

Discussion –
Wednesday, 25 September 2019,
19:30, in English

Over the recent years, a so-called 'ontological turn' has gained prominence, not only in connection with new materialisms, posthumanism, or within the discipline of anthropology, but also in political theory. But what does such an 'ontological turn' stand for within political thought?

It first of all means that politics should not be conceptualized in any narrow sense of the term, that is, neither with respect to current political systems nor as a particular kind of action. The turn toward ontology thus implies a turn away from politics-as-we-know-it toward 'the political'. Yet secondly, it becomes important to specify what 'the political' consists in. Should the political be conceived in terms of a political ontology of the multitude (Antonio Negri), of 'being-with' (Jean-Luc Nancy), of 'the social imaginary' (Cornelius Castoriadis), or of precarity (Butler)?

With
Oliver Marchart
Allan Dreyer Hansen
Vassilios Paipais

Moderated by
Sara Gebh

As Oliver Marchart argues, 'the political' means conflict, and conflict is the law of being. In the last instance, all social relations are formed and deformed in moments of insurrection, uprising, protest, but also oppression, subordination, and exclusion. All social action, consequently, bears the mark of negativity: to act is to negate the given. Such a praxis-based ontology of the political has consequences not only for the way one looks at the world, but also for the particular form of action called thinking. If indeed thinking is acting, then to think is also to negate the given. Yet the given cannot be negated by the individual, it can only be negated politically – in short: collectively and conflictually. We can only think as a collective, and we can only think through conflict.

The panel discussion builds on Marchart's recent book *Thinking Antagonism. Political Ontology after Laclau* (2018) and serves as the opening event of the conference **Ontologien des Politischen im Widerstreit**, 26-27 September 2019, at the Freie Universität Berlin, co-organized by the FU Berlin and Vienna University.

Oliver Marchart is professor of political theory at the University of Vienna. He works in the fields of political theory, cultural theory, and aesthetics. His recent books include *Thinking Antagonism. Political Ontology after Laclau* (2018); *Conflictual Aesthetics. Artistic Activism and the Public Sphere* (2019); and *Das unmögliche Objekt. Eine postfundamentalistische Theorie der Gesellschaft* (2013).

Allan Dreyer Hansen is associate professor at the Institute for Society and Globalisation at Roskilde University, Denmark. He has published widely on radical politics, the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe, as well as on the question of political ontology.

Vassilios Paipais is a lecturer at the School of International Relations, University of St Andrews. He is the author of *Political Ontology and International Political Thought: Voiding A Pluralist World* (2016).

Sara Gebh is a university assistant at the Department of Political Sciences of the University of Vienna. She is currently finishing her PhD at The New School on the concepts of stasis and conflict in the history of democratic thought.

THINKING THE POLITICAL AFTER THE 'ONTOLOGICAL TURN'

Organized by
the University of Vienna
in cooperation with
the ICI Berlin

