purchase in the Renaissance.

We are not claiming that religion is foreign to culture; rather, we are asserting that, because of its odd positioning in modernity, religion, like art, requires forms of analysis other than cultural ones if we are to grasp its uncanny ability to retain and transmit its urgencies. Both art and religion can, of course, be explored on purely contextual grounds, by purely contextualizing methods, but do those approaches end up grasping what is distinctive about these forms of human expression? Just as art solicits some kind of formal analysis, religion requires some kind of formal and phenomenological accounting in order to apprehend the successive claims for attention, acknowledgment, resistance, and reform by means of which religion keeps surviving its various modern overcomings.

In the great poetic projects of Spenser and Milton, the lyric experiments of Donne and Marvell, and the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, we see something called literature emerging against the backdrop of sacred texts. In one account of this transformation, literature founds secular culture. This account offers a narrative in which early modern literature creates a

secular public, a narrative in which literature *makes* the break and *is* the break between the secular and the sacred.¹⁴ A counter-narrative would posit that there was no break at all, that each of these great poets was a man of faith, and that the task of the historical critic is to reconstruct the horizon of belief that has become illegible to us today.¹⁵ Political theology remains discontent with both narratives, seeking instead moments of impasse and hence of possibility that elicited imaginative formulations with the power to reveal and constitute new norms, communities, and forms of life. Political theology recovers the specificity of literature from the potentially neutralizing force of culture by taking seriously Renaissance literature's definitive disclosure of political making as what is at stake in key moments of revelation and scripture. In this volume, such moments include the signature of circumcision, the violence of sacrifice, the dream of a *corpus mysticum*, the challenge of neighbor love, the unions and disunions of marriage, the dialectic of idolatry and iconoclasm, and the inextricable bond between enlightenment and terror.

2. The Volume

Political Theology and Early Modernity brings together fourteen essays by established and emerging scholars in early modern studies who share an interest in the role that sixteenth- and seventeenth-century literature and thought has played in modern recurrences of political theology. The essays in this volume argue that there is a special relationship between political theology as a critical issue in literature and politics and early modernity as a period and area of study. Political theology is a distinctly modern problem, one that crystallizes in some of the most significant theoretical writings of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, including psychoanalysis, later deconstruction, and Benjamin's Baroque meditations, as well as in a world political stage marked by the resurgence of fundamentalism within a scene scripted by secularity. But political theology also has its origins in medieval iconographies of sacred kingship as distributed and displayed in the political, dramatic, and artistic forms of European civilization, along with the critique of traditional sovereignty mounted by Grotius, Hobbes, Spinoza, Locke, and others in the seventeenth century. *Political Theology and Early Modernity* makes the case not only for the relevance of political theology as a critical discourse in the humanities today but also for the essential role that Renaissance and Baroque literature and thought have played and have yet to play in its contemporary articulations.

Essays in this volume address texts or moments from the early modern period—including works by Shakespeare, Machiavelli, Raphael, Milton,

Donne, Hobbes, Pascal, and Spinoza—that have served as points of departure for later developments of politics and theology in modernity by thinkers and writers such as Schmitt, Strauss, Kantorowicz, Freud, Lacan, Blumenberg, Auerbach, de Lubac, and Arendt. Our aim in publishing these essays is to raise two questions at the same time. How does Renaissance and Baroque literature help to explain the character and persistence of political theology in modernity and postmodernity? And how does the reemergence of political theology as an intellectual and political problem in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries renew and reorient our understanding of the early modern as a period and an archive? In his essay in this volume, Jacques Lezra writes that political theology “is not a concept alone but the record of an encounter.” That is, its effects are both imaginary and real, manifest in works of art and reasons of state; engaging with those effects requires acts of critical imagination that move with precision and grace between past and present, remapping their relationship in the process.

As a term, political theology originates in ancient Rome. Marcus Terentius Varro opposes the term *theologia politike* against *theologia mythike* and *theologia kosmike* to explain the division of civil religion from mythical and natural religions.¹⁶ For Varro, political theology is the same thing as civil religion. As an early modern formulation, political theology gets its fullest and most explicit articulation in Spinoza’s *Theologico-Political Treatise*, published anonymously in 1670. There, Spinoza defines political theology in terms of a central contradiction. In one of the *Treatise*’s opening scenes, Spinoza associates political theology with a Tacitean *arcana imperii* or mystery of state. “The supreme mystery of despotism [*arcanum monarchii*], its prop and stay, is to keep men in a state of deception, and with the specious title of religion to cloak the fear by which they must be held in check, so that they will fight for their servitude as if for salvation, and count it no shame, but the highest honor, to spend their blood and their lives for the glorification of one man.”¹⁷ In this account, theology is subordinated to the political through the instrumentalization of monotheism. If this were all that Spinoza argues, political theology would be the same as Varro’s civil religion. But as the *Theologico-Political Treatise* continues, Spinoza supplements this scene with a second one in which monotheism is bound to the state through the social contract. Taking Hebrew Scripture as his proof-text, Spinoza argues that the Israelites made a contract with God *before* they made a contract with Moses. Here, all citizens were “completely equal” and “had an equal right to consult God, to receive and interpret his laws.” In short, Spinoza continues, “they all shared equally in the government of the state.”¹⁸ In this second scene, Spinoza links

religious imagination to democracy, suggesting that the modern state is ineluctably bound to the creative project of rescripting Hebrew narrative. Unlike civil religion, political theology in this sense prompts the reimagining of the political, social, and cultural life. Although Spinoza uses philology to dissolve the authority of Scripture as state-sanctioned revelation, he embraces the generative aspect of what Kahn calls “the cultural artifact we know as the Bible.”

Until very recently, political theology has not been a central question in early modern literary studies, especially in Anglo-American circles. Even though Ernst Kantorowicz’s study on medieval political theology *The King’s Two Bodies* was a central text for much early modern new historicist work, his argument about political theology and the *corpus mysticum* tended to be subordinated to a Foucauldian interest in power and the body.¹⁹ Moreover, work explicitly focused on politics and the state by historians such as Quentin Skinner and literary critics like Annabel Patterson has been decidedly secular. What changed this situation was the end of the Cold War, which brought with it the potential for reimagining Europe and international geopolitics along with a resurgence of religious fundamentalism, sectarian violence, and a war on terror justified and fought as a holy cause. As the promise of a new future began to look like the uncanny repetition of the religious wars of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a number of European intellectuals began to probe with increasing vigor the religious and theological underpinnings of the modern state. It was in this context that a number of contemporary scholars across the humanities began to read Schmitt with renewed critical attention.²⁰ Based on his readings of Bodin and Hobbes, Schmitt proposes that just as theology assumes a God who can suspend natural law through the creative force of miracles, so too does the modern state assume a juridical sovereign who can suspend positive law and decide exceptions.²¹ The implication of Schmitt’s argument is that the early modern and modern sense of public space is always and already overdetermined by theological concepts and ways of thinking. To find a way out of religious conflict, early liberal writers like Hobbes and Locke subordinate theological concerns to the secular state, creating a civic space that purports to be free from doctrinal and confessional concerns. But, as Schmitt’s critique of liberalism insists, this vision of politics reiterates theological concepts in a different key.

The essays in our volume explore other encounters with early modern texts in order to arrive at new readings of political theology. Do not, however, expect consensus in the arguments and analyses that lie ahead. Our purpose in assembling the essays in this volume is not to develop a single line of

argumentation that would answer Schmitt's challenge, but to think through the problems and promises associated with political theology as they appear on the scenes of early modernity, modernity, and postmodernity as well.

3. Essay Descriptions

Rather than reinstating a simple divide between political theology and secular liberalism, the essays in our first section, "Modern Destinations," move from Schmitt's political writings to his literary criticism, and from Schmitt to Strauss, Blumenberg, Kantorowicz, de Lubac, Benjamin, Arendt, and Auerbach, exploring the knotted sites of conflict and concurrence between politics and theology. These essays—by Victoria Kahn, Adam Sitze, Carlo Galli, Graham Hammill, Jennifer Rust, Kathleen Biddick, Paul Kottmann, and Jane O. Newman—share in the effort to shift the locus of political theology from the person of the sovereign to a variety of other nodal points: the *corpus mysticum* of the multitude, rhetoric and metaphor, modes of theological and secular reasoning, and forms of cultural and political making. In the process, these essays reimagine political theology and open new sets of terms for its critique. We continue with a second section, "Scenes of Early Modernity." Traveling back and forth from enlightened despotism to the Reformation and beyond, essays in this section take the literary, figurative, and aesthetic dimensions of political theology as their points of departure. Rather than starting with political thought, these essays—by Jacques Lezra, Julia Reinhard Lupton, Drew Daniel, Gregory Kneidel, and Jonathan Goldberg—begin at the various conjunctions of the secular, the sacred, and the textual, developing in diverse ways the expected forms of community that emerge from a heterogeneous sense of political theology, and exploring the various forms and fantasies of violence by which political theology persists in the secular world. Finally, we are happy to conclude with a postscript by Étienne Balibar that returns us to the problems with which we began, namely the shared ancestry of monotheism and the Enlightenment that turns critiques of political theology into acknowledgments of its longevity.

In the inaugural essay of our first section, "Political Theology and Liberal Culture: Strauss, Schmitt, Spinoza, and Arendt," Victoria Kahn develops a critical account of political theology through her reading of Strauss and Spinoza. The value of Strauss as opposed to Schmitt, Kahn argues, is that he thought about political theology in terms of philosophy. Can there be a version of political philosophy that is based on reason and not revelation? To address this question, Strauss developed a critique of liberal culture, most trenchantly in his work on Spinoza. For Strauss, proto-liberal philosophers

like Hobbes and Spinoza attempt to domesticate the problem of religious difference by turning religion into culture. But the cost of this domestication is that proto-liberal theories of culture simply repress the central role of revelation. For this reason, Strauss argues, revelation in politics and religion is an ongoing problem over which liberalism cannot help but stumble. Kahn then shows how Spinoza resists Strauss's reading. For Spinoza, she argues, culture is not a byproduct of religion. Rather, religion, philosophy, and politics are all created by culture. In Kahn's account, culture's central term is imagination. That is, culture assumes a version of imagination that is constitutive and productive, not illusory and false, so that cultural imagination becomes the means by which religion, politics, and reason are differently cultivated. Spinoza's *Theological Political-Treatise* may in fact stage a central conflict between theocracy and culture, but since both are produced by a more fundamental notion of imagination as constitutive, Kahn argues, culture becomes the vehicle for a critique of political theology. But, Kahn suggests, this insight means that contemporary intellectuals need to rethink their understanding of secular culture not just as the site of hegemony but also as the place of invention.

The Italian jurist and Schmitt scholar Carlo Galli develops his account of Schmitt through an innovative interpretation of Schmitt's *Hamlet or Hecuba*, which appeared in German in 1956 and was recently published in a complete and authorized English translation in 2009. In 1983, Galli worked with Simona Forti to bring out an Italian edition of *Hamlet oder Hekuba*; we are very pleased to be able to include Galli's introduction to that edition in this collection, along with a commentary on Galli and Schmitt by Adam Sitze, who co-translated Galli's piece with Amanda Minervini. Sitze's commentary is meant to introduce an English-speaking audience to Galli's groundbreaking work on Schmitt and political theology. In "*Hamlet: Representation and the Concrete*," Galli links Schmitt's *Hamlet* essay to *Nomos of the Earth*, which Schmitt published in 1950 and which he considered to be his most important work. In *Nomos*, Schmitt argues that the long political settlement organized by the Catholic Church was dissolved and replaced in the early modern period by the *jus publicum europaeum*, a form of limited hostility that allowed the European nation-states to control war amongst themselves on the lines of a self-contained game or *Spiel*, but that radically deregulated the state of war in relation to the seas and to nations outside Europe, leading to the genocidal biopolitics of colonialism. *Hamlet*, with its echoes of religious schism, its maritime setting, and its haunting by crises besetting the person of the monarch, unfolds in the space of an early modernity still in transition between forms of geopolitical order. *Hamlet* discloses the protean and unstable

other side of the *jus publicum europaeum*, a “barbaric” play of indecision, violence, and catastrophe that is in the mid-twentieth century the European state’s undoing. For Galli, *Hamlet or Hecuba* is not an incidental piece of amateur literary criticism, but rather the text in which Schmitt most openly confronted the tragic structure of his own thought.

Graham Hammill keeps his eye on Schmitt but shifts the problem of political theology onto the terrain of rhetoric. In “Blumenberg and Schmitt on the Rhetoric of Political Theology,” Hammill shows how Blumenberg develops an understanding of political theology based on metaphor and imagination. Initially Blumenberg used rhetoric as a term of abuse to dismiss Schmitt’s account of the theologico-political sovereign, but as the debate continued, he shifted tactics, redefining some of Schmitt’s key concepts through a rhetorical understanding of politics in order to underscore the role that invention plays in early modern and modern versions of political theology. As Hammill shows, for both Schmitt and Blumenberg, the key figure is Hobbes. For Schmitt, Hobbes transposes theological concepts into a modern theory of the state, whereas for Blumenberg, Hobbes initiates a linguistic turn in modern political thought that endows the political subject with theological metaphors that can be manipulated and potentially left behind. In Hammill’s reading, Blumenberg’s account of political theology and rhetoric anticipates and, in many ways, goes beyond Agamben’s recent work on economic theology. Aiming to initiate a conversation between political theology and Foucauldian models of biopower, Agamben shows how theologies of the Trinity from the early Church Fathers through the seventeenth century stage various forms of governmentality. Hammill argues that Blumenberg’s understanding of political theology and rhetoric offers a more affirmative model of biopower, one that emphasizes the power of metaphor to place the subject within theologico-political models of governance while also underscoring rhetoric as a fundamentally creative form of life.

In “Political Theologies of the *Corpus Mysticum*,” Jennifer Rust anatomizes the concept of the mystical body in the writings of Schmitt, Kantorowicz, and the modern Jesuit theologian Henri de Lubac. Rust demonstrates that Kantorowicz uses the lateral sociological imagery of the *corpus mysticum*, the Pauline figure for the body of the faithful united in the institutions of the church, to counter the more personalist and decidedly vertical models of Catholic order put forward by Schmitt in *Roman Catholicism and Political Form* in 1923. Kantorowicz’s main ammunition here is de Lubac’s *Corpus Mysticum: The Eucharist and the Church in the Middle Ages*, written during World War II and published in 1944. In an argument that would ultimately influence Vatican II, de Lubac argues that the *corpus mysticum* originally re-

ferred to both the sacrificial body of Christ in the Eucharist and the social body of the church instituted in communion. Kantorowicz used the institutional dimensions of de Lubac's *corpus mysticum* to argue for a more horizontal, communal, and durable conception of both the Catholic Church and the forms of secular sovereignty produced out of its tropology than that put forward in Schmitt's writings. Yet Rust goes on to show that Kantorowicz also fundamentally flattens the dynamism of de Lubac's account; Kantorowicz substitutes abstraction, fictionality, and legalism for de Lubac's performative and sacramental account of communion and community. As such, Kantorowicz's secular body is the flip side of Schmitt's authoritarianism. Rust proceeds by reading Kantorowicz against Schmitt (for lateral versus horizontal forms of sovereignty) and then reading de Lubac against Kantorowicz (for sacramental, dynamic, and performative versions of the *corpus mysticum* against abstract, juridical, and bureaucratic ones), opening the door to post-secular readings of Catholic political theology conducted in a progressive social key.

In "Dead Neighbor Archives: Jews, Muslims, and the Enemy's Two Bodies," Kathleen Biddick explores recent work by Agamben and Santner, key figures in the translation of Schmitt's ideas into more left-leaning articulations of political theology. Following the writings of early twentieth-century Jewish philosophers and critical thinkers such as Benjamin, Franz Rosenzweig, and Jacob Taubes, Agamben and Santner turn political theology against itself in order to open a new vision of the political. Focusing specifically on their recuperation of messianic time, Biddick shows how contemporary radical politics remains unwittingly caught in the medieval world of Christian typology. An originary moment for her is Peter the Venerable's campaign against Muslims and Jews in the twelfth century, among other things a hermeneutic battle in which both groups were excluded from the miracle of Christian meaning-making. This exclusion surreptitiously continues in the work of Rosenzweig, Benjamin, and Taubes, all of whom stumble over the figure of the undead Muslim, an untimely irritant whose presence keeps the typological machine grinding. Rather than repeatedly deciding on typology and its covert structures of enmity and exclusion, Biddick argues that typology's untimely remainders foster visions of community in the medieval, early modern, and postmodern worlds.

In "Novus Ordo Saeclorum: Hannah Arendt on Revolutionary Spirit," Paul Kottman reconstructs Arendt's attempts to describe the purely human foundations of political authority in secular modernity. Like Kahn, Kottman is concerned with Enlightenment revisitations of the Renaissance, elaborating in Arendt a new vision of the secular that moves beyond the opposition

between liberalism and a Schmittian understanding of political theology. Unlike Kahn, Kottman locates secular creation in politics and not in culture. Machiavelli is Arendt's early modern point of departure; in the *Discorsi*, Machiavelli depicts the founding of both Rome and Venice as moments of human constitution that broke from the tyranny of kinship without referring themselves to divine foundations except through the self-conscious poeisis of civic myth. Arendt insists on the necessary relationship between freedom, founding, and politics: politics is acting freely, and action is new beginning, the founding of possibilities for future action. Whereas such a formulation can lead to an aporia—freedom disappears as soon as the foundation it gives birth to congeals into an order—Kottman demonstrates that the “revolutionary spirit” is a form of active recollection—of recollection *through action*—by means of which new generations remain faithful to the promise of freedom made by previous generations through their deeds in the present. Yet modernity for Arendt is ultimately *not* continuous with the Renaissance. In the wake of the revolutions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Arendt tries to rethink the proper role of the revolutionary spirit as the recollection, indeed the mourning, for the complementary failures of the French and the American Revolutions. Whereas the American Revolution, in devoting itself to the pursuit of happiness, failed to account for mass poverty and thus remained a movement of landholders, becoming the nursery of liberal capitalism rather than the seat of a genuine civic republicanism, the French Revolution, by staking its claims in the liberation of the poor from the necessity of hunger, roped the revolutionary spirit to a certain biopolitical program that would constrain politics to the management of life.

Finally, in “Force and Justice: Auerbach's Pascal,” Jane O. Newman shows how scholarly work on political theology in post-World War I Germany enacted and enabled resistance to the Nazi state. Newman focuses her analysis on Auerbach's shifting engagement with Pascal, beginning with his 1933 monograph, *The French Audience in Seventeenth-Century France*, and continuing up through his 1941 essay, “The Triumph of Evil,” which was revised and reprinted several times over the course of Auerbach's life and was included as a chapter in his posthumously published *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (1959). Initially, Newman argues, Auerbach saw Pascal as part of a defanged intelligentsia produced by what he calls de-Christianization, the separation of the City of God from the City of Man that leaves humans in a world of force with no recourse to justice. But as he was rendered an increasingly passive political actor by the Nazi regime, Auerbach came to see Pascal making an argument for the necessary, if also unpredictable, intrusion of the City of God into the world of human force through the figure of the

just individual who resists temporal injustice. Moreover, as Newman shows through careful analysis of Auerbach's footnotes, his critical engagements, and reviews of his own work, at issue for Auerbach was the *Kulturkampf*—the attempt before World War I to create a politically unified Germany through German Lutheranism—and its afterlife in Nazi Germany. The very opposite of a Schmittian version of political theology in which theological concepts are embodied in the person of the sovereign, for Auerbach political theology served as a means by which he could give account of himself and of intellectual activity in mid twentieth-century Europe.

The second section of our collection opens with Jacques Lezra's essay, "The Instance of the Sovereign in the Unconscious: The Primal Scenes of Political Theology." Here, Lezra stages a revelatory encounter between psychoanalysis and the story of Don Carlos, the tragedy of a promising young prince sacrificed to the despotic powers of throne and altar. In Schiller's play *Don Carlos* and in Verdi's opera on the same theme, the story came to emblemize for the rest of Europe Spain's turn away from modernity and enlightenment. Schiller's play celebrates secularization by activating the *akedah*, the almost-sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham, a primal scene for the three monotheisms and the forms of sacrifice and anti-sacrifice, of archaism and reform, around which they organize their scriptures, practices, and self-narrations. For Schiller, the despotic monarch's murder of his enlightened son brands as distinctively "Spanish" the intellectual bankruptcy of inquisition and absolutism. And yet this political-theological legacy returns, in the form of the Spanish Catholicism of Donoso and his German Catholic champion Schmitt, indicating the imperfect character of the secularization displaced from Spain onto other parts of Europe. Like Kahn, Lezra is interested in the Enlightenment as the clearing house of certain Renaissance themes and problems; the Enlightenment in effect tries to finish the secularizing projects that the Renaissance initiates, yet its own efforts remain troubled by the phantasmatic energy of the tropes it attempts to lay to rest. Lezra's essay is significant on many counts, not the least of which is his definitive articulation of the symptomatic role of Spain in the broader European imaginary, and the part played by translation (linguistic and mediatic) in hitching the Spanish problem to a series of apparently unrelated projects, including psychoanalysis and liberalism.

Critics as diverse as Leo Strauss and Samuel Weber have criticized Schmitt for ignoring the role that mediation plays in the installation of the theologico-political sovereign. Schmitt's version of political representation tends to cast the sovereign as a distinctly unmediated form of personhood. In her essay "Staging the Sovereign Softscape," Julia Reinhard Lupton approaches

political theology from a diametrically opposed point of view: the mediating work of tapestry in producing the fragile, highly mobile, and sublime aura of the theologico-political court. Focusing on a set of tapestries illustrating the lives of Sts. Peter and Paul, initially designed by Raphael for Pope Leo X, acquired by Henry VIII, and sold off by Oliver Cromwell, Lupton considers the various ways in which the Pauline Renaissance takes shape through the rich and textured scenography of design. As objects that can be bought and sold, Lupton argues, Raphael's tapestries map the pathway from the church to the confessional state. As an instance of iconography joining the life of Paul to that of Peter, the arras disclose the particular in the universal, the Jewish in the Catholic, and the Catholic in the Protestant. As a form of mediation, tapestry helped to create a public life that was at once theological, theatrical, and designed. Like *The Winter's Tale*, which Lupton also considers, Raphael's tapestries in the Tudor and Stuart courts knit together a hybrid space in which Catholic, Protestant, and profane iconographies join together in and as a form of entertainment. And finally, as softscape, tapestry is emblematic of the various threads and connective tissues both real and symbolic that make up the billowing surfaces and temporary architecture of theologico-political spaces. Instead of condensing political theology into the person of the sovereign, Lupton argues for a more expansive and multidimensional approach that allows us to reencounter the layered, infolded, and continually productive character of the Pauline Renaissance as it unfurls on the scenes of early modernity and in contemporary politics.

In "Striking the French Match: Jean Bodin, Queen Elizabeth, and the Occultation of Sovereign Marriage," Drew Daniel offers marriage as a key figure of political theology, one that links sexuality and erotic life to the life of the body politic. Daniel focuses on Elizabeth's possible marriage to the Duke of Alençon and the role that Bodin played in negotiating that marriage in order to ask whether there might be irreconcilable differences between a political theology that takes marriage as its point of departure and one that starts with sovereignty. Recasting a political theology of the absolute and single sovereign through the dynamic sense of coupling that is at the heart of marriage, Daniel rethinks Schmitt's understanding of the agency and temporality of decision-making. In Daniel's account, Elizabeth becomes Schmitt's unlikely partner, as her opacity in relation to her possible marriage to Alençon—her various and contradictory statements, actions, and communications—offers an eccentric perspective on the purity and clarity of Schmitt's solitary, deciding sovereign. In part, Elizabeth's responses to her possible marriage offer historical nuance and texture to Schmitt's account of political theology. And in part, her literary reflections on the marriage disclose strategies of de-

ferral at the heart of political decision-making. Proceeding through a series of couplings—Elizabeth and Alençon, Bodin and Schmitt, Saint Paul and John Stubbs, Elizabeth and Alain Badiou—Daniel’s argument orchestrates a *ménage à trois* among literature, history, and theory in which each plays helpmeet to the other.

Gregory Kneidel focuses on the limits of typological operations. In “Giving Up the Ghost: The Death of Christ in and as Secular Law,” Kneidel poses the apparently simple question of why and how the two halves of the Christian Bible came to be called “testaments.” The proof text is Hebrews 9:15–19, which moves from testament as covenant or *berit* (the word used for the covenant at Sinai as well as the covenant of circumcision and the covenant with Noah) to testament as last will, coming from Roman testate law. Reading Renaissance biblical commentaries as well as legal treatises, Kneidel teases out a number of possible narratives and scenarios implied in this almost imperceptible yet dramatic slippage between kinds of testament. Typologically, Roman law displaces Hebrew law, and Christ is cast not only as the new Moses but as the new Justinian. But, for Kneidel, typology does not give us the whole story. In probate law, when two wills survive the testator, one testament must be preferred to the other, based on the “spirit” or meaning of the will, to be determined equitably by the probate judge on the presumption of parental “love.” Probate reasoning leads to the same conclusion as typology (the New Testament trumps the Old Testament because it is more “loving”), yet it does so via principles of equity and discretion. Kneidel goes on to link these various debates and tensions to the plurality of jurisdictions in early modern England and the drive to both homogenize and secularize them, a debate in which he locates the poetry of John Donne.

Jonathan Goldberg approaches political theology through a reading of Milton’s *Samson Agonistes*. A long tradition of Milton criticism sees Samson’s decision to massacre the Philistines as the poem’s central problem. Is Samson divinely inspired and, therefore, is Milton legitimating religious violence? Or is Samson a rogue actor, misguided in his inspiration, in which case Milton would be distancing himself from religious violence? However, as Goldberg’s essay “Samson Uncircumcised” reminds us, the decision—including the decision between these two readings of Milton’s drama—is predicated upon a difference whose undecidability exceeds any attempt to resolve it. In Goldberg’s account, this undecidability is figured as circumcision. Less a Jewish ritual to be superseded via Christian typology, for Milton circumcision is a mark of difference within the typological imaginary that simultaneously binds, interrupts, and disturbs hermeneutic, political, religious, and sexual oppositions—between literal and figurative, friend and enemy, Christian

and Jew, man and woman, homosexual and heterosexual—around which *Samson Agonistes* is organized. *Samson* is Milton's attempt to account for this mark of difference that, Goldberg argues, motivated his revolutionary politics. At the same time, like Daniel, Goldberg draws our attention to the specifically sexual aspects of political theology. As Goldberg argues, the cut of circumcision also prompts a mass of erotic fantasies in *Samson* around phallic potency and castration. One implication of this argument is that the modern state cannot secure the difference between political and religious violence because the state is in fact founded on a secret complicity shared by the two. A second implication is that religio-political violence needs to be understood in its erotic dimensions as well, since this violence draws its resources from erotic fantasies held in reserve by revolutionary politics.

We conclude this volume with a postscript by Étienne Balibar entitled “The Idea of ‘New Enlightenment’ [*Nouvelles Lumières*] and the Contradictions of Universalism.” Recognizing the Enlightenment as a historical moment with its roots in the early modernity of Spinoza, Balibar argues that enlightenment is also an ongoing possibility for thought, political reform, and social organization, a project that finds itself repeated in multiple places and times in history and across the globe. Balibar probes the dialectic between the Enlightenment as a distinctively Western project whose terms European civilization seems doomed to repeat, and enlightenment as a process of thought and emancipation internal to all cultures and systems of belief. For Balibar, universalism—the legacy of the Enlightenment, but also of monotheism—remains a vexed but urgent mandate for global thought today. Universalism, he argues, repeatedly falls short of its own goals, yet cannot simply be inverted or negated by its opposite (particularism, culture, anthropological difference). Instead, our task according to Balibar is to “tarry” within the contradictions of universalism in order to find ways to displace or disarm them, with the hope of achieving genuine moments of community in contemporary politics, thought, and life.

Notes

1. Debora Kuller Shuger, *Sacred Rhetoric: The Christian Grand Style in the English Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Ewan Fernie, ed., *Spiritual Shakespeares* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005). For other innovative approaches to religion in the English Renaissance, see Hannibal Hamlin, *Psalm Culture and Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Phebe Jensen, *Religion and Revelry in Shakespeare's Festive World* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); James Kearney, *The Incarnate Text: Imagining the Book in Reformation England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); Peter Lake and Michael C. Questier, *The Anti-Christ's Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists and Players in Post-Reformation England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); and

Susannah Monta, *Martyrdom and Literature in Early Modern England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

2. Recent contributions to political theology in early modern studies include Paul Cefalu, *English Renaissance Literature and Contemporary Theory: The Sublime Objects of Theology* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Graham Hammill, *The Mosaic Constitution: Political Theology and Imagination from Machiavelli to Milton*, forthcoming from the University of Chicago Press; Richard Halpern, "The King's Two Buckets: Kantorowicz, *Richard II*, and *Fiscal Trauerspiel*," *Representations* 106 (Spring 2009): 67–76; Gregory Kneidel, *Rethinking the Turn to Religion in Early Modern English Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Anselm Haverkamp, "Richard II, Bracton, and the End of Political Theology," *Law and Literature* 16.3 (2005): 313–26; Jacques Lezra, *Wild Materialism: The Ethic of Terror and the Modern Republic* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010); Julia Reinhard Lupton, *Citizen-Saints: Shakespeare and Political Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); and Jennifer Rust, "Political Theology and Shakespeare Studies," *Literature Compass* 6.1 (November 2008): 175–90. In German, see Thomas Frank, Albrecht Kokshorke, Susanne Liebermann, and Ethel de Mazza, *Des Kaisers neue Kleider: Über das Imaginäre politischer Herrschaft* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2002); Albrecht Kokshorke et al., *Der fiktive Staat: Konstruktionen des politischen Körpers in der Geschichte Europas* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2007); and Björn Quiring, *Shakespeares Fluch* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2009).

3. For some of these latter extensions, see Julia Reinhard Lupton, *Thinking with Shakespeare: Essays on Politics and Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

4. Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. Tracy Strong (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

5. Carl Schmitt, *Nomos of the Earth*, trans. G. L. Ulmen (New York: Telos Press, 2003).

6. Carl Schmitt, *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes: Meaning and Failure of a Political Symbol*, introduced by George Schwab, trans. George Schwab and Erna Hilfstein (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1996).

7. There is a growing bibliography of work on political theology that takes up the two terms as the sign of an impasse, not a synthesis (which means leaving aside works of positive theology). Key texts include Eric Santner, *The Royal Remains: The People's Two Bodies and the Endgames of Sovereignty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Hent de Vries and Lawrence E. Sullivan, eds., *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006); Hent de Vries and Samuel Weber, eds., *Religion and Media* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); Miguel Vatter, ed., *Crediting God: Sovereignty and Religion in the Age of Global Capitalism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011); Vincent P. Pecora, *Secularization and Cultural Criticism: Religion, Nation, and Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006); and Slavoj Žižek, Eric Santner, and Kenneth Reinhard, *The Neighbor: Three Inquiries in Political Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

8. Eric Santner, *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life: Reflections on Freud and Rosenzweig* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001). See also Bonnie Honig, *Emergency Politics: Paradox, Law, Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), for inventive readings of Rosenzweig, democracy, and emergency contra Schmitt.

9. Graham Hammill develops this distinction in *The Mosaic Constitution: Political Theology and Imagination from Machiavelli to Milton*.

10. Drew Daniel cites Daniel Dennett on problem spaces in AI research: "An impasse creates a new problem space (a sort of topical workspace) in which the problem to be solved is precisely the impasse. This may generate yet another, meta-meta traffic problem space, and so on." *The*

Melancholy Assemblage, Fordham University Press, forthcoming.

11. Hans Blumenberg, "Prospect for a Theory of Nonconceptuality," in *Shipwreck with Spectator: Paradigm for a Metaphor of Existence*, trans. Steven Rendall (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997), 81, 98. See also Hans Blumenberg, *Paradigms for a Metaphorology*, trans. Robert Savage (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010).

12. See our introduction to *Sovereigns, Citizens, and Saints: Political Theology and Renaissance Literature*, ed. Julia Reinhard Lupton and Graham Hammill, special issue, *Religion and Literature* 38 (Autumn 2006): 1–6.

13. Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1971), 86.

14. For a powerful and highly influential version of this argument, see Richard Helgerson's groundbreaking *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

15. For innovative variations of this argument, see for example Maurice Hunt, *Shakespeare's Religious Allusiveness: Its Play and Tolerance* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004) and John Cox, *Seeming Knowledge: Shakespeare and Sceptical Faith* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2007).

16. Hent de Vries, "Introduction," in *Political Theologies*, 25.

17. *Spinoza: Complete Works*, trans. Samuel Shirley, ed. and introduced by Michael L. Morgan (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing, 2002), 389–90.

18. *Ibid.*, 540.

19. For an account of the shift from the Kantorowicz of the New Historicism to the Kantorowicz of political theology, see Victoria Kahn, "Political Theology and Fiction in *The King's Two Bodies*," *Representations* 106 (Spring 2009): 77–78.

20. Perhaps most significant among these intellectuals for the overall project of this volume is Agamben, whose work on sovereignty and law traces the labyrinthine pathways of political theology from the contemporary moment backwards to interwar Germany, early modern Europe, the foundations of the Catholic Church, and the administration of Roman law. These various moments dramatize the persistence of political theology through problems of inclusion and exclusion, sovereignty, and violence as well as dreams of redemption, disturbances in time-keeping, and the return of forgotten possibilities. See Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

21. The American reception of Schmitt has tended to focus on *Political Theology* and *The Concept of the Political*, both written during the Weimar period and both locating the problem of political theology in the personal authority of the sovereign, although new work on Schmitt is beginning to focus on his constitutional writings and his theories of representation. This new work is represented, for example, in a special issue of *Telos* (Winter 2010) on Schmitt and Shakespeare, edited by David T. Pan and Julia Reinhard Lupton.