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Author(s): Palonen, Kari

Title: Playing Against Contingency : The Common Agenda of Four Different Studies

Year: 2023

Version: Published version

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Please cite the original version:

Palonen, K. (2023). Playing Against Contingency : The Common Agenda of Four Different Studies. *Redescriptions*, 26(1), 1-3. <https://doi.org/10.33134/rds.406>



Playing Against Contingency: The Common Agenda of Four Different Studies

EDITORIAL

KARI PALONEN 

HUP HELSINKI UNIVERSITY PRESS

In the last issue of *Redescriptions* (25:2, 2022), I discussed different criteria for political action and concluded that there is a common idea behind them, namely contingency. In other words, the concept of political action, or acting politically, concerns ways of dealing with contingency. This holds also for those activities that try to eliminate, reduce, minimise, or neutralise contingency. These are not depoliticising human activities but rather politicking against politics. Depoliticisation is not possible by intended action but occurs when specific aspects of politicisation fade away or disappear into the background behind other forms of politicisation that are currently focused on or thematised by the actors.

The four articles published in the present issue of *Redescriptions* are so different that it was difficult to think, whether they have anything in common. At a certain level of abstraction, however, all of them not only deal with contingency and thus mark a political aspect, but each of them discusses struggles against the experience of contingency, in my terminology, politicking against politics. The articles of Kuura Irni and Olivier Costa & Olivier Rozenberg are explicitly dealing with political action, Carlos Pérez-Crespo and Pegah Mossleh have their focus rather on what I call ‘theory politics,’ discussing how scholars deal with contingency, although the difference between the two is, of course, highly relative.

Kuura Irni’s piece illustrates well, how eating has today become a thoroughly political activity that not only marks personal choices, but which has immediate relevance for such prosaic matters as election results or governments’ programmes. Veganism is a radical alternative in comparison to a wider spectrum of choices, including vegetarianism, pescetarianism, and different degrees of meat-eating. Irni’s interesting point, developed around the work of Donna Haraway and her critics, lies in bringing to the agenda different interpretations or schools of veganism. For me, the debate resembles the old, but still up-to-date, controversy between the so-called absolute and relative pacifists, which in Finland of my youth had existential significance for those of us, who refused to

CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:**Kari Palonen**University of Jyväskylä,
Finlandkari.i.palonen@jyu.fi**TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:**

Palonen, Kari. 2023. “Playing Against Contingency: The Common Agenda of Four Different Studies.” *Redescriptions: Political Thought, Conceptual History and Feminist Theory* 26(1): 1–3. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33134/rds.406>

do the military service and had to go through the so-called conscience examination. Irni thematises, how the 'absolutist's' critique of Haraway in its claim for consistency – corresponding to what Max Weber said of the *Gesinnungsethik* of the Quakers in *Politik als Beruf* – is, if taken literally, perhaps respectable but still impracticable and self-defeating. It refuses to face the elementary political judgement between expediency and morality as one of considering both aspects and assessing how to relate these opposite requirements to each other. The article illustrates how stubborn veganism, which discards consequences resembles those absolute pacifists of today who appear as 'useful idiots' serving *de facto* the Russian military attack against Ukraine.

Pérez-Crespo's article deals with two intelligent 'reactionary' thinkers – in the sense of Albert O. Hirschman's *The Rhetoric of Reaction* (1991) – namely Carl Schmitt and Juan Donoso Cortes, whom the author, more than previous scholarship has done, identifies as major inspirator for Schmitt's doctrine of 'decisionism.' Schmitt has sometimes been praised as an author imagining the ideal type of pure, completely groundless, and unjustified decision. Pérez-Crespo illustrates how this ideal type followed Donoso Cortes's radical rejection of the 1848 revolution in France by recognising the contingency of the situation – which the monarchists did not do – but responding to this with dictatorship. In the Weimar Republic, Schmitt also opposed the monarchists and connected the concepts of sovereignty, *Ausnahmestand*, and dictatorship, interestingly interpreting in 1924 the Weimar Constitution's famous Article 48 as enabling a dictatorship of the *Reichspräsident*. Both Donoso Cortes and Schmitt marked a keen insight into the contingency of the situation but responded to it by aiming at the extinction of that contingency by a dictator.

Costa and Rozenberg, in their turn, discuss the kind of contingency that Donoso Cortes and Schmitt militantly denounced, namely the politics of parliamentary debate. This refers to a situation in which contingency is an operative principle that is built into the very mode of proceeding. A question on a parliament's agenda not only allows but also presupposes alternative answers and an open debate on their strengths and weaknesses. Of course, this view is, again, an ideal type, and parliaments have frequently tried to restrict the range of contingency with different means, such as time-limits or controlling the speeches. The specific contingency regulations of the European Parliament are well discussed by the authors. Their main interest concerns, however, situations, in which parliamentary speeches 'misuse' the procedural resources of parliamentary principles, namely with the use of 'unparliamentary language' and insults that not only break the rule of respect for adversaries (Berlusconi on Schulz) but also ridicule against the European parliament itself and thus try to bring it into disrepute (Farage).

Pegah Mossleh, in his article, goes back to the alternative programmes of conceptual history around the turn of the century, namely the works of Reinhart Koselleck, Quentin Skinner, and John Pocock, well known to the readers of *Redescriptions*. Although the present debates in the conferences of the History of Concepts Group and related contexts show a diversified profile of perspectives and approaches, Mossleh's demarcation of these authors' work is justified as a medium, through which he constructs his own research programme around the neologism of *lithoconcepts*. He translates it to German as *Steinbegriff*, with an intention to refocus the scholarly interest from conceptual change to conceptual stabilisation. This should neither be interpreted as a return to ahistorical concepts nor as a resistance to conceptual change, but the author discusses the fixation of concept to stone-like entities. From my

perspective, this is a version of conceptual struggle against political action, politicking in the sense of longing for a conceptual order minimising the political aspect.

Contingency, of course, concerns equally the processes of stabilisation of concepts that Mosslele refers to. In my view, instead of offering examples of such concepts, it would perhaps be more interesting to speculate with the procedures and practises of conceptual stabilisation in the author's sense. One obvious case would be the canonisation of concepts, not only in the religious sense but also in establishing a range of 'perennial questions,' parodied by Skinner. Another could refer to claims for transhistorical categories, as Koselleck's looking for 'anthropological constancies.' Of course, such canons and categories can be challenged by their politicisation, as it has been done to the allegedly eternal division to 'men' and 'women' in recent decades. Maybe the value of identifying *lithoconcepts* would consist of identifying topics to be subjected to politicisation.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

AUTHOR AFFILIATION

Kari Palonen  orcid.org/0000-0001-7274-1690
University of Jyväskylä, Finland

Palonen
Redescriptions: Political Thought, Conceptual History and Feminist Theory
DOI: 10.33134/rds.406

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Palonen, Kari. 2023.
"Playing Against Contingency: The Common Agenda of Four Different Studies." *Redescriptions: Political Thought, Conceptual History and Feminist Theory* 26(1): 1–3. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33134/rds.406>

Submitted: 21 June 2023
Accepted: 21 June 2023
Published: 07 August 2023

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