THE POLITICS OF BEING, THE BEING OF POLITICS: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL ONTOLOGY AND NEW ONTOLOGIES OF BECOMING

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to clarify the complex and multi-layered relationship between the concepts of 'political ontology' and 'new ontology' within the context of the 'ontological turn' in twenty-first-century thought. Using an analytical and comparative method, the article first examines the definition, main concerns, and intellectual genealogy of 'political ontology'. It then distinguishes between two different meanings of the term 'new ontology': the historical school of Nicolai Hartmann and contemporary currents such as speculative realism and new materialism. The main thesis of the study is that the most productive and fruitful intersection with 'political ontology' is established with these contemporary 'new ontologies' rather than with Hartmann's. In conclusion, it is argued that contemporary problems such as climate change, artificial intelligence, and ecological crises cannot be adequately understood through the anthropocentric concepts of traditional political theory. In this context, it is emphasised that the dialogue between 'political ontology' and 'new ontologies' provides a fundamental basis for the 're-politicisation of being' and is a condition for imagining a more just and sustainable political future that includes the non-human world.

Keywords: *Political Ontology, New Ontologies, Ontological Turn, Speculative Realism, New Materialism*

VARLIĞIN POLİTİKASI, POLİTİKANIN VARLIĞI: POLİTİK ONTOLOJİ VE YENİ OLUŞ ONTOLOJİLERİN ELEŞTİREL BİR ANALİZİ

ÖZ

Bu çalışma, yirmi birinci yüzyıl düşüncesindeki 'ontolojik dönüş' bağlamında , 'politik ontoloji' ve 'yeni ontoloji' kavramları arasındaki karmaşık ve çok katmanlı ilişkiyi aydınlatmayı amaçlamaktadır. Makale, analitik ve karşılaştırmalı bir yöntemle öncelikle politik ontolojinin tanımını, temel kaygılarını ve entelektüel soykütüğünü inceler. Ardından, 'yeni ontoloji' teriminin Nicolai Hartmann'ın tarihsel okulu ile spekülatif gerçekçilik ve yeni materyalizm gibi güncel akımları ifade eden iki farklı anlamını ayrıştırır. Çalışmanın temel tezi, politik ontoloji ile en verimli ve üretken kesişimin, Hartmann'dan ziyade bu çağdaş 'yeni ontolojiler' ile kurulduğudur. Sonuç olarak, iklim değişikliği, yapay zekâ ve ekolojik krizler gibi güncel sorunların geleneksel siyaset teorisinin antroposentrik kavramlarıyla yeterince anlaşılamayacağı savunulmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, politik ontoloji ve yeni ontolojiler arasındaki diyalogun, 'varlığın yeniden siyasallaştırılması' için temel bir zemin sunduğu ve insan olmayan dünyayı da kapsayan daha adil ve sürdürülebilir bir siyasi gelecek düşünmenin bir koşulu olduğu vurgulanmaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: *Politik Ontoloji, Yeni Ontolojiler, Ontolojik Dönüş, Spekülatif Gerçekçilik, Yeni Materyalizm*

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Introduction: The 'Ontological Turn' in Philosophy and Political Theory

In the wake of the linguistic and epistemological turns that animated philosophical inquiry during the latter decades of the twentieth century, the early 2000s witnessed a pronounced resurgence of the question of 'being' across both disciplinary domains. This intellectual trajectory, commonly identified as the 'ontological turn', is not merely an inward-looking concern within philosophical theory; it further constitutes an attempt to engage with pressing political and social imperatives such as emergent forms of global capitalism, deepening ecological degradation, technological innovations—most notably artificial intelligence and biotechnology—and the attenuation of inherited identity-based politics.[1] This is because technology is increasingly understood not merely as a set of tools, but as possessing an 'ontological force' of its own—a 'technicity' that actively co-shapes what 'nature' and 'the human' can be.[2] The so-called 'Anthropocene' rubric, which asserts that human action now functions as the primary agent of planetary transformation, intensifies this ontological urgency.[3] Within this milieu, the notions of 'political ontology' and 'new ontology' have assumed centrality within contemporary discourse

This study seeks to clarify the reciprocal relations between 'political ontology' and 'new ontology' by unpacking the polysemy and historical strata embedded in these terms. Its overarching thesis is that although a tenuous—albeit historically significant— link can be discerned between the early-twentieth-century New Ontology movement centred on Nicolai Hartmann and canonical political theory, the most productive interface is between political ontology and the modern 'new ontologies' that have arisen in the twenty-first century, including speculative realism, object-oriented ontology (OOO), and new materialism. The discussion begins by an exposition of political ontology, its main concerns and its intellectual heritage. Subsequently, two distinct meanings of 'new ontology' are distinguished and theorised in their respective contexts. Based on this analytic terrain, the intricate intertwining of these fields is revealed by showing how the currents of contemporary ontology have altered the thinking of politics, especially in ecological study, technological examination, the reworking of identity, and considerations of security.

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[1] Clayton Chin, "Just What is Ontological Political Theory Meant to Do? The Method and Practice of William E. Connolly," *Political Studies* 69, no 4 (2021): 771-772.

[2] Aud Sissel Hoel and Iris van der Tuin, "The Ontological Force of Technicity: Reading Cassirer and Simondon Diffractively," *Philosophy & Technology* 26, no. 2 (2013): 188.

[3] Melinda Harm Benson, "New Materialism: An Ontology for the Anthropocene," *Natural Resources Journal* 59, no 2 (2019): 251.

Political Ontology: From Metaphysics to Politics

Political ontology is a central field of inquiry which questions the underlying assumptions about political existence that prestructure institutions and practices: the implicit or explicit assumptions of a society or era about what exists, what counts as real, and what are the modes of existence. The current chapter will engage in an analysis of the definition of the discipline, its intellectual genealogy, and its most prominent recent changes. The basic premise of political ontology is that to understand the political organisation of a period is to understand its metaphysical image of the world, that is, its ontological imaginaries and assumptions.[4] This approach goes one step behind the 'what?' questions posed by traditional political philosophy, such as 'What defines a state?' or 'What is justice?', and raises a more fundamental question: What is the basic conception of being that makes it possible to think and experience concepts such as the state or justice in a particular way at a particular historical moment? Indeed, a central theme of this analysis will be the profound shift within contemporary new ontology from a focus on static being to dynamic becoming, a move that reconfigures the very foundations of political inquiry. This means that determining which questions are asked and why these questions are asked and not others is itself a metaphysical enquiry.[5] For example, instead of asking 'what is sovereignty?', it explores how sovereignty is conceptualised in different historical periods and what kind of 'truth effects' these different discourses produce.[6] This moves the analysis from a purely discursive level to a deeper onto-political horizon, where the basic assumptions of being that make discourse possible are analysed.[7]

From this perspective, ontology is no longer an abstract field of philosophy outside politics. On the contrary, existence itself is an ontology of power relations. Political ontology is defined as the relationship between affecting and affected forces and in this context, even the 'body' as a force is political.[8] Therefore, doing political philosophy does not mean dealing with a sub-branch of philosophy; philosophy itself becomes a political endeavour as a condition and possibility, and the attempt to separate ontology from its

283

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[4] Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006, 46.

[5] Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 45-46.

[6] Stefano Guzzini, *International Political Sociology, or: The Social Ontology and Power Politics of Process*, Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies, 2016, 4.

[7] Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 62-65.

[8] Cengiz Baysoy, "Marksizm'in Aporia'sı: 'Devlet'," *PolitikART*, August 08, 2023, 319, Access Date: April 15, 2025, https://www.politikart.net/yazi/marksizmin-aporias-devlet.

politicality is fundamentally rejected.[9] Among the main problematics of this field are the following: What are the constitutive units of political reality.[10] What ontological assumptions are basic political categories such as sovereignty, state, body and identity based on? Which beings and ways of being does a political order enable and which ones does it systematically exclude or render invisible?[11]

Philosophical Origins and Founding Figures: From Antiquity to Modernity

The roots of political ontology can be traced back to the beginning of philosophy. According to Leo Strauss, Socrates became the first political philosopher by shifting philosophy from the study of nature to the world of human things.[12] However, it is undoubtedly Plato who establishes the most obvious link between the political and the ontological. In his work *Republic*, Plato bases the ideal political order of *Kallipolis* on a transcendent idea of 'the Good' beyond the sensible world. In this approach, a just political order should reflect the true nature of being, and the nature of political things is defined in terms of the natural inequality between the constituent parts of society.[13]

With modernity, this picture changes radically. Niccolò Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbes, whom Strauss points out as the founders of modern political philosophy, detached politics from the transcendent and ideal and reduced it to the 'real' nature of human beings and the material world. By reducing politics to strategies of seizing and maintaining power, Machiavelli constructs it as an autonomous sphere with its own rules, independent of morality. In doing so, he places the evil in human nature at the centre of political analysis.[14] Hobbes, on the other hand, sees nature as a mechanism subject to mechanical laws and reduces the political, namely the state (*Leviathan*), to an artificial body—an apparatus or artifact—derived from individuals' fear of death and desire for security. With Hobbes, the political is detached from its traditional teleological

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[9] Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, trans. Kathleen Blarney, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005, 40-45.

[10] Halil İbrahim Yenigün, "Siyaset Teorisinde Yeni Ontolojik ve Teolojik Tahayyüller ve Demokrasi," *Dîvân: Disiplinlerarası Çalışmalar Dergisi* 18, no 34 (2013): 6.

[11] Sarah Hunt, "Ontologies of Indigeneity: The Politics of Embodying a Concept," *Cultural Geographies* 21, no 1 (2014): 27.

[12] Leo Strauss, *The City and Man*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007, 13.

[13] Plato. *Republic*, trans. C.D.C. Reeve, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Company, 2004, 514-a-517e.

[14] Leo Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958, 207-209.

and cosmological foundations, being transformed into a sphere grounded in a new materialist ontology and shaped solely by human will.[15]

The philosopher who reformulated this debate in the twentieth century most sharply is Carl Schmitt. Schmitt argues that there is a direct structural similarity between the metaphysical image in which a certain period moulds the world and the form of political organisation appropriate to that world.[16] Basing the political on the 'friend-enemy distinction' and arguing that the basis of political order is not a rational norm but the sovereign's 'decision on the exception', Schmitt becomes one of the most important figures of modern political ontology by placing ontology (the existential moment of decision) directly at the heart of politics.[17]

Critical Approaches: Marxism and Heidegger

Political ontology also occupies an important place within the traditions of radical criticism. The Marxist tradition usually thinks of political ontology in terms of the 'state', but criticises the state not as a pure entity but as a production of the bourgeois theory of sovereignty. From this viewpoint, the state is not a neutral arbiter but an instrument of the ruling class, designed to protect the existing capitalist relations of production. For a Marxist political ontology, the fundamental reality is not power relations in general, but class struggle in particular. It is these antagonistic relations that are embodied in the disciplined and exploited 'body' of the worker, which becomes the primary site of capitalist extraction and political resistance. From this perspective, politics, rather than being a superstructural institution, is a matter of 'infrastructure' directly related to the organisation of production and labour. A political ontology based on the practice of freedom ultimately aims at the liquidation of the state and a communalist order in which labour is self-organised.[18]

The philosophy of Martin Heidegger, the central figure of the 20th century's, ontology, carries deep and controversial political implications. In his influential study titled *The Political Ontology of Martin Heidegger*, French

285

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[15] Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 210.
[16] Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 36.
[17] Schmitt, *Political Theology*, 5.
[18] Baysoy, "Marksizm'in Aporia'sı." Georg Lukács, an important continuation of this tradition, in his monumental work *The Ontology of Social Being*, aimed to fill this ontological gap within Marxism and tried to ground social being in both its identity and difference with nature.

sociologist Pierre Bourdieu argues that Heidegger's philosophy is not a pure investigation of being, but rather a philosophical reflection and glorification of the search for a 'conservative revolution' that emerged in the crisis environment of post-World War I Germany.[19] According to Bourdieu, Heidegger's philosophy reshapes the themes of the search for a 'conservative revolution' in a philosophical discourse.[20] Bourdieu argues that there is a 'homology' between the philosophical and political spheres; Heidegger's position in the philosophical sphere corresponds to the conservative revolutionary position in the political sphere.[21] This critique has made an important methodological contribution to the study of political ontology by providing a sophisticated method of reading that shows philosophical texts neither have absolute autonomy in themselves nor can they be simply reduced to their social context.[22]

Contemporary Political Ontologies: 'Neo-Left Ontology'

Recently, there has been a marked increase in interest in ontology, especially within left-wing political theory. A number of philosophers such as Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, Ernesto Laclau, Giorgio Agamben, Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek agree that left theory requires a 'new ontology' in order to overcome current political impasses. This orientation is part of a quest to move beyond the liberal defence of the status quo and rethink politics on a fundamental plane. The two main 'schools' in this field are centred around the work of William Connolly and Chantal Mouffe.[23]

This 'new-left ontology' seeks a new communal politics beyond sovereignty and domination. Among the different aspects of this search are Jean-Luc Nancy's 'ontology of being-with'[24], Agamben's concepts of 'bare life' and 'potentiality' that are both inside and outside of sovereign power,[25] Badiou's mathematical ontology of the 'event', Rosi Braidotti's call for a new process

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[19] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Political Ontology of Martin Heidegger*, trans. Peter Collier, California: Stanford University Press, 1991, 1-2.

[20] Bourdieu, *The Political Ontology of Martin Heidegger*, 61.

[21] Bourdieu, *The Political Ontology of Martin Heidegger*, 42,69.

[22] Bourdieu, *The Political Ontology of Martin Heidegger*, 2-3.

[23] Chin, "Ontological Political Theory," 772.

[24] Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural,* trans. Robert D. Richardson & Anne E. O'Byrne, eds. R. D. Richardson & A. E. O'Byrne, California: Stanford University Press, 2000, 53.

[25] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, eds. Werner Hamacher & David E. Wellbery, California: Stanford University Press, 1998, 44-46.

ontology centred on the figure of the nomadic subject[26] (Braidotti, 2006, p. 199) and his attempt to revitalise the idea of communism[27] and Žižek's radical critique of capitalism based on the Lacanian concept of the 'Real.'[28] These thinkers attempt to liberate ontology from the shadow of Heidegger and its historical connection to fascism. In a manner reminiscent of Theodor Adorno's critique of Heidegger, they reject a static, ahistorical and non-dialectical understanding of Being. For them, ontology is not a stable ground on which to build a solid structure, but rather a constantly changing, contradictory and unstable foundation. This means that the basis of politics is not a determination or essence, but an openness and contingency. It is an ontological contingency in which, in Connolly's words, "internal and external nature... contains elements that are stubbornly opaque to human knowledge, resistant to human projects, and resistant to normal models of individuality and harmonious community."[29]

The New Ontology: Revitalising the Investigation of Being

In the history of philosophy and in contemporary debates, the term 'new ontology' is used in two different but not to be confused with each other ways. Firstly, it refers to a specific school of philosophy founded by the German philosopher Nicolai Hartmann in the early 20th century. Secondly, it is an umbrella term used to describe a broader and heterogeneous set of currents emerging in the 21st century, such as 'speculative realism' and 'new materialism'. The New Ontology movement, of which Nicolai Hartmann (1882-1950) was the founder and main representative, emerged as a radical criticism and reaction to movements such as idealism, positivism and Neo-Kantianism that dominated German philosophy in the early 20th century.[30] The basic and founding argument of the movement is that existence precedes knowledge ontologically. Therefore, it follows that epistemology, in regard to the problem of categories, is not independent but presupposes an ontological understanding, it itself needs an ontological foundation.[31] This principle argues for a shift in

287

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[26] Rosi Braidotti, "Posthuman, All Too Human: Towards a New Process Ontology," *Theory, Culture & Society 23*, no 7-8 (2006): 199.

[27] Further elaboration on this subject can be found in Alain Badiou's seminal works, *Being and Event*, and *The Communist Hypothesis*.

[28] Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, London: Verso, 2009, 51–55.

[29] Chin, "Ontological Political Theory," 777.

[30] Helmut Kuhn, "Nicolai Hartmann's Ontology," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 1, no 4 (1951): 290.

[31] Nicolai Hartmann, *New Ways of Ontology*, trans. Reinhard C. Kuhn, Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1953, 19.

philosophical priority from knowledge to being and is sometimes formulated as the reduction of epistemology to ontology.

Hartmann combines two basic approaches as philosophical method. The first is the 'descriptive-phenomenological method', which is deeply influenced by Edmund Husserl's phenomenology.[32] This method aims to describe and analyse things and phenomena 'as they are', free from theoretical prejudices. The second is the 'aporetic method.'[33] This method takes the seemingly insoluble problems and contradictions (*aporia* in Greek) encountered during phenomenological description seriously as a philosophical problem and tries to overcome these contradictions. The combination of these two methods places Hartmann's philosophy on both a realistic and critical ground. His work represents a 'realist' position that recognises that there is a being and existence independent of thought and consciousness. Hartmann's method, far from a naïve realism, constitutes a self-proclaimed 'critical ontology' that proceeds through a detailed analysis of the world's irreducible 'complexity', its hierarchical 'stratified structure', and the persistent metaphysical problems that philosophy is fated to confront.[34]

288

Layers and Modes of Being: Hartmann's Systematic Philosophy

One of the most original aspects of Hartmann's New Ontology is his systematic model that conceives existence as a holistic but hierarchical structure. This structure should be understood not merely as a scalar hierarchy of forms (*Stufenbau*) but as a true stratification (*Schichtung*) of categorially distinct domains (Peterson, 2016, p. 116).[35] According to him, existence does not consist of a single homogeneous level; it consists of four basic 'layers of being' (Ger. *schichten*, Eng. *strata*) that build on each other but have their own specific laws and cannot be reduced to each other.[36] These four main strata embrace the whole sphere of the real world:[37] This hierarchy begins with the inorganic or inanimate layer, which is the material world analysed by sciences such as physics and

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[32] James Collins, "The Neo-Scholastic Critique of Nicolai Hartmann," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 6, no 1 (1945): 110.

[33] Kuhn, "Nicolai Hartmann's Ontology," 298.

[34] Hartmann, *New Ways of Ontology, 43-49,52.*

[35] Keith R. Peterson, "Flat, Hierarchical, or Stratified? Determination and Dependence in Social-Natural Ontology," in *New Research on the Philosophy of Nicolai Hartmann*, eds. Keith Peterson and Roberto Poli, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016, 116.

[36] Hartmann, *New Ways of Ontology, 43.*

[37] Hartmann, *New Ways of Ontology, 46.*

chemistry; it is considered the most basic and strongest stratum. Built upon this is the organic or living layer, which contains the phenomenon of life in plants and animals and is the domain of biology. The next level is the psychological layer, the realm of conscious experiences like emotions and perceptions found in humans and partly in animals, which is the subject of psychology. The structure culminates in the spiritual (*Geistig*) layer, a realm unique to human beings that includes thought, freedom, culture, language, religion, morality, and art, and which is the main interest of philosophy. The relationship between these strata is governed by a series of categorial laws. According to Hartmann's 'law of strength,' the lower stratum is always the stronger, more foundational one; for example, organic life is dependent upon inorganic processes, not vice-versa. However, the higher stratum possesses a specific autonomy and a greater richness of determination, introducing a categorial novum—a new set of principles not found at the lower level.[38] This affords the higher stratum a measure of freedom in relation to the lower, despite its fundamental dependence on it.[39] As the layers move upwards, 'strength' decreases due to dependence on the basic layers, but 'richness' increases due to newly emerging qualities (such as freedom, creativity).[40]

289

In addition to this vertical layered structure, Hartmann states that existence has two basic horizontal 'modes of existence.'[41] The first is 'Real Existence', which is the concrete world subject to time, change, and causal relations. This mode encompasses the four previously mentioned layers of being.[42] Hartmann asserts that the true characteristics of reality are not dependent on space and matter, but rather on time and individuality. The second mode is 'Ideal Being', which consists of unchangeable, timeless, and spaceless entities such as logical and mathematical forms, as well as philosophical essences and values. These do not 'exist' in the real world but possess a form of ideal existence.[43] Crucially, for Hartmann, these two spheres have different modal architectures; for instance, something is really possible only when all of its

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[38] Hilda D. Oakeley, "Professor Nicolai Hartmann's Concept of Objective Spirit," *Mind* 44, no 173 (1935): 40.
[39] Peterson, "Flat, Hierarchical, or Stratified?", 124.
[40] Kuhn, "Nicolai Hartmann's Ontology," 308.
[41] Collins, "The Neo-Scholastic Critique of Nicolai Hartmann," 114.
[42] Hartmann, *New Ways of Ontology, 25*
[43] Hartmann, *New Ways of Ontology, 26*

conditions are fulfilled, making it a 'total possibility', whereas ideal possibility is much broader.[44]

Hartmann, influenced by Max Scheler's philosophy of values, tries to place the field of values within this ontological framework. According to him, moral, aesthetic and other values are objective, self-existent 'essences.'[45] People do not create these values, but discover them through an intuitive, emotional response to specific situations and try to realise them in the real world.[46] This process of discovery is part of what distinguishes Hartmann's project: his critical ontology returns to a 'natural realism,' adopting a direct cognitive stance (*intentio recta*) toward the world in which the cognizing subject is itself a real being among other real beings.[47] In order to properly analyse the relationship at the heart of the inquiry, it is critical to clarify the shifts in meaning that the term 'new ontology' has undergone and the fundamental philosophical distinctions between the two different usages. This distinction is a crossroads on which the central argument of this study rests. Historical research shows that there is an intense philosophical and genealogical gap between the ontology of Hartmann and the heterogeneous movements that are grouped together as new ontologies and which have thrived in the twenty-first century. Hartmann's programme was developed in active conversation with phenomenology and classical metaphysics, especially with Aristotle, Kant, and Hegel,[48] as a critique of early twentieth-century German philosophy, above all the epistemological primacy and apparatus of idealism of the Neo-Kantian school.[49]

290

Within his schema, the reality is developed in hierarchical fashion through an inorganic layer to a series of intermediate levels to a culmination in the specifically human, or spiritual, plane, so making the human being the privileged locus of ontological interest in the hierarchy. In comparison, the new ontologies that have formed in the 2000s (including speculative realism, object-oriented ontology [OOO] and new materialism) are based in an entirely new intellectual landscape.[50] They are most critical of what they call 'correlationism':

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44 Nicolai Hartmann, *Possibility and Actuality*, trans. Alex Scott and Stephanie Adair, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013, xix.
45 W. Ernest Schlaretzki, "Ethics and Metaphysics in Hartmann," *Ethics* 54, no 4 (1944): 273.
46 Schlaretzki, "Ethics and Metaphysics in Hartmann," 273.
47 Keith R. Peterson, "Translator's Introduction: Hartmann's Realist Ontology," in *Ontology: Laying the Foundations*, by Nicolai Hartmann, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019, xxii.
48 Collins, "The Neo-Scholastic Critique of Nicolai Hartmann," 110.
49 Kuhn, "Nicolai Hartmann's Ontology," 292.
50 Benson, "New Materialism," 253-254.

the view that reality can only be known in human perception or language, a view which they claim has prevailed in Continental thought since Kant. This criticism is embodied in the formulation advanced by Quentin Meillassoux as the notion that we can only have access to the correlation of thought and being and that we can never disjoint these two notions.[51] These critiques put post-structuralist and process philosophers in their intellectual context, particularly the work of figures like Gilles Deleuze, Alfred North Whitehead, and Bruno Latour, whose career-long project has been to critique the modern 'Bifurcation' of Nature and Society and to develop a more symmetrical, pluralistic anthropology.[52] Of equal importance is the promotion of a flat ontology to counter the hierarchical one by Hartmann. The ontological equality of phenomena, which includes humans, animals, plants, rocks, machines, and even fictional characters, is the claim of the flat ontology that denies the privilege and supremacy of the human subject.[53] When viewed in this binary, the nexus of ontology and politics is characterized by extreme asymmetries. Despite the fact that even the New Ontology of Hartmann is provided with certain points of contact with conservative thought in the doctrine of value, the currents of the contemporary vanguard have created a mutating and revolutionary field of discourse with political ontology. As a result, the following discussion involves these newer currents and their direct interaction with the theory of politics.

291

Intersections and Interactions: The Impact of Contemporary Ontologies on Political Theory

Developing the main argument of this study, this chapter will analyse the dynamic and multifaceted relationship between political theory and the so-called 'new ontologies' of the 21st century. Within this turn, speculative realism, object-oriented ontology (OOO), and new materialism emerge as distinct yet interconnected currents that collaboratively open the door to a posthuman understanding of politics. Though their methods and points of emphasis differ, they are united in their relational and comparative critique of modern philosophy's foundational assumptions.

All three movements build upon a vigorous critique of what Quentin Meillassoux identifies as 'correlationism'—the post-Kantian philosophical

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[51] Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier, London: Continuum, 2008, 5.
[52] Latour, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence*, 8, 115.
[53] Levi R. Bryant, *The Democracy of Objects*, Michigan: Open Humanities Press, 2011, 263.

doctrine that we can only ever access the correlation between thought and being, never either term in isolation (Meillassoux, 2008, p. 5). In response, these new ontologies contest such deep-seated anthropocentrism by asserting the existence of a 'reality-in-itself' that is independent of human representation or consciousness. Object-Oriented Ontology, a prominent branch of speculative realism, advances this position by arguing that philosophy must move beyond a purely human-centric worldview and acknowledge the autonomous existence of all objects (Bryant, 2011, p. 34). New materialism, taking a complementary path, shares this anti-correlationist impulse but focuses more specifically on the inherent agency and vitality of matter itself. Together, these approaches challenge the basic categories of political theory and compel us to rethink agency, causality, and being in a world not made solely for humans.

Developing the main argument of this study, this chapter will analyse the dynamic and multifaceted relationship between political theory and the so-called 'new ontologies' of the 21st century. These currents—chiefly speculative realism, its influential offshoot Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO), and new materialism—form a complex but interconnected intellectual field. Their primary point of convergence, and indeed their shared genesis, lies in a vigorous critique of what the philosopher Quentin Meillassoux has termed 'correlationism'. Correlationism signifies the foundational premise of most Western philosophy since Kant, which asserts that being cannot be thought of separately from thought itself; consequently, we can never access reality as it is 'in-itself,' but only as it is 'for-us,' correlated with human consciousness.[54] While this anti-correlationist stance unites them, these ontological projects diverge significantly in their methods and focus, creating a rich ground for comparative analysis. Speculative realism acts as the broader umbrella movement, launching the initial challenge to anthropocentrism by insisting that philosophy must speculate on a reality independent of human access. Within this movement, OOO emerges with a radical proposal: a 'flat ontology' where all entities—human and non-human, tangible and abstract, from corporations and viruses to stones and literary characters—are granted equal ontological footing, possessing a withdrawn reality that can never be reduced to their relations or effects. New materialism, while sharing the anti-anthropocentric goal, takes a different relational path. It focuses less on the withdrawal of objects and more on the inherent vitality, agency, and self-organizing capacity of matter itself, viewing reality as a dynamic and ongoing process of material becoming. This turn

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[54] Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 5.

towards the world itself necessitates new scholarly methods, such as the 'diffractive reading' proposed by thinkers who aim to construct an 'onto-epistemology' capable of understanding the formative power of non-human agents like technology.[55] Ultimately, it is through this web of relations—their shared opposition to 'human-centeredness' and their distinct ontological proposals—that these currents collectively force a radical rethinking of politics beyond the human subject, opening the door to a truly posthuman political theory. [56]

Object-Oriented Ontology is one of the most powerful branches of Speculative Realism, formulated by Graham Harman. OOO advances a 'flat ontology' that rejects hierarchical classification and maintains that every entity possesses ontological parity. As a result, objects vary between tangible objects like tables and chairs and intangible objects like companies, nations, characters in books and abstract concepts.[57] The most critical assertion of the OOO is that things cannot be reduced to their parts or to their interactions with other things; they all have an opaque and recessive nature. This anti-anthropocentric inclination brings about major political and social implications. OOO cannot be sympathetic to 'any form of human-centred politics.'[58] From an ecological standpoint, the crisis is not merely 'human damage to nature' but an intricate web of interactions among human and non-human agents. Political transformation is more likely driven by "environmental or technological changes than by manifestoes."[59] Such reformulation distributes responsibility across a network of actors—including atmospheric systems, corporations, and viruses—instead of attributing it exclusively to 'humanity'. In design, where technology traditionally serves human utility, OOO suggests a re-evaluation. Rather than subordinating objects to anthropocentric purposes, design can create artifacts that "allude to a deeper or alternate view of reality."[60] Ultimately, OOO challenges the modernist assumption that human beings should 'fill up a full half of philosophy', re-tuning the interpretive apparatus for emergent autonomous systems, like AI, and the mediated worlds they inhabit.[61] However, OOO's anti-anthropocentric project is not without its theoretical tensions. Critics point to an

293

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[55] Hoel and van der Tuin, "The Ontological Force of Technicity," 189, 198.

[56] Bryant, *The Democracy of Objects*, 34.

[57] Bryant, *The Democracy of Objects*, 247.

[58] Graham Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything*, London: Pelican, 2017, 146.

[59] Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology*, 146

[60] Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology*, 252.

[61] Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology*, 56.

inherent paradox: the very concept of the Anthropocene, often cited as a reason to de-center the human, simultaneously confirms humanity's unparalleled power as a geological agent, thus questioning the political efficacy of a fully flat ontology. Moreover, from a different critical perspective, OOO's approach to technology can be seen as philosophically underdeveloped compared to earlier analyses. By treating technological artifacts as ontologically equal to any other object, it risks overlooking the unique and pervasive nature of modern technology as a distinct mode of being—what Martin Heidegger famously analysed as 'enframing' (*Gestell*)—which structures reality in a specific, calculative manner and poses its own political and existential challenges.

A new ontological orientation, new materialism, has now taken centre stage in scholarly discussion, which is based on a close investment in matter, and the inherent agency of matter. Unlike classical materialism, which had envisioned matter as passive, inert, and external to thought, new materialism describes matter as active, living, dynamic, self-regulating and agentic.[62] This project seeks to theorize a "vitality intrinsic to materiality as such"[63], moving beyond the habit of "parsing the world into dull matter (it, things) and vibrant life (us, beings)".[64] The paradigm draws on philosophies of immanence, such as Spinoza's concept of the inherent dynamism of matter[65], and is informed by concepts like the rhizome and assemblage introduced by Rosi Braidotti, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari.[66]

294

One of the most fundamental interventions of new materialism is its direct challenge to hierarchical models of being, placing it in stark contrast to the thought of Nicolai Hartmann. While Hartmann's ontology is explicitly vertical, conceiving the real world as a series of 'ontological strata' where higher levels possess a greater richness of constitution[67], new materialism espouses what has been termed a 'flat ontology'.[68] This approach, influenced by thinkers like Bruno

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[62] Andrew Poe, "Review Essay: Things-Beyond-Objects," *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy* 19, no 1 (2011): 157.

[63] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2010, xiii.

[64] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, vii

[65] Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2007, 179.

[66] Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, 406.

[67] Nicolai Hartmann, *Ontology: Laying the Foundations*, trans. Keith R. Peterson, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019, 86

[68] Diana Coole, "Agentic Capacities and Capacious Historical Materialism: Thinking with New Materialisms in the Political Sciences," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 41, no 3 (2013): 453

Latour, seeks to place human and nonhuman actors on a 'less vertical plane'.[69] Instead of a structured layering, new materialism envisions a "normatively and ontologically horizontal plane"[70] on which matter is seen as inherently self-organizing and vibrant. This rejection of a pre-ordained hierarchy in favour of a flat plane of immanent forces marks the key point of departure between Hartmann's critical ontology and the generative ontology of new materialism.

It challenges dichotomous Western assumptions at an ontological, and not merely discursive, level by attempting to "disrupt the givenness of the nature–culture dichotomy"[71] along with distinctions between mind/body, subject/object, and human/non-human by focusing on the "actual entwining of phenomena that have historically been classified as distinct".[72] These are replaced with the concept of intra-action, which, in contrast to the usual notion of 'interaction,' recognizes that distinct entities "do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action"[73], thereby mutually constituting one another. In turn, new materialism transforms the notions of political agency, as it does not represent it as the manifestation of independent human will but as distributed 'agentic capacities'[74] the ability practiced in the context of heterogeneous assemblages that involve human bodies, technologies, microbes, ecosystems, media, and discourse.[75] This is exemplified in the work of Rosi Braidotti, who theorises a 'nomadic subject' as a 'multi-layered' and dynamic assemblage of human and non-human forces, moving beyond static identity categories.[76] In the framework of object-oriented politics, which moves beyond a purely human-centered view, political transformation is often driven more by "environmental or technological changes than by manifestoes and courageous stands at the barricades."[77] Therefore, recent examples of anti-colonial movements, ecological activism, and feminist resistance can be effectively analysed not as purely human struggles, but as a 'political chain' involving the multilateral collaboration of crucial non-human actors. These can include abused territories, technological mechanisms aimed at the enforcement of justice, and viruses that can trigger an epidemic, all of which act as political forces alongside

295

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[69] Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, ix
[70] Coole, "Agentic Capacities", 453.
[71] Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, ix.
[72] Coole, "Agentic Capacities", 453.
[73] Barad, *Meeting the Universe*, 33.
[74] Coole, "Agentic Capacities", 457.
[75] For a detailed discussion, see Manuel DeLanda, *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity*, London: Continuum, 2006.
[76] Braidotti, "Posthuman, All Too Human", 197-208.
[77] Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology,* 146.

human agents.[78] This symmetrical approach, which treats human and non-human entities as 'actants' within a collective, is a foundational contribution of Bruno Latour, who argues that one must follow these heterogeneous associations to trace how the social is assembled.[79] However, there are also political controversies around the framework: in its insistence upon overcoming anthropocentrism and the nature/culture split, which capitalist exploitation has revealed, it remains vulnerable to criticism by historically minded materialists who argue that its universalist ontology of distributed agency conceals the actual relations of social power and property. It is in this perspective that the ontological equivalence between a virus, a corporation and a labourer can make the structural power of capital and the exploitation mechanisms of the state appear as a triviality. New materialism[80], therefore, has a central but undecided place in contemporary discussion, particularly, how to square its insistence on fragmented agency with the need of organised and conscious revolutionary politics.

New materialist feminist theory moves beyond social constructionism by treating the body as a material entity with its own agency. This view finds parallels in ontological models where each stratum, though dependent on lower ones, has autonomy because it introduces a new set of principles—a categorial *novum*—not found at the lower level.[81] This striking parallel suggests that, in this respect, Hartmann's thought has not been overcome so much as rediscovered, highlighting the enduring relevance of his stratified model for contemporary debates on agency and autonomy. Similarly, its rejection of mind/body dualism echoes stratified ontologies that define the human as a unified whole composed of distinct physical, organic, psychic, and spiritual layers, ensuring that such divisions do "in no way remove... the unity and wholeness of the human being".[82] In this context, an individual's experience of navigating between different worlds becomes "an important skill for those who occupy multiple voices and embody

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[78] Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology,* 147.

[79] Bruno Latour, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence: An Anthropology of the Moderns*, trans. Catherine Porter, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013, 30–31.

[80] For seminal and comprehensive discussions on the core concepts of new materialist approaches, their relationship with agency and politics, and the internal debates within the field, see: Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010; Coole, Diana and Samantha Frost, eds. *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010; Braidotti, Rosi. *The Posthuman*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013; DeLanda, Manuel. *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity*. London: Continuum, 2006.

[81] Peterson, "Hartmann's Realist Ontology", xxvii

[82] Hartmann, *New Ways of Ontology,* 45.

supposedly dichotomous positions of subjectivity (coloniser/colonised, indigenous/academic)."[83]

This perspective combines concepts such as Michel Foucault's 'biopolitics' (the power that governs life) and Achille Mbembe's 'necropolitics' (the power that decides death) with a politics that defends life, protects the fragile and 'mourns the unmourned.' The body is no longer only a site of power and resistance, but also the centre of practices of interdependence, care, healing and solidarity. This shows that politics is not only about grand narratives in the public sphere, but also about material relations at the most intimate and bodily level.[84]

Conclusion: Rethinking Politics, Reimagining Being

This study has charted a fundamental convergence at the heart of 21st-century thought: the critical project of political ontology and the speculative work of new ontologies. It has argued that the most pressing contemporary challenges—from ecological crises and the rise of artificial intelligence to new forms of global power—can no longer be adequately addressed by the anthropocentric concepts of traditional political theory. The dialogue between political ontology and new ontologies, particularly speculative realism and new materialism, provides the necessary conceptual tools for a 're-politicisation of being'. This involves moving beyond established certainties to ask foundational questions about what constitutes an agent, how responsibility is distributed in human-nonhuman assemblages, and how different modes of existence can coexist. The central finding of this paper is that engaging with ontology is not a retreat from the political, but a precondition for imagining a more just and sustainable future that includes the non-human world.

The practical ripple effects of this ontological turn are becoming increasingly visible across various fields of political inquiry, with the discipline of International Relations offering a potent example. Here, a notable shift is underway from traditional realism's focus on physical survival to the framework of 'Ontological Security Theory'. This approach argues that states, like individuals, are motivated by a need for a coherent narrative and identity—what

297

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[83] Hunt, "Ontologies of Indigeneity," 28.
[84] Baysoy, "Marksizm'in Aporia'sı"

Anthony Giddens calls "confidence in the continuity of self-identity".[85] By positing that the state's very 'being' is constituted not just by material power but by the relational routines and narratives that provide it with a sense of security, this theory offers a new socio-psychological lens to understand foreign policy actions that defy purely rationalist explanations.[86] This focus on the narrative 'being' of the state, echoed in the rise of international political sociology (IPS) and its own ontological critique of the political, serves as a clear indicator of the broader intellectual shift examined in this study. [87]

The analysis of this article has shown that the relationship between 'political ontology' and 'new ontology' is not a one-dimensional one, but rather a complex convergence and dialogue at the heart of 21st century thought. The main findings of the study can be synthesised as follows: 'political ontology' functions as a critical lens that questions the assumptions of existence underlying politics, that is, what an order considers real and what it excludes. 'new ontologies' - especially in their contemporary forms such as speculative realism, object-oriented ontology and new materialism - are movements that carry out this enquiry through concrete philosophical projects, reshaping the conceptual toolkit of politics. The relationship between these two fields is one of 'convergence' in the context of a broader 'ontological turn' in 21st century thought, rather than one simply encompassing the other.

The importance of this ontological turn is not just a philosophical curiosity. The most fundamental and burning issues of our time, such as climate change, mass extinctions, the rise of artificial intelligence, biotechnological interventions and the global network society, can no longer be adequately understood with the anthropocentric and dichotomous (nature/culture, man/machine, subject/object) concepts of traditional political theory. These new and complex realities force us to rethink 'being' itself. This re-politicisation of being, i.e. placing questions such as what constitutes agency, how responsibility is distributed, and how different ways of being can coexist at the centre of politics, is an indispensable intellectual endeavour to correctly diagnose these new realities and to develop new political imaginaries and practices to respond to them. Consequently, the dialogue between political ontology and new ontologies is not just a philosophical debate, but a

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[85] Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008, 54-55

[86] Pınar Bilgin, "Identity/Security," in, *The Routledge Handbook of New Security Studies,* ed. J. Peter Burgess, London & New York: Routledge, 2010, 81-89.

[87] Guzzini, *International Political Sociology*, 1-2.

fundamental condition for thinking about a more just, more sustainable and more inclusive political future that includes the non-human world, which requires recognising that even on issues such as bio-genomic race, which ontology we choose is a matter of 'constructivist conventionalism' with political consequences.[88]

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[88] Rasmus G. Winther & Jonathan M. Kaplan, "Ontologies and Politics of Biogenomic 'Race'," *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory* 60, no 136 (2013): 56.

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301

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