

Rethinking “Cultural Coexistence” After the Ontological Turn

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Abstract

This paper examines how the concept of “cultural coexistence” can be reconsidered through debates that have emerged in cultural anthropology following the ontological turn. It explores three central questions: what constitutes cultural difference, what entities are understood to coexist, and what kinds of states or relations coexistence implies. Conventional approaches assume a single underlying reality, within which different societies develop distinct interpretations of the same world; cultural difference is thus framed as a difference in recognition of one same reality. In contrast, the ontological perspective rejects the dichotomy between reality and representation, maintaining that no external vantage point exists from which different worlds can be compared. Difference is therefore treated as radical alterity grounded in distinct ontologies. Within this context, one proposed approach to engaging alterity focuses on “partial connections,” using the insights and frictions they generate as openings for rethinking coexistence. The paper further discusses multispecies ethnography, which aligns closely with ontological anthropology, highlighting how humans and nonhumans—including fungi, viruses, and other species—mutually shape one another through diverse forms of entanglement. Drawing on these perspectives, it introduces “co-generation” as a mode of coexistence that captures the dynamic, interdependent processes through which heterogeneous beings come into being together.