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Sovereignty and its Discontents: On the Primacy of Conflict and the Structure of the Political (Birkbeck Law Press)

William Rasch

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This book argues for the centrality of conflict in any notion of the political. In contrast to many of the attempts to re-think the political in the wake of the collapse of traditional leftist projects, it also argues for the logical and/or ontological primacy of violence over 'peace'.

The notion of the political expounded here is explicitly 'realist' and anti-utopian - in large part because the author finds the consequences of attempting to think 'the good life' to be far more damaging than thinking 'the tolerable life'. The political is not thought of as a means to implement the good life; rather, the political exists because the good life does not. Indeed, if one sees 'globalization', with its emphasis on efficiency and economy, as a threat to the autonomy of the political, then one ought to be wary of political ideologies that reduce the political to species of moral or legal discourse.

As laudable as the aims of human rights activists or political theorists like Rawls and Habermas may be, the consequences of their thought and actions further reduce the scope and possibility of political activity by, in effect, criminalizing political opposition. Once 'universal' norms are instantiated, political opposition becomes impossible. A fully legalized, moralized, and pacified universe is a thoroughly depoliticized one as well.

Academics and advanced students researching and working in the areas of political theory, legal theory and international relations will find this book of great interest.

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