

THE AESTHETICS OF WAR IN THE THOUGHT OF GIOVANNI GENTILE AND CARL SCHMITT

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INTRODUCTION¹

This research note is a preliminary sketch of my doctoral research. The aim of the project is to establish a dialogue between Giovanni Gentile (1875 - 1944) and Carl Schmitt (1888 - 1985). The conversation I wish to present, draws on several commonalities between the two thinkers, both biographical and intellectual. Both Schmitt and Gentile were involved with the Nazi and Fascist regimes, Schmitt as a jurist and Gentile as a reformer and Minister of Education. Intellectually, they share a number of features: theoretical allegiances and interests, as well as critiquing similar approaches and traditions. Both thinkers place an emphasis on concreteness, as well as an interest in conceptual history. Although for different reasons, Schmitt and Gentile were highly critical of positivism, liberalism, mechanisms, any theory that adopts an intellectualistic (transcendental) approach to politics and law (Schmitt), and philosophy (Gentile). The conversation leads to a comparison of their treatments of war, which I analyse through a framework offered by aesthetics. In what follows I will provide a brief presentation of Gentile, followed by an outline of my reading of Schmitt and Gentile's treatment of war, and the ways in which I aim at using aesthetics.

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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Gentile was among the towering intellectual figures of 20th century Italy. Born in 1875 in Castelvetro (Sicily), Gentile gained his intellectual formation at the *Scuola Normale Superiore* in Pisa. In 1893 Gentile began his University studies in the faculty of history under the guidance of Alessandro D'Ancona, a prominent historian of Italian literature. While in Pisa, Gentile became acquainted with Donato Jaja, a neo-Hegelian scholar that will spark a profound fascination with philosophy in the young Gentile, who will change the direction of his studies from history to philosophy (Turi, 1995, p. 19). Jaja's work built on Italian Hegelian scholarship of the *Risorgimento*, in particular that of Bertrando Spaventa, a largely understudied thinker who attempted a reform Hegelian dialectics, as well as striving to use the thought of Hegel as a blueprint for Italy's political programme (Piccone, 1977, p. 51). When Gentile began his University studies, figures like Jaja were peripheral in the intellectual landscape of the turn of the century. Due to positivism's well-established dominance in philosophy, the discourse was largely occupied with highlighting and fostering connections between the philosophical and the scientific method, marginalising metaphysics and especially, Idealism. In 1896, Gentile initiated a correspondence with Benedetto Croce, who at the time was a young, successful, and dissenting voice in the intellectual landscape. Gentile read several articles where Croce criticised the positivist historical methodology². The Croce-Gentile rapport will give rise to the neo-Idealist movement, which will come to occupy the Italian intellectual scene for almost half a century.

Although Gentile is mostly known for his political involvement and his contribution to philosophy, his *oeuvre* mirrors his intellectual formation. His works are a combination of conceptual and cultural history, philosophy (metaphysics, aesthetics, ethics), philosophy of law, philosophy of history, philosophy of education (*pedagogia*), and political philosophy. Gentile's extremely prolific intellectual career began in 1896, and continued uninterrupted until he was murdered in 1944. Gentile's corpus consists of over fifty volumes³. Outside the academy, Gentile's political involvement was largely culture-oriented. During the Fascist Regime, he held office as Minister of Education (1922 – 1924) entirely reforming the Italian educational system. In that period, he also authored a number pro-Fascist articles, as well as writing *Origins and Doctrine of Fascism* (1928), a text outlining the 'philosophy' behind Fascism. In light of these activities, Gentile is still subjected to a *damnatio memoriae*, his role as the ideologue of Fascism, a 'stain' not easily forgotten, tainting his name to this day. As a result of that, today, Gentile's intellectual contributions are largely neglected in all the fields in which he was active. Only a few of Gentile's texts are available in translation⁴ and in light

² Croce had been attacking Pasquale Villari's attempt to relegate history to science. As a response to Villari, Croce published *History Brought Under the General Concept of Art* (1893), which denied the similarities between history and science, and instead brought to the fore the common traits of art and history, both concerned with the beautiful representation of individuals.

³ The publication of Gentile's complete works was attempted and interrupted by the following publishers: Treves (Milan), by Sansoni (Firenze) in 1936 - directed by Gentile's son Federico, who in 1946 then delegated the task to *Fondazione Giovanni Gentile per gli Studi Filosofici* (Giovanni Gentile Foundation for Philosophical Studies) based in Rome. In 2001 *Le Lettere* (ex Sansoni) has republished Gentile's complete works following the division envisioned by Ugo Spirito and Vito Bellezza. The complete bibliography of Gentile's works was compiled by Bellezza in 1950, and published as the third volume of the book series *Giovanni Gentile. La vita e il pensiero* curated by the Gentile Foundation.

⁴ Regrettably, only three of these texts exist in the English. Those are: *Theory of the Mind as Pure Act*, translated from the third edition by H. Wildon Carr. London, MacMillan and Co., 1922. *Genesis and Structure of*

of the neglect on primary sources, it is not surprising that the scholarship on Gentile is all but extensive. Most of the recent literature aims at reintroducing his thought, or rather to drag Gentile out of the oblivion where he currently lays. Despite the vastness and the richness of his thought, as well as his influence on Collingwood, Gramsci, and Croce, Gentile has not yet been rediscovered.

The fate of Schmitt *today* could not be more different: we have two biographies (Bendersky, 1983; Mehring, 2014), as well as an insightful intellectual biography of Schmitt (Balakrishnan, 2002). In 'Controversies over Carl Schmitt: A Review of Recent Literature', Caldwell (2005) writes: "the authors of the books under review here see him variously as a traditional nineteenth-century liberal, as a fascist in the Italian vein, as a conservative revolutionary, as an insightful critic of Marx, as an antisemite, and as a brilliant theorist of democracy" (357). This passage depicts the wide array of ways in which Schmitt's work has been read, and does not address the multiplicity of articles that deal with comparisons between Schmitt and other thinkers, the attempts to use Schmitt's thought today, and the left's efforts to use Schmitt as a critic of liberal democracy, and the scholarship on the reception of Schmitt's thought in several parts of the world. This shows that *pace* the controversial nature of Schmitt's *persona*, as well as some of his ideas, Schmitt has now been accepted in academic circles.

A project that creates a dialogue between Schmitt and Gentile is a new exercise in Anglo-American and Italian academia. To my knowledge, the only piece where Schmitt and Gentile figure in the same paragraph is an article co-authored by Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy (1990), they write:

Here it would be necessary to rigorously show what kinds of relationships ideology, thus conceived as a total *Weltanschauung*, maintains with what Arendt calls 'total domination' (*OT*, p. 436), that is to say, with what Carl Schmitt - basing himself in this on the authority both of the properly fascist discourse (that of Mussolini and Giovanni Gentile) and the Jüngerian concept of 'total mobilization' (which furnished a first definition of technology as a total world power) - called the *Total State* (293)

Regrettably, there is no evidence that Schmitt read Gentile, and Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy provide no reference that indicates otherwise. The aim of this research is to simulate a conversation between Schmitt and Gentile, shedding light on the similarities and connections between them. In doing so, this project fills several *lacunae* in the scholarship. Firstly, contribute to studies on Schmitt by providing an investigation his treatment of war, and exploring it through an aesthetic framework. Secondly, to shed light on the profundity of Gentile's thought, both political and philosophical. Finally, to the field of aesthetics, by showing how a concept (war) can retain an aesthetic qualifier.

There are some disciplinary differences between Schmitt and Gentile, which translate in the fields they contributed to, as well as the mode of theorising they employ. Gentile, for instance, made no contribution to political theory, while Schmitt's writings never reached the philosophical complexity and rigour of Gentile's. In spite of the dissimilar nature and scope of their intellectual contributions, Gentile and Schmitt do share some theoretical common ground. One of such commonalities is the emphasis on the concrete. At several points

Society, translated by H.S. Harris. Urbana, Ill. University of Illinois Press, 1960. *The Philosophy of Art*, translated by Giovanni Gullace. Ithaca, NY. Cornell University Press, 1972.

Schmitt exposes the inefficacy of a 'scientific' view of concepts, and suggests a concrete approach to their analysis. Gentile's philosophical position is the formulation of a form of idealism — actual idealism or absolute spiritualism — that aims at refuting the transcendentalism of previous philosophical currents. For Gentile (1912) positivism, intellectualism, and previous forms of idealism all entail the existence of a reality that is prior to thought (232). Such reality is untouched by human thought, which only plays a peripheral role in those metaphysical outlooks. The role of thought in these views is peripheral, a 'spectator' as opposed to an 'actor', because it simply reflects what has already been delineated (either by God's mind, the laws of nature, or necessity and fatality) (Gentile, 1922, p. 6). This form of thought, Gentile (1922) calls 'abstract' (43). To that, he juxtaposes 'concrete thought' — namely, the thought that is capable of shaping reality, prior to which nothing exists (Gentile, 1922, p. 4). Therefore, the centre of Gentile's philosophical system is human, concrete thought. The centrality played by concrete thought in Gentile, explains his refutation of any theory that reduces human endeavours (political, legal, historical, and philosophical) to mechanisms. Albeit in different ways, Schmitt and Gentile theorise with a particular attention to the concrete, which leads them both to research the origins, definitions, and metamorphoses of concepts. Therefore, there is a sense in which both Schmitt and Gentile are concerned with 'rupture'. Schmitt's rupture is the faith in the exception, and Gentile's rupture is the sense in which the human spirit can — and must — be placed at the centre of theoretical discussions, thus rupturing a discourse, that since its inception, has maintained the existence of some entity prior to thought.

SCHMITT AND GENTILE ON WAR

A reader of Schmitt might notice that his thought and consequently, his pen, seems to have two faces. On the one hand, we are confronted with Schmitt the jurist, whose analytic and synthetic prose is essentially oriented towards order and state politics. On the other hand, at times we encounter a different pen, one that appears to momentarily abandon the normativity of order that characterises his *oeuvre*, in favour of decisionist and quasi-irrationalist tendencies, as well as a form of faith in the extraordinary. The latter Schmitt abandons the detached lapidary style in favour of a metaphoric, obscure, and at times prophetic prose. In this project, I wish to demonstrate that Schmitt's two-facedness is related to his profound fascination with war. In *The Concept of the Political* (Schmitt, 1996, p. 25-26) Schmitt tells his readers that a definition of the political can be provided if and only if we discover the 'specific political categories'. Those must be independent from other categories of human endeavour such as ethics, aesthetics and so on. For Schmitt (1996), "the specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy" (26). Now, unlike the other antithesis (i.e., beautiful and ugly in aesthetics; and good and evil in ethics), the political alone possesses the 'outmost degree of intensity', meaning that "the political enemy ... [is] existentially something different and alien, so that in the extreme case conflicts with him are possible" (27). Therefore, the political is the only antithesis that can lead to justified combat, for the enemy threatens our very existence and our way of life. Hence, the political distinction (friend/enemy) essentially entails the possibility of war. Two passages from the *Concept* are worth quoting to understand Schmitt's treatment of war. The first passage points to war as the outcome of the political antithesis between friend and enemy:

War follows from enmity. War is the existential negation of the enemy. It is the most extreme consequence of enmity. It does not have to be common, normal, something ideal, or desirable. But it must nevertheless remain a real possibility for as long as the concept of the enemy remains valid (33).

The second passage elaborates on the function of war as the existential negation of the enemy, and points to the fact that war is justifiable only in the extreme situation of enmity and via the political antithesis:

There exists no rational purpose, no norm no matter how true, no program, no matter how exemplary, no social ideal no matter how beautiful, no legitimacy, nor legality which could justify men in killing each other for this reason. If such physical destruction of human life is not motivated by an existential threat to one's own way of life, then it cannot be justified (49).

Here, Schmitt indirectly reiterates the earlier argument according to which the political distinction is the only antithesis or motive that rightfully motivate combat. From these passages, we can make the justified inference that Schmitt is not exalting, or encouraging war. More than that, he seems to provide a rationale for *defensive* war rather than offensive, as combat is justified *only* in the case of existential negation. Moreover, in *The Concept* it seems as though war represents a test of ultimate faith in, as well as validity of the political entity. Schmitt tells us that the state is the political entity *par excellence* because it alone possesses the “the real possibility of deciding in a concrete situation upon the enemy and the ability to fight him with the power emanating from the entity” (45). Moreover, the *jus belli* for Schmitt, “implies a double possibility: the right to demand from its own members the readiness to die and unhesitatingly to kill enemies” (46). In the same text Schmitt also reminds us that if another entity decides on the political distinction, then that entity will become *the* political entity, replacing the state precisely because the new entity bears decisional power. This mention of the political decision brings us to Schmitt's treatment of the state of exception. In *Political Theology* Schmitt (2006) writes: “in the exception the power of real life breaks through the crust of a mechanism that has become torpid by repetition” (5). Later on Schmitt (2006) argues that “all significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts ... the exception in jurisprudence is analogous to the miracle in theology” (36).

The passages from *The Concept* and *Political Theology* show the two Schmitt(s) I illustrated above. While in the former text war receives a detached systematic treatment and it is mentioned because it is part of an inevitable phenomenon, viz. the political friend/enemy grouping, in the latter text we are presented with a different picture. The depiction of the extreme situation in *Political Theology* is adorned with a powerful metaphor, which gives the reader the impression that Schmitt is almost wishing for the state of exception to materialise. The *agere* required in the state of exception seems to defeat the endless liberal *deliberare*. *Prima facie* equating the exception with a miracle seems to point to the materialisation of the exception as a miracle. In that case, we would read the materialisation of a miracle of something desirable, a fruit of providence. This interpretative move, fitting with the widespread reading of Schmitt as an irrationalist thinker in whose mind the pregnant seeds of Nazism already existed, is not the sole available reading. David Hume's definition of a miracle as paves the way for a second interpretation. In Hume's view a “miracle is a violation of the laws of nature” (Hume, 2007, p. 83). This presents a miracle as a *temporal* suspension of the laws of nature, just like the exception requires a *temporal* suspension of the laws of the state. The aftermath of both a miracle, and the exception, are the same: normality and order. After the exception is dealt with, the state returns to its normal, unexceptional workings. In my view Schmitt's reading of the exception could not be more different than Agamben's Benjaminian diagnosis of our political world, where the state of exception has become a paradigm of government (Agamben, 2005, p. 6-7). For Schmitt, the point is that our political and legal structures must be able to react in a timely and appropriate fashion to the state of exception.

That the state of exception cannot be codified is part of its very nature, characterised by its very exceptionality thus residing outside an established paradigm of rules. The interpretation I have proposed is designed to show that Schmitt, far from advocating a perpetual state of exception, has faith in that moment because of the miraculous power it holds. As a result of this power, the exception becomes more interesting than the rule. Therefore, although not an advocate of the exception, Schmitt is *fascinated* by its power because in the face of the exception, liberalism's desires to obliterate it reveal its inaptness.

For Schmitt, war was never the point of politics, "But as an ever present possibility it is the leading presupposition which determines in a characteristic way human action and thinking and thereby creates a specifically political behaviour" (Schmitt, 1996, p. 34). His descriptive claim that war *could* materialise, coupled with the normative claim that it *should not* materialise, is of vital importance in my analysis of Schmitt as the ordered thinker. Through the claim that war is a perpetual logical possibility resulting from a necessarily unavoidable political distinction, Schmitt is providing a modal argument. By that I mean that Schmitt is pointing to the possibility of conflict arising from a necessary condition of the political world. Through the recognition of this state of affairs, Schmitt then understands that war is a revelatory moment in a number of ways. Firstly, the readiness to die is a crucial aspect of the political: "If ordered to go to war, the Schmittian agent will obey because his ultimate aim is the preservation of the political entity to which he belongs" (Slomp, 2009, p. 164). If the state is no longer capable of making a friend/enemy distinction, then the state will disintegrate and succumb in the face of a real political entity emerging from elsewhere. Therefore, in the moment of war, or in the perpetual possibility of war, the question of *belonging* is fundamental. Put crudely, an agent will not risk his life for a political entity he does not feel part of, thus revealing his loyalties to a political group. This fact (or rather, *where loyalties lie*) will only be manifest in the most extreme antagonism. In my reading of Schmitt, the question of war is *an extreme, but a revelatory one*. Secondly, if the exception were to materialise, the state as a unity would be in serious jeopardy, which explains why Schmitt wants to leave *carte blanche* for the channels that permit dealing with the exception as swiftly as possible. However, in virtue of its potentially devastating force, the exception has the power to defeat an ineffective order. I base my reading of Schmitt's treatment of war as a 'politics of distance' on the two arguments outlined above. The claim that Schmitt provides a politics of distance from war, is compatible with both, the normative Schmitt and the irrationalist Schmitt, and most importantly, provides an account for their co-existence. Although his theories are characterised by a normativity of order, Schmitt is somehow fascinated by war. This fascination is evident in the revelatory power that war retains, as well as the exception's ability to defeat the liberal mechanism. Schmitt therefore, aesthetically contemplates war at a distance, without directly inviting it in his political and legal pictures. However, its very aesthetic contemplation can generate a number of answers, as well as shaping political behaviour extensively.

Schmitt's two faces have been previously detected in the scholarship. For instance, Wolin (1990) suggested a reconciliation through what he dubs *political existentialism*. He writes: "there are specific 'existentialist' precepts that allow him to unite both a radical decisionism with a concrete philosophy of order. There is little doubt that he perceived the consummate union of these two doctrines to be the *Führerstaat* of Adolf Hitler" (394). I wish to distance my interpretation from this reading. What I propose to offer instead, is an investigation of Schmitt's two faces and explain the oscillation appealing to Schmitt's fascination with war, which I argue, is an aesthetic fascination. There are a number of articles that deal with the

aesthetic in Schmitt. Some concentrate Shakespeare's influence on Schmitt (Pan: 1987; Pye: 2009). These articles do not explore the aesthetic dimension of an aspect of Schmitt's thought. Other contributions identify an aesthetic angle in Schmitt's theories. To my knowledge, the first in that vein is Wolin (1992), where the author claims Schmitt gives the state of emergency a "quasi aestheticist justification" (434). The exception necessarily ruptures a tranquil state of normalcy proper of bourgeois society, hence, the emergency gains an aesthetic power as the defeater of the liberal *Lebensphilosophie*. Schmitt's aesthetic treatment of the exception is an 'aesthetics of horror' (term borrowed from Bohrer) within is a tendency to "propa[gate] a temporal semantics of rupture, discontinuity, and shock" (Wolin, 1992, p.433). Wolin's piece exemplifies a common trend in the literature on the aesthetic in Schmitt: the neglect to define and thus occupy the term 'aesthetic' with a definition. What does it mean for something — a concept, moment, or theory — to be aesthetic? In Wolin (1992) it seems that 'the aesthetic' is taken to mean the shockingly violent power of the exception. Were my modest reading of Wolin correct, it would seem that 'aesthetics' could be replaced with words in the vicinity of 'mystifying', 'mystical', 'awe-aspiring', thus showing that there is nothing *special* about the attribute 'aesthetic'. In other words, the 'aesthetic' in this sense is used as a word — as opposed to a concept.

As I mentioned above, Gentile was no political theorist, thus his treatment of war is radically different in scope and nature to that of Schmitt. Gentile's writings on war can be located in three theoretical and temporal segments. Firstly, in the untranslated *Fondamenti della Filosofia del Diritto* [*Fundamentals of the Philosophy of Right*] (1916). Secondly, the journalistic pieces prior, and leading to the First World War collected in *Guerra e Fede* [*War and Faith*] (1919), and those written right after the War, now in *Dopo la Vittoria* [*After the Victory*] (1920). Thirdly, in the writings of the Fascist period, in particular *I Profeti del Risorgimento Italiano* [*Prophets of the Italian Risorgimento*] (1923), and *Origins and Doctrine of Fascism* (1928). Here I will focus on the first and third segments.

Fundamentals was conceived as a course of lectures on the philosophy of law delivered in 1916 to the students of the Faculty of Jurisprudence at the University of Pisa. The text is a typically actualist analysis of the discipline, in both its scope and teleology. In a chapter dealing with the concept of dialectic as development, and the place of the individual in society, Gentile (2003) writes: "war does not have its end in itself; war is the instauration of peace, resolution of a duality or plurality in the collective will, the realisation of which is immanent in conflict, representing its true *raison d'être*, and its proper meaning" (72). He continues by arguing that war is the result of particular interests, which are yet to understand their own particularity — interests which can only be pacified through the ordeal of war. He then specifies that conflict should be understood not as a transitory phase between individualism and a universal substance that negates individualism, but rather, as a necessary moment in the spirit's dialectical life, for there can be no peace without war (Gentile, 2003, p. 73). Thus, philosophically, Gentile understands war as a dialectical phenomenon part of the unification process of the multiplicity of wills in society. In that sense, war is both the signal of a lack of unitary, but also the first step towards its resolution. Politically, Gentile was a fierce supporter of Italy's participation in the First World War⁵, which triggered his interest for the *Fasci di Combattimento* (Bedeschi, 2004, p. 74). *I Profeti* surveys the specifically Italian tradition of the *Risorgimento*, with its key figures (Giuseppe Mazzini and Vincenzo Gioberti

⁵ Croce business

on the theoretical side, and Goffredo Mameli and Giuseppe Garibaldi on the practical) and the fundamental aspects of their thought. The aim of *I Profeti* is to resurrect the philosophy and conception of life of the *Risorgimento* and continue its project in Italy's new historical moment: Fascism. Given that war had been the fundamental idea of the Fascists, Gentile (2004) shows the ways in which war and struggle were pivotal in the thought of Mazzini and in the living example of Mameli. Gentile defines Mazzini as "the educator, the apostle: the idea made person" (212), thus paving the way for an exploration of his thought directed at its very employment as a source of inspiration for the Italian people. More interesting is the claim that Mazzini is the prophet of Fascist Italy, which shares all the postulates of Mazzini's philosophy (Gentile, 2004, p. 152). Readers soon learn that Mazzini's philosophy forms a religious conception of life (Gentile, 2004, p.17) which entails a conception of ethics according to which duties (*sanctity of duty*) always precede rights, and consequently, where rights cannot be claimed unless duties are complied with. Politically, Mazzini uses the primacy of duties to make the argument that persons have a duty to form a people, and consequently a nation. The construction of the nation must be achieved "not through solidarity, but through struggle [*lotta*] and war: that war which — like Mazzini wrote in 1855 — "is sacred like death, and like death, gives access to a holier life, and a higher ideal" (Gentile, 2004, p. 22). The idea that nation is created through struggle and war is fitting with Mazzini's belief that "life is neither spectacle nor enjoyment, but a struggle, sacrifice ... rights cannot be obtained from above, but must be conquered through insurrection and martyrdom" (Gentile, 2004, p. 26). Thus, for Gentile, faith in the Mazzinian project of the *Risorgimento* should not be abandoned, but rekindled in Italy's new spirit. In Gentile's Mazzinian thought, war is *the* unification strategy. A strategy that seems not to be abandoned even in times of peace, for it seems to be the very essence of life. In that vein, Gentile (2004) includes Mameli in the list of 'prophets' by writing that "he is the martyr par excellence: the martyr whose life and death enlighten the origins of this Italy" (158). Further on, Gentile (2004) quotes Mazzini on Mameli's death: "Mazzini wrote that Mameli should not be pitied for his death, for he died 'of the beautiful death, fighting in the open in the name of God and People'" (163).

In the 1928 *Origins*, referring to the importance of war for the Fascists, he writes: "The war was seen as a way to cement the nation as only war can, creating a single thought for all citizens, a single feeling, a single passion, and a common hope, an anxiety lived by all, day by day — with the hope that the life of the individual might be seen and felt as all — but which transcends the particular interests of any" (Gentile, 2009, p. 2). In the aftermath of the much-disputed intervention in the war, when faith in the restoration of peace and order in the Italian State seemed vain, Gentile (2009) wrote that the Fascists never lost hope: "disappointments and the anguish that came with peace notwithstanding — continued to have faith in the war, and what victory in that war, meant. They sought to restore Italy to itself, through the reestablishment of discipline and the reordering of social and political forces within the state" (18). Therefore, in *Origins* Gentile argues for Italy's participation in the war, because he (like the *Fasci*) believed that war was the only way to bring about a sense of 'Italianness', which. Fighting in the same war, the fragmented Italian people would develop a sense of brotherhood and friendship that was inexistent at the time, despite the experience of the *Risorgimento*. Thus, war becomes the very distinguishing phenomenon of political life. Although this seems *prima facie* quite similar to what Schmitt wrote in *The Concept*, in Gentile's writing we find a perpetual call for arms, martyrdom, and war. Moreover, that very war is the moral answer to a moral life, to a conception of politics that is necessarily religious and ethical. Thus, in the very act of death for one's nation, one becomes a hero and a martyr. War is therefore pivotal in this conception of political life and living politics, where the lines

between a personal meaning of life and the nation's teleology are almost inexistent. In placing war at the centre of this political picture, Gentile invites questions of moral realisation as well as aesthetic unity. While in Schmitt, war is always at a distance, contemplated as a perpetual possibility for an array of political and juridic questions, but never invited into political life. In this sense, I have called Schmitt's posture towards war *a politics of distance*, and Gentile's *a politics of proximity*. In Gentile's political works, war figures in two ways: theoretically, as the necessary dialectical moment in the clash of interests, which when materialised resets the political order, and from a political perspective, as the moral answer to Italy's existential political problem, *viz.* the absence of a nation. The encounter between Schmitt and Gentile unveils a number of intriguing features of war, undetectable in liberal thinkers and in the liberal tradition, broadly construed. Among these features: the creative destruction of war — the creation of a new order brought about by the violent demise of the old; the unifying power of combat — the horror, violence, and consequent trauma, can unify the people at a much deeper level than any other event and phenomenon. Through the dialogue between Gentile and Schmitt, an interesting spatiality with regard to war emerges: a *politics of distance* (Schmitt), contra a *politics of proximity* (Gentile).

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