

Introduction: Is Politics Possible Today?

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... is a question that can easily appear ill-phrased and as if here someone made a category mistake. It can appear ill-phrased if one presumes that as long as there are human beings, there is politics. This would mean, politics is not only possible today. It is possible all the time (and everywhere). Because politics is never impossible. There might be bad and good forms of politics and political forms that are just rather mediocre. But politics from such a point of view is never impossible, because it is always already there when and where there are human beings. Because human beings are beings who are social and act collectively, and thus: as soon as there are human beings, there is politics. This is what one ends up with if one believes politics is primarily inscribed into the very social being of human being and it is what one assumes when one assumes that the existence of human beings brings with it, unavoidably, politics. Politics then would be a formal-natural implication of (human) existence. It is an (essential) part of the human life form; it is linked to human essence - and this obviously means that there is such a thing as a human essence for this position. Politics is possible, because it is, in some sense, always already realized with the very existence of human beings. Politics is therefore not simply always possible, it is rather always already actual and realized. It thereby is turned into a (natural) given (because inscribed into the very nature of the human - and maybe even into that of other - beings). Politics is according to this model a structural implication of the human world. In short, politics here becomes natural structure, natural structuration is political. For such a position, politics is on the side of structure, nature, essence and givenness.

But - as we could critically ask - what if there is a world wherein there are human beings who do not live like human beings (ought to)? This could then be the product of the human misunderstanding themselves or of the world, which does not allow for human beings to live in a human way. This is, obviously, a rather familiar critical trope, one that brings back memories of debates around alienation and dehumanization, and the like. If there are human beings but in a world where they cannot live like human beings then this discrepancy itself is where (emancipatory) politics is situated and located. The discrepancy defines the goal, the aim and end of politics. Politics in this view is also possible, but it is not a given. Rather it is possible because of the gap between what is and what ought to be. This gap might be sometimes difficult to identify, but it is nevertheless always there and because it is always there, even sometimes, invisibly, politics is (always) possible, but not always realized, when the gap remains untouched. It is realized when one operates from, around and against this gap. For this gap is never really empty, it is rather normatively charged and provides the very forceless force of the better political argument. For when one can identify how human being ought to live and how they are not living that way, one

can find in the nature of human beings the very norm by means of which one can critically judge the gap between is and ought. Politics then is always possible because there is always a natural norm that allows us to judge what is the right and the wrong way of leading a human life. Realizing politics - successfully - in this view cannot then but lead to the abolishment of politics through the very act of realizing politics. Politics attacks the gap between is and ought and overcoming it must imply the abolishment of politics as political act.

The question “Is Politics Possible Today?” rejects both these modes of naturalizing politics. It implies that politics is not always possible and seeks to examine the coordinates of the present world and determine if they allow for politics. This means that all terms in the question must be understood not only in an interlinked, but also in a fundamentally historical way. This, in turn, implies that our “Today” can (or could) be one that makes politics impossible. It can be one where we do not even know what politics is and it can be one where politics is not a given, but needs to be reinvented. Or it might be a today where it seems impossible that there ever will be politics or that politics could be reinvented. But this also means to conjuncturally explore and examine what we (possibly could) mean when we speak of and refer to the possibility of politics (today). Since possibility itself then turns out to be a historical category.

Politics is not always already realized and actual, it is not always possible. This statements are just another way of saying that politics is immensely historical. And it is immensely historical because it is one of the forms of practice that makes, that creates, that invents and transforms (even the forms of) history. But if there is an end of history, there might be an end of politics - and a symptom might be that we are confronted with so many politics of the end (and problematic forms of non-enlightened, to pun Jean-Pierre Dupuy, doomsaying¹).

If politics (is one of the forms of practice that) makes history, then history can seem possible or impossible in this, in our *today*; since it can seem that everything is already decided (and things will go down the drain) or that the future will be nothing but a (maybe increasingly horrible) repetition of the present, which in itself (since at least quite some time) could than be nothing but the repetition of the past. And then the impossibility of politics is linked to the impossibility of changing the prevalent mode of changing things, linked to not being able to transform the form of transformation. Therefore, the question “Is Politics Possible Today?” is a real question - both in the sense, it is really a question and it is a question of the real of politics. It brings together what transforms even the form of transformation (politics), inscribing it into a given conjunctural temporal and symbolic framework (today) and asks if

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1 Dupuy 2002.

this inscription can be thought and practised (possibility) or not). It thus is reminiscent of the knots that result from thinking through the dimension of the real, the symbolic and the imaginary in their peculiar interwovenness.²

Is it possible to have an idea of politics that is not simply the repetition of the perpetually unfinished revolution that is today's increasingly explosive and catastrophic bourgeois society, or in different terms: capitalism? Can we move away what has become (inscribed into) our (second) nature? Of the naturalization of what we deem to be possible? The present issue of *Crisis and Critique* did, as frequently before, ask its authors to take a position on this question. Can we think and conceive of the possibility of what can so easily seem so or does always appear - maybe even increasingly if this is not a contradiction in adjecto - impossible, notably: politics? This is another way of asking: can there ever be politics? We asked for partisan answers. Since this is a question, which cannot be answered without taking a position. For even if politics might be (and might remain forever) impossible, thinking it in a partisan manner, signifies taking a stance, dis-stancing oneself from the prevalent dogmas and clichés of what is political and what politics looks like, from the tyranny of the possible and its particular instalments and from all the political clichés that are so easily naturalized. Taking such a (dis-)stance to the (non-)world of today - and even if the answer to our question (Is politics possible today?) is ultimately a negative one - can at least be considered to be reminiscent of what today might seem impossible (and might never be), namely politics. We hope we will all be reminded of its impossible possibility through the courageous position-takings that you will read in the following.

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² Cf. here the classical dialectical rendering of this interlinkage in the preface to the second edition of Žižek 2008.

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