

# *Exploring the Political Thoughts and Social Influences of Schmitt and Foucault*

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**Abstract:** This article mainly discusses the ideas of Schmitt and Foucault and their impact on society. Schmitt and Foucault are both famous thinkers, and their own ideas are very famous. Exploring the differences between the political thoughts of Schmitt and Foucault would be beneficial for scholars to understand their ideas and better know the reasons for the differences. Schmitt used to be a Nazi, and his ideas were sometimes misunderstood. But this does not affect his and Foucault's ideas, which have led to many changes and progress in society. The first part discusses their respective introductions and their thoughts. The second part describes their differences, including differences in views of sovereign roles, the relationship between power and knowledge, different social backgrounds and Political ideologies, and changes to society. The third part is a discussion about their ideas. The final section analyzes the conclusions of these individuals, their views on rights, and concludes which side is better.

**Keywords:** political thoughts, social influences, Schmitt, Foucault

## 1. Introduction

Power and knowledge have been important research topics in the field of social sciences. Michel Foucault and Carl Schmitt, two influential thinkers, have put forward unique perspectives on the relationship between power and knowledge. Foucault, one of the most significant French philosophers of the 20th century, revealed the mechanisms of power and how knowledge is shaped by power in modern society through his in-depth studies. Foucault's crucial point is that power is not finally about repression but the creation of an identity [1]. On the other hand, Schmitt, a German political scientist and jurist, focused on the concept of politics and the essence of power, emphasizing the close connection between power and the sovereign state. These two thinkers' viewpoints provide valuable insights for our understanding of the interaction between power and knowledge. This paper aims to discuss Foucault and Schmitt's perspectives on the relationship between power and knowledge and analyze their similarities and differences. However, there are shortcomings of existing research on the different perspectives of Foucault and Schmitt in their studies on power and knowledge, including:

**Theoretical bias:** Existing research tends to emphasize the differences between Foucault and Schmitt's perspectives, often overlooking their potential commonalities or complementary aspects. This bias can limit a comprehensive understanding of their ideas.

**Lack of consideration for cultural backgrounds:** Foucault and Schmitt come from different intellectual traditions and cultural backgrounds, which have influenced their viewpoints. However, existing research rarely explores the impact of these cultural backgrounds on their ideas, thereby neglecting a more comprehensive analysis.

**Focus on specific research fields:** Existing research often confines Foucault and Schmitt's perspectives to specific fields such as political philosophy or social theory, lacking interdisciplinary perspectives. This limitation restricts a holistic assessment of their ideas.

Schmitt was an outstanding German thinker of the last century, who had previously been a Nazi. His ideas had a significant impact on 20th century philosophy and theology, and he proposed many important concepts related to the constitution, such as institutional guarantees. Foucault was a famous French philosopher and social thinker of the last century. He has had a significant impact on literary criticism and its theories, philosophy, science, and other fields. What are their main ideas? One of Schmitt's main theories is the specific difference between friends and enemies. He explains that the difference between friends and enemies is public, not private. Foucault's theory is skeptical of any attempt to argue that political systems and a set of practices are better than political rights. The ideas of these two thinkers also have shortcomings. Schmitt's idea was opposed due to being a Nazi before. In fact, over the past 100 years, Political philosophy and theory have opposed Schmitt, including Foucault. Furthermore, literature, like philosophy and history, cannot escape ideology and power, but literature is literature because of its independence and uniqueness, which Foucault overlooked. The impact of the two on society is also different. In recent years, there has been a new Schmitt craze worldwide, including China, which has had a significant impact on today's international relations. Foucault has written many books that have had a significant impact on the West, and his criticism of humanistic literature has also sparked reflection. The article compares the differences in their main ideas and influences.

## **2. Comparisons**

Schmitt, and Foucault are each critical of a state characterized merely by limited government, individual rights, and public policies designed primarily to maximize economic growth. Their critiques will be compared in this regard. Although Schmitt and Foucault have different perspectives on the subject, their central concerns intersect in several ways. Both Schmitt and Foucault provide valuable insights into the limits and potential dangers of a state characterized only by limited government, individual rights, and economic growth. By conducting an in-depth study of Foucault and Schmitt's perspectives, it is better to understand the relationship between power and knowledge and apply these theories in practice. This is of great significance to scholars and researchers in fields such as political science, sociology, and philosophy.

### **2.1. The Definition and the Role of Power**

Foucault argues that power is not a fixed entity belonging to a specific institution, but a dynamic and fluid force that exists in all aspects of society. He reveals how power operates through subtle and pervasive techniques of surveillance and punishment to discipline people's behavior and thinking in order to create norms and rules in society. Large technology companies, for example, have extensive knowledge of user behavior and preferences through the collection and processing of personal data. This knowledge capability allows them to tailor personalized ads, recommendations, and services that influence users' spending habits and decisions. It highlights how knowledge is an instrument of power,

shaping individuals' behaviors, opinions and decisions in different domains. And by emphasizing the presence and influence of knowledge power in different domains, it critically examines and deal with the processes of knowledge generation and dissemination.

In contrast, Schmitt examines the issue of power primarily in the political realm, particularly highlighting the formation and operation of the sovereign state. He believes that political decision-making holds fundamental power significance, and the sovereign state represents the core and embodiment of power. Schmitt emphasizes the close connection between power and the sovereign state, asserting that power forms the foundation and manifestation of the state. He highlights the decisive and exceptional nature of politics, cautioning against the potential abuse of power leading to authoritarianism and totalitarianism.

## **2.2. The Run Mode of Power**

Foucault's perspective also emphasizes the asymmetrical and micro-level nature of power. He focuses on the micro-power relations that emerge and are maintained in everyday practices that affect the bodies, behaviors, and minds of individuals in different social institutions and contexts. He reveals how power is generated and reinforced through the disciplinary mechanisms of social institutions such as schools, hospitals, and prisons, and gives power universality and effectiveness. Nick Rengger argues that Foucault, by emphasizing the interplay between power and knowledge, reveals the micro-mechanisms of power in modern politics and introduces concepts like "biopower" and "disciplinary society" [2]. Use the family as an example. The family is the micro-social unit in which power dynamics exist. Parents usually have authority in the family and influence the behavior and education of their children. They establish rules, enforce boundaries, and guide the development of their children based on their knowledge and values. These power relations within the family also exhibit asymmetries and micro-level characteristics. The opinion that the exercise of his power often requires imbalance and control rather than fairness and equality, otherwise rights would be difficult to enforce is argued. In John Rawls's book "A Theory of Justice," Rawls presents a liberal political philosophy. He argues that Foucault's focus on how power and knowledge shape individual subjectivity may lead to excessive control and infringements on freedom. Rawls emphasizes that the political system should protect citizens' basic rights and freedoms [3].

Schmitt has a unique perspective on the operation of power. He argues that political power is exercised and controlled by ruling elites, rather than being a pervasive force across various levels of society. Schmitt emphasizes the importance of the state as the core institution for the exercise of power. His theory of power is based on his study of state sovereignty. According to Schmitt, the state is a political organization with independent decision-making capacity and supreme authority, enabling it to exercise and wield power. Schmitt sees power as the ability to make decisions and command resources, often demonstrated through decisive actions in extreme situations such as war and emergencies. Overall, Schmitt's viewpoint underscores the significance of the state as the central entity for the exercise of power, as well as the role of confrontation and competition in international politics in shaping power dynamics. His theory of power stands somewhat opposed to Foucault's perspective, which emphasizes the universality and micro-level operation of power, as well as the role of knowledge.

## **2.3. The Connection Between Power and Knowledge**

Foucault's emphasizes the close relationship between power and knowledge and shows how power shapes, regulates, and controls individuals through the production and operation of knowledge. Foucault's analysis reveals how power is formed and consolidated through knowledge production and utilization. He presents the theory of power-knowledge, suggesting that power exercises control

over individuals and groups through mechanisms such as surveillance, discipline, and punishment. Foucault focuses on how power shapes our thoughts, behaviors, and identities through the dissemination, organization, and manipulation of knowledge. He views power as a pervasive force present at various levels of society, while knowledge serves as an effective means of exercising power. Robert Torre suggests that Foucault's perspective considers power as a pervasive force across various levels of society, highlighting its dispersed nature, strategic aspects, and processes of normalization.

Schmitt paid attention to the important role that knowledge plays in supporting the exercise of state power. He recognized that effective decision-making by political leaders requires the need for accurate information and knowledge. The application of knowledge influences the development and implementation of national policy. The existence of government agencies and intelligence agencies dedicated to the collection and analysis of information and knowledge further emphasizes their important role in supporting the exercise of state power. However, it is important to acknowledge the potential challenges associated with the use of knowledge. Schmitt warns of the manipulative and controlling nature of knowledge. Governments and power structures can use knowledge to shape public opinion, manipulate information, and control the thoughts and behaviors of individuals. This potential abuse of power can destabilize state authority and lead to social injustice. Overall, Schmitt provides an interesting perspective on the interplay between knowledge and power in the functioning of the state. His emphasis on the role of sovereignty and knowledge provides valuable insights into the creation and exercise of state power. However, the application of knowledge must be approached with care to ensure that power is exercised rationally and in accordance with the principles of equity and social development. John Dunn points out Schmitt's focus on state sovereignty and the role of political decision-makers. He believes that Schmitt offers a distinct perspective on power and legitimacy.

#### **2.4. The Differences of Their Cultural Backgrounds**

Foucault and Schmitt differ in their cultural backgrounds, which partially explains why they have different views on power and knowledge. Firstly, Foucault, a French philosopher and social theorist, was deeply influenced by French intellectual traditions such as structuralism and post-structuralism. His thinking was shaped by political events and social movements of 20th-century France. Living in a society that emphasized individual freedom and rights, Foucault's research focused on how individuals and societies are shaped through knowledge, power, and social institutions. In contrast, Schmitt was a German political scientist and jurist whose ideas emerged in the early 20th-century German political context. He lived through World War I and the Nazi era, experiences that greatly influenced his views on political power and sovereignty.

These different cultural backgrounds contribute to the divergent perspectives of Foucault and Schmitt on power and knowledge. Foucault emphasizes the universality and micro-level operation of power, considering knowledge and power as intertwined and controlled through social institutions and disciplinary techniques. On the other hand, Schmitt emphasizes the state as the central institution of power and views power as the capacity for decision-making and commanding resources, with specific attention to confrontation and competition in international politics.

These differences also reflect their distinct focuses on social and political issues. Foucault is more concerned with the operation of power in everyday life and the limitations on individual subjectivity, while Schmitt is more concerned with issues of state sovereignty and security. Consequently, their viewpoints diverge on issues of power and knowledge due to the influence of their respective cultural backgrounds and research interests.

## 2.5. Limitations of Some Researches

While Foucault and Schmitt differ in their approaches, some scholars have sought to bridge their perspectives. Wendy Brown suggests that both Foucault and Schmitt share an understanding of power as productive, rather than solely repressive. [4] They acknowledge that power not only suppresses but also creates new forms of governance. Brown argues that combining Foucault's emphasis on the diffuse nature of power and knowledge with Schmitt's focus on sovereignty can help illuminate contemporary political dynamics.

Moreover, other scholars have critiqued certain aspects of Foucault and Schmitt's ideas. Judith Butler raises concerns about Foucault's concept of power-knowledge, suggesting that it lacks a clear theory of agency and may overlook the potential for resistance within power structures. Similarly, Richard Bellamy argues that Schmitt's reliance on the sovereign decision-maker neglects the role of institutions and legal frameworks in shaping power relations

## 2.6. The Difference of Thinking Between Schmitt and Foucault

Schmitt's theory expresses the answer to this question as a description of the essence of politics. Schmitt famously claimed the specific political differences between friends and enemies. Schmitt explained that the difference between friends and enemies is essentially public, not personal. A person may have their own enemies, but personal hostility is not a political phenomenon. Politics involves groups as common enemies. Two groups of people will find themselves in the same hostile state, only when there is a possibility of war and killing between them. Therefore, the difference between friends and enemies refers to the maximum degree of strength and association or separation. The greatest degree of connection is the willingness to fight and sacrifice for others in one's own group, while the greatest degree of separation is the willingness to kill others for them, simply because they are members of hostile groups [5]. Schmitt believes that political hostility has many different roots. Politics is different from other fields of value because it is not based on its own differences. Ethics is based on the distinction between good and bad morals, while economics is based on the distinction between profit and no profit. The political differences between friends and enemies do not use these other distinctions, nor do they use any specific distinctions such as language, race, culture, or religion, which may become differences in human identity and differences.

For Schmitt, conflict is the decisive factor in politics itself, and politics is crucial to humanity. His influence on Political ideologies of the last century was subtle, but his core thought penetrated into the thoughts of the Left–right political spectrum [6]. Schmitt completely rejected Classical liberalism, which inspired the left and right to attack tolerance, market economy, limited the government and peace.

Foucault advocated resistance to the political status and power of the established government. He is skeptical of any claim that a political regime and a set of practices are superior to other political forces [7]. Using rational theory to support or argue political views is another attempt to exercise power over others. Therefore, he avoided any plane of political reform, and also avoided the explicit expression of moral and rational norms that any society should adhere to.

About Foucault, people widely believed that he adopted a new approach to political issues, with the new description of power and subject as the core. Critics are more concerned with their coherence than questioning the novelty of this views. Foucault defined government in security, territory, and population as allowing for a complex form of population oriented power, political and economic knowledge as the main form, and security as the basic technological tool.

## 2.7. Social Influence of Schmitt and Foucault

German legal theorist Karl Schmitt wrote the book “Political Concepts”, which had a huge impact on both the left-wing anti liberalism and the right-wing anti liberalism. Schmitt believes that specific political differences can be simplified as differences between friends and enemies.

The tradition of western Ideology of political ideologies has been flowing with the blood of “realistic education”. Schmitt’s “Concept of Politics” is just a beacon tower that continues this blood. The fundamental conflict between political realism and idealism and its solution have always been the basic theoretical problem in the history of western Ideology of political ideologies, and it is also an eternal practical problem for western theorists to understand and elaborate the political order of the world.

Carl Schmitt written several comments to reveal the structural defects of the League of Nations. As early as 1926, the year Germany was allowed to join the League of Nations, Schmitt wrote “The Two Faces of the Geneva League of Nations” to remind the German public opinion community that it is still highly uncertain whether the League of Nations constitutes a true alliance.

For Schmitt, conflict is the decisive factor in politics, and politics is very important to the people. His influence on the Political ideologies of the last century was subtle, but his main ideas penetrated into the concepts of the left wing and the right wing. Schmitt completely denied Classical liberalism, which inspired left-wing and right-wing attacks on tolerance, market economy, limited government and peace [5].

After admitting Schmitt’s personal participation in the Nazi Party, this had a chilling effect. It also explains many of the dark moments of political behavior in history. This helps explain, but cannot prove. His ideas guided and sometimes influenced the political sensitivity of many people.

China is very fascinated by Carl Schmitt. The acceptance and influence of Schmitt’s works in China are so extensive and profound, even known as the “Schmitt fever”. Schmitt’s influence is evident in theoretical debates about the contemporary role of Chinese classical thought and how it is challenged by modernity [8]. However, in addition to Schmitt’s contributions to these philosophical debates, an important source of Schmitt’s influence can be traced back to his political legitimacy, national sovereignty, and contemporary China’s foreign affairs. Therefore, Schmitt fever deserves our careful study, because it provides valuable insights for China’s politics, law and Political philosophy.

Foucault is one of the most famous intellectuals in France. His historical theory about the concept of madness was immediately praised. Foucault wrote influential books on powerful Western societies, such as medicine, religion, and more abstract theoretical issues such as power, knowledge, sex, and self. Although Foucault’s research subjects are extensive, they all focus on the knowledge and power of people related to books. For Foucault, many modern concepts and practices that attempt to reveal the truth about humanity have actually created the types of people they claim to discover.

The antipsychotic movements of the 1970s and 1980s were largely attributed to Foucault, although he did not consider himself a part of them. His criticism of the humanities triggered many reflections in anthropology and related fields, although it helped a new generation of scholars to carry out cross-cultural dialogue on the themes and variants of domination and Subjectivism.

Foucault overturned the Enlightenment ideal that knowledge is power, fundamentally claiming that power is knowledge [9]. Consistent with many postmodern ideas, Foucault affirmed that it is impossible to break free from some form of power or other forms of shackles, as power is the constituent dimension of all discourse.

### 3. Discussions

Some existing researches lack consideration for cultural backgrounds: Foucault and Schmitt come from different intellectual traditions and cultural backgrounds, which have influenced their viewpoints. However, existing research rarely explores the impact of these cultural backgrounds on their ideas, thereby neglecting a more comprehensive analysis.

Foucault's cultural background had a profound influence on his ideas about the relationship between power and knowledge. Growing up in post-World War II France, Foucault was exposed to a society characterized by political and social upheaval. This historical context fuelled his interest in questions of power, knowledge, and social structures. His analysis of power went beyond traditional Marxist and structuralist perspectives, shifting attention to the micro-level workings of power and its practices in everyday life. He entered the *École Normale Supérieure* (the standard launching pad for major French philosophers) in 1946, during the heyday of existential phenomenology [10].

Foucault's cultural background also included the existentialist and phenomenological traditions in France. He embraced the critical thinking style of the Western philosophical tradition and maintained connections with contemporary French philosophers such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Jacques Derrida. These philosophers delved into issues of power, identity, freedom, and subjectivity, inspiring him in his own investigations.

Foucault's thought emphasizes the interplay between power and knowledge. He argued that power is not merely a repressive mechanism but also a productive force. Knowledge, according to him, is not a mere reflection of objective facts, but is shaped and utilized within power relations. Through his studies of institutions like prisons, mental asylums, and disciplines, Foucault revealed how power forms and sustains its legitimacy and efficacy through knowledge.

In conclusion, Foucault's cultural background had a profound influence on his ideas about the relationship between power and knowledge. His critical thinking style, sensitivity to social transformations, and inspiration from the Western philosophical tradition allowed him to propose novel theoretical perspectives and foster in-depth exploration of the relationship between power and knowledge.

The cultural background of Carl Schmitt has had a significant impact on his views on power and knowledge. Here are some possible influences:

Schmitt's thinking is influenced by the German tradition, including German jurisprudence, history, and philosophy. German jurisprudence emphasizes the importance of authority and sovereignty, which is reflected in Schmitt's conception of power.

Schmitt proposed the theory of the state of emergency, which asserts that the ability to exercise power in times of crisis is a sign of a nation's sovereignty. This theory reflects Schmitt's preference for concentrated power and authority, aligning with the traditional emphasis on authority in his cultural background.

Schmitt's critique of the rule of law is also influenced by his cultural background. Germany has experienced failures of legal systems and political turmoil throughout its history, which may have led Schmitt to have reduced trust in the rule of law and advocate for a political model based on sovereignty. Though Schmitt had not been a supporter of National Socialism before Hitler came to power, he sided with the Nazis after 1933 [11].

Schmitt's views include a skepticism towards knowledge, asserting that abstract universal principles cannot be applied to concrete political decision-making. This skepticism may be related to the German philosophical tradition's questioning of rationalism and universal values.

While the cultural background of Carl Schmitt has influenced his views, it is important to note that his ideas are diverse and complex. Other factors such as his personal experiences, historical events, and interactions with other philosophers and political thinkers also play a role in shaping his thoughts.

## 4. Conclusions

This passage discusses the perspectives of Michel Foucault and Carl Schmitt on the relationship between power and knowledge. Foucault's main point is that power is not solely about repression but also involves the creation of identity. Schmitt emphasizes the connection between power and the sovereign state. The existing research on their perspectives has some shortcomings, including theoretical bias, lack of consideration for cultural backgrounds, and a focus on specific research fields.

Foucault's perspective emphasizes the universality and micro-level operation of power, while Schmitt's viewpoint underscores the significance of the state and the role of confrontation in shaping power dynamics. Understanding these different theories contributes to a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between power and knowledge.

In examining the connection between power and knowledge, Foucault highlights how power shapes individuals through the production and operation of knowledge. On the other hand, Schmitt recognizes the role of knowledge in supporting the exercise of state power. He acknowledges that effective decision-making requires accurate information and knowledge, but also warns of the potential manipulative and controlling nature of knowledge. Foucault and Schmitt's different cultural backgrounds contribute to their divergent perspectives on power and knowledge. Foucault's French background influenced his focus on individual freedom and the role of social institutions, while Schmitt's German background shaped his emphasis on state sovereignty and security. Overall, considering their cultural backgrounds and acknowledging the limitations of their perspectives can lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between power and knowledge.

Schmitt's political thought revolves around the distinction between friends and enemies, emphasizing the public nature of this differentiation. Schmitt argues that political hostility has various roots and is not based on other fields of value such as ethics or economics. His rejection of classical liberalism has influenced political ideologies across the spectrum. In contrast, Foucault focuses on resistance to established political power and skepticism towards claims of superiority by any regime. Their different approaches reflect their divergent views on the role of conflict and resistance in politics, as well as their attitudes towards normative frameworks and moral claims.

Schmitt and Foucault are both outstanding people. Both individuals have their own unique ideas about rights and their enforcement, which have also had a significant impact on society. Schmitt believes that the specific political difference is the difference between friends and enemies. Individuals may have personal enemies, but personal enemies are a political phenomenon. Schmitt regards legal phenomena as political phenomena and acknowledges the legitimacy of politics. Schmitt's influence was significant, and some political and legal scholars paid attention to him, thinking that his ideas were too persuasive and profound. Even though he was a Nazi, some people still agreed with some of his views. Foucault believes that what people have is not an objective existence. His attention to history and society, as well as his in-depth exploration of power and knowledge, has led people to re-examine the essence of modern society and humanity itself. Foucault advocates a relative attitude towards truth, critically examining the establishment and dissemination mechanism of truth, thus breaking the traditional Authoritarianism and dogmatism thinking. Foucault's main ideas include historical criticism, the power of knowledge, the constructiveness of identity and the relativity of truth. These ideas have important implications for our understanding of the significance of social and personal life.

## Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.



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