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Bonnie Honig, *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics*

Nicholas Tampio

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Abstract and Keywords

In the 1980s and 1990s, a central debate in academic political theory was between liberals and communitarians, Kantians and Hegelians, Rawls and his critics. Bonnie Honig's *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (1993) disrupted this debate and argued that surface disagreements conceal an underlying consensus that the purpose of political theory is to answer, once and for all, the fundamental political questions. Drawing upon and transforming the work of Hannah Arendt and Friedrich Nietzsche, Honig argues that democracy requires attentiveness to the remainders of politics and a proclivity to contestation. To show the continuing relevance of Honig's conception of agonistic democracy, I criticize Cass Sunstein's account of the regulatory state for its displacement of politics, focusing on how his advocacy of fuel economy regulations occludes the political question of rethinking public transportation.

Keywords: Agonism, Bonnie Honig, Cass Sunstein, democracy, Friedrich Nietzsche, Hannah Arendt, John Rawls, Michael Sandel, the political

Like Bob Dylan plugging in his electric guitar at the Newport Folk Festival, Bonnie Honig's *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (1993; hereafter *PTDP*) brought a jolt of energy to political theory. In the 1980s and 1990s, many political theorists framed the major debate as between the liberal Rawls and his communitarian critics, including Michael Sandel (Mulhall 1992; Walzer 1990). Liberals and communitarians disagreed on how to conceptualize the embedded quality of human nature and whether public policy should benefit primarily individuals or communities. Still, liberals and communitarians tended to read the same canonical authors—including Kant and Hegel—and share the aspiration to speak directly to elected officials and judges. For a time, Anglo-American political philosophy aspired to formulate indisputable principles that responsible political agents would have to implement. Honig disrupted this debate and argued that both groups share a commitment to ending political contestation. Honig's

work has made political theory a more risky and exciting endeavor, where theorists must negotiate order and chaos, Apollo and Dionysus, a virtue politics of building order and a *virtù* politics of problematizing any established framework.

Honig wrote the first draft of *PTDP* as a dissertation at Johns Hopkins University where she studied with William E. Connolly and Richard E. Flathman (Watson and Honig 2013). With Connolly (1991), Honig transmogrifies Nietzsche's ideal of aristocratic competition into a democratic politics that nurtures agonistic respect among individuals and groups. With Flathman (1989), Honig cherishes willful individualism and advances a chastened view of politics as a necessary, if often unpleasant, activity to combat the normalizing tendencies of modern social life. *PTDP* toggles between Connolly's and Flathman's more and less, respectively, appraisals of politics as intrinsically rewarding. Calling *PTDP* a paradigm of the "Hopkins school," however, merely contextualizes the book's originality and importance. Honig is a brilliant reader of political theory texts, shining light on passages in Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* (1971) and Sandel's *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (1982) that reveal the theoretical blind spots of the two most prominent figures in the liberal-communitarian debate. And her readings of Friedrich Nietzsche's "Homer's Contest" (2007) and Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* (1958/1998) lay the foundation for an agonistic conception of democracy that refuses to grant any authority the right to settle foundational political questions, say, about the correct distribution of society's wealth, appropriate gender roles, or national identity. In subsequent years, Honig has continued to flesh out her vision of agonistic politics, and, in a recent survey, Honig was ranked among the top five political theorists doing work that will be influential for the next twenty years (Moore 2010). "Few theorists have done more in recent years to explore and develop our understanding of the political conflicts and struggles that lie at the heart of democratic politics than Bonnie Honig" (Humphrey, Owen, and Hoover 2014).

This essay begins by describing Honig's critique of liberals and communitarians for trying to shut down political debate by force or deceit. The next section explains how Honig presents a positive vision by democratizing Nietzsche's notion of the Overman and by widening the topics covered by Arendt's notion of the political. The subsequent section shows how Honig envisions politics as a constant negotiation between virtue and *virtù*, a balancing act of stabilizing and destabilizing political arrangements. In the last section, I illustrate the power of Honig's framework by emulating the style of *PTDP* to criticize Cass Sunstein's account of the regulatory state as a means to cool down democratic passions.

The Liberal-Communitarian Antipathy toward Politics

The epigraph to chapter one of *PTDP* is from Nietzsche: “[*Virtù*] rouses enmity toward order, toward the lies that are concealed in every order, institution, actuality—it is the worst of vices if one judges it by its harmful effect upon others” (1). In her critical moments, Honig embodies a *virtù* perspective that expresses enmity toward order for its tendencies to cover over theoretical inconsistencies and practical injustices. Honig has two main strategies to demonstrate how virtue political theorists displace politics. First, she scrutinizes textual passages where a virtue theorist confronts the problem that people may not embrace a politics that ostensibly expresses human nature. In these instances, virtue theorists must rely on force or coercion that their theory cannot adequately justify. The second strategy is to illustrate the real-world consequences of forcing people to conform to a virtue politics that does not concede its own contestability. In *PTDP*, Honig primarily relies on textual deconstruction, showing how Kant, Rawls, and Sandel try to settle a political question, fail, conceal this failure, and the harmful consequences of this concealment.

Honig begins with Kant because his philosophy undergirds much of the liberal-communitarian debate. Kant believes that all human beings deserve liberal respect for merely being (imperfectly) rational beings, but that there is a higher kind of respect, teleological respect, which is due to human beings that respect the moral law. Like the prominent Kant scholar Christine Korsgaard (2009), Honig thinks that Kant maintains a “constitutional model” of the soul where reason should strive to dominate the animalistic instincts. Unlike Korsgaard, Honig roots for the willful part of human nature to fight back against reason’s commands: “From the perspective of *virtù* ... the self’s resistance to the requirements of moral virtue and subjectivity is cause not for mourning but for celebration. There is vitality in a self that exceeds all orderings” (39). Furthermore, Honig notes that Kant himself does not follow his strictures about pure practical reason governing human animality. His examples introduce a heteronomous element into supposedly autonomous moral thinking, and his stipulations about the right state and international order suggest that moral autonomy is “a fragile condition, enormously dependent on external care, intersubjective community practices, juridical support, and stable phenomenal conditions” (38). Honig’s goal is not to destroy Kantianism as much as to temper its claims to have placed practical philosophy on stable ground.¹

Honig’s next target is Rawls, arguably the most prominent figure in contemporary Anglo-American political theory (Moore 2010). In *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls aspires to find an

Archimedean point that will enable a rational and reasonable resolution to the questions of how to order the basic structure of society. Rawls wants politics and political theory “to isolate the right vantage point, to establish the right setting, to facilitate the identification of these right resolutions, to dissolve the remainders of politics rather than to engage them” (127). Rawls wishes the original position to express human nature, to disclose principles of justice that will resolve all constitutional difficulties once people step, as it were, into the real world. In the original position, according to Rawls, people recognize that nobody deserves their good or bad fortune. Nobody is responsible for the material conditions into which they were born, so it is fair for society to look at wealth as a collective resource that we may distribute on reasonable and rational principles. At the same time, in Part III of *A Theory of Justice* Rawls discusses “irresponsible rogues and idiosyncratic misfits” and declares, “their nature is their misfortune” (149). Rawls, it appears, does not want to jeopardize the foundations of his theory of justice just because some people do not fit within its conception of a well-ordered society. Honig speaks up on behalf of these misfits: “Is nothing forgone in the [Rawlsian] unification of a life? What about promiscuity, spontaneity, experimentation, the will to live in the present” (151)? For Honig, Rawls is largely responsible for establishing the precedent in Anglo-American philosophy of articulating, once and for all, the basic principles of justice that policymakers and judges must administer. By listening to the people injured by these kinds of systems, Honig contends, we may be in a better position “to diminish the violence and resentment that invariably hurt political arrangements” (159).

In *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, Honig explains, Sandel speaks up for embedded selves, people who embody the norms of a community and cannot fathom, say, bracketing their Christian or Muslim identity to think about abstract notions of right or justice. According to Sandel, Rawls commits a kind of violence by asking, say, citizens of faith to disavow their religious commitments when entering the original position behind the veil of ignorance. On the one hand, Sandel recognizes that some people belong to communities that do not fit within Rawls’s conception of a democratic culture. On the other, Sandel resists acknowledging that people are pulled by competing tensions within communities, say, by the orthodox Jew resisting her community’s gender norms. “Sandel replicates the Rawlsian move: he domesticates his intrasubjective conception of the self by way of a practice of self-interpretation that is strikingly similar to Rawlsian practices of self-ordering of which Sandel is highly critical” (163). Sandel’s conception of friendship enables him to stipulate the conditions under which the individual will achieve internal harmony in ways analogous to the Rawlsian subject in the original position. Much like the Hegelian critique of Kant, Sandel wants to reconcile the dualisms within Rawls’s theory between the individual and the community. The problem is that this effort of reconciliation harms willful subjects who resist community norms just as surely as they rebel against philosophers who demand reasonableness.

Honig advocates for the “remainders of politics”—the rogues and misfits who are neither reasonable liberals nor well-adjusted community members and who turn to politics as a way to challenge normalizing pressures. In the next section, we consider how Arendt draws upon Nietzsche and Arendt to build a *virtù* conception of politics.

The Resources for an Agonistic Framework

In *PTDP*, Honig identifies two aristocratic predecessors whom she draws from to contest virtue politics, but whom she leaves behind when she articulates a democratic agonistic politics. The first is Nietzsche. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche speaks of the Overman as a brave, artistic, life-affirming individual who transcends the herd and its tendency to meanness, small-mindedness, and conformity. Like Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, and William E. Connolly before, Honig thinks that the idea of the Overman has interest only if we (re-)conceptualize it to signal “the resistant and unmasterable” side of human nature (65). The other element that Arendt takes from Nietzsche is his celebration of the *agon*, or contest, in his essay “Homer’s Contest” (2007). “The *agon*’s contests challenge actors to test themselves, to discover their talents and develop their strengths” (70). Nietzsche himself did not think that it was possible to recreate the ancient *agon* in modern politics, infused as it is with the mob’s existential rage, or *ressentiment*, against claims to superiority. In her radicalization and democratization of Nietzsche’s philosophy, Honig thinks that politics may be a site where many people contest the herd-like tendency in human affairs.

Honig’s next predecessor is Arendt, author of *The Human Condition* (1998) and a theorist famous for commending the *vita activa*, a life committed to doing great deeds and saying great words about matters of common concern. “Arendt theorizes politics as an always unfinished business, committed simultaneously and perpetually to the settlement and unsettlement of identities, both personal and institutional.” Arendt’s is “a *virtù* theory of politics, an activist, democratic politics of contest, resistance, and amendment” (77). Honig, like Arendt, thinks that politics is important and, often enough, a site of exhilarating possibilities to fashion a new and better world. At the same time, Honig thinks that Arendt’s distinction between the political and the social, the public and the private, in its own way, displaces many important political conversations about, say, economic justice or gender roles (118). Honig argues that Arendt overlooks how politics infuses everyday life, including about matters as “mundane” as racial profiling or pay equity. Again, Honig is only willing to go so far with her aristocratic forerunners before asserting that we need to figure out ways to make ongoing popular contestation a facet of modern life.

One aspect of Honig's legacy is her introduction of new voices into the mainstream conversation of Anglo-American political theory. Rawls and his communitarian critics share a philosophical canon composed primarily of virtue theorists such as Kant and Hegel committed to laying down the law, as it were, once and for all. By bringing Nietzsche, Arendt, and Derrida into the conversation, Honig is, in Deleuze's terms (1994), an individual full of "ill will" who prompts political theory to start anew on different presumptions, including that in a recalcitrant universe nobody has the right or the power to end political contestation. As a graduate mentor at Harvard, Northwestern, and now Brown University, book review editor of *Political Theory* (2000-03), and prominent member of the political science profession, Honig has created space for political theorists to diversify the canon to incorporate thinkers as diverse as Benedict de Spinoza, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Luc Nancy, Étienne Balibar, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Luce Irigaray, and more (Watson and Honig 2013, 110).

A second aspect of Honig's legacy is her influence on political realism, a movement that disputes the notion that a priori principles should guide the rough-and-tumble world of politics. In his oft-cited article on "Realism in Political Theory," William A. Galston (2010, 387) quotes *PTDP* and extrapolates its meaning thus: "Tranquility is fleeting at best; conflict and instability are perennial possibilities. The yearning for a world beyond politics is at best diversionary, at worst destructive." According to Galston, *PTDP* is an antidote to political moralism, a family of doctrines that holds that politics is applied morality or that philosophers ought to discover or construct constitutional principles. Unlike, say, deliberative democrats such as Jürgen Habermas who invite us to imagine that we can transcend politics and attain universally shared ideals in an original speech situation, Galston explains, Honig aligns with Chantal Mouffe, Bernard Williams, and others in recognizing that human nature and the circumstances of politics suggest that contest over the role or direction of government is interminable. "Honig acknowledges that '[t]he perpetuity of conflict is not easy to celebrate', and she does not do so. It is rather to say that politics is always and everywhere a tension between the drive for and goods of stabilization and consensus, on the one hand, and the drive for and goods of destabilization and conflict" (Galston 2010, 396). For Galston and other political realists, Honig is important both for her critique of "high liberalism" and its quest to escape from politics and her recognition that political morality is not a science with apodictic principles. In turn, however, Honig worries that certain political realists can become satisfied with a *modus vivendi* politics that prioritizes stability over justice. For her part, Honig favors an "agonistic realism" that aspires to a better future and that cultivates a fighting spirit for justice and equality (Honig and Stears 2011).

Politics as Negotiating Virtue and *Virtù*

Honig's heart in *PTDP* is clearly with the *virtù* theorists who challenge common sense, expose the cruelties underneath ostensibly pure moralities and political theories, celebrate the possibility of new ideas and practices entering the political arena, and so forth. One pleasure of reading *PTDP* is its irreverent tone toward theorists and philosophers who write as if they are Supreme Court justices laying down the law.

In the conclusion to *PTDP*, however, Honig makes the crucial admission that politics requires virtue and *virtù*, order and just the right amount of chaos. "Politics consists of practices of settlement *and* unsettlement, of disruption *and* administration, of extraordinary events or foundings *and* mundane maintenances" (205). Political actors and theorists must daily decide whether to build or destroy, consolidate or disrupt, settle or unsettle. To paraphrase Michael Oakeshott (1996, 121–128), Honig is a "trimmer" who thinks that the times call for sailing toward open seas rather than land, for challenging authority and seeking new political possibilities rather than consolidating established intellectual traditions and political norms.

PTDP appeared in an era when much of academic political theory was orienting itself by the work of John Rawls (Moore 2010). In *PTDP*, Honig focuses her critical attention on Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*. Rawls himself, however, tried to fold into his subsequent work a greater appreciation of political contestation—though not, according to Honig (1993, 195–199) enough to change the fundamental tenor of his political philosophy. *PTDP* is one of the most interesting texts of the liberal-communitarian debate, but it is a mistake to say that the book is only relevant in that context.

Honig calls upon political theorists to challenge any philosopher, book, or school of thought that claims to settle the big political questions once and for all and silence the remainders of politics who suffer in the new political arrangement. In our political moment, I contend, we witness many self-proclaimed experts claiming to solve political problems with big data, behavioral economics, and evidence-based policies. Technocratic liberals tend not to cite Kant or Hegel or engage in conversations with their philosophical adversaries, preferring to work with political and economic elites in New York City, Silicon Valley, and Washington, D.C. The Obama administration has encouraged this approach to governance, with the U.S. Digital Service composed of technological savants transforming federal agencies with the motto "JFDI (that is, just fucking do it)" (Gertner 2015). One person who bridges the academic and policy worlds and speaks for the new technocratic liberal paradigm, however, is President Obama's friend and colleague at the

University of Chicago: Cass Sunstein. In the next section, I draw inspiration from Honig to challenge Sunstein's vision of the regulatory state more or less shutting down the *agon* for many of society's most vexed dilemmas.

Cass Sunstein and the Apolitical Regulatory State

Earth needs a virtual country: #Rationalia, with a one-line Constitution: All policy shall be based on the weight of evidence.

Neil deGrasse Tyson (2016)

We live in an era that expresses a deep distrust for the political, that is, public contestation over the values that should govern our common way of life. From one side, the threat comes from ultra-nationalist conservative movements that offer simplistic reasons for a country's decline—including, often enough, the presence of immigrants and people of different religions or ethnicities. From the other side, liberal technocrats assert that they will govern by facts and evidence and thereby avoid the disputes over values that so often consume political life. In their own way, both camps displace politics as conceptualized by Arendt and Honig. In this section, I update the agonistic critique of political rationalism by contesting the antipolitical vision of Cass Sunstein, one of the most prominent scholars in the American legal academy. From 2009 to 2012, Sunstein was America's so-called "regulatory czar" as administrator of the White House Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA). In *Simpler: The Future of Government* (2013), Sunstein justifies the role of OIRA as approving or rejecting any regulatory rule proposed by a federal agency such as the Department of Transportation, the Department of Treasury, or the Environmental Protection Agency.

In *Simpler*, Cass Sunstein addresses the problem that most people do not think clearly about their own lives or that of the polity. Sunstein makes this point using terms from Daniel Kahneman's *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. System 1 is the cognitive system that makes automatic, or instantaneous, decisions, to good effect, when we jump out of the way of a moving car, or bad, when we decide that we dislike a political candidate because of the pitch of her voice. System 2 is the more deliberative and reflective cognitive system that should forge and implement public policy. That does not happen enough, including because of what Russell Hardin calls the "crippled epistemology of extremism," the fact that members of a crowd often reinforce each other's worst System 1 cognitive tendencies (2013, 149).

Given the sometimes “crippled epistemology” of the electorate, Sunstein argues that civil servants in federal agencies should be empowered to forge regulations that enable them to complete their mission of protecting and increasing the general welfare. “In my own experience,” Sunstein explains, “agencies are highly professional, and they work hard to get the analysis right. Those who do the analysis are civil servants, not political appointees” (2013, 180).

One reason to empower civil servants is that they must make decisions based on facts and sound arguments. When President Reagan created OIRA in 1980, he entrusted it to only permit federal regulations whose benefits exceeded its costs. In the aftermath, many Democrats accused OIRA of acting as a barrier to progressive legislation about health, environmental, or labor regulations. Sunstein commends President Obama for his executive order to reinforce the executive branch’s commitment to OIRA and its emphasis on evidence-based regulatory oversight. According to the executive order, “each agency is directed to use the best available techniques to quantify anticipated present and future benefits and costs as accurately as possible” and “each agency shall ensure the objectivity of any scientific and technological information and processes used to support the agency’s regulatory actions” (2013, 218, 219). Sunstein praises the executive branch’s commitment to run its agencies using social science techniques such as behavioral economics and cognitive psychology.

Sunstein enjoins technocrats to transform society in profound ways through the use of choice architecture and nudges. Choice architecture is “the design of the social environment in a way that influences people’s choices—for example, by affecting ease or accessibility, by providing information, or by making certain features of the situation salient and clear or instead invisible” (2013, 37). Nudges are “approaches that influence decisions while preserving freedom of choice” (2013, 38). Sunstein calls his political philosophy *libertarian paternalism*. It is paternalistic because it aims to create choice architectures that create good outcomes for most citizens—to live longer, to be healthy, to save money, etc. To the charge that he is overriding citizens’ autonomy, Sunstein says that a good choice architect will merely nudge people to do things that they would choose to do if they had sufficient time, knowledge, and expertise to study the issue in depth. Sunstein calls his view libertarian because he wants the regulatory state to give maximum choices to citizens, including opting out of regulations if possible.

Sunstein thinks that history will show that many political debates were merely technical problems that have a solution. “My own experience in government was that in tough cases, the real issues usually involved the facts, not values, and certainly not which interest groups to favor. When people in government are discussing a rule, a certain task is to ascertain those facts.” Once they do and convey that information to the interested parties, “they are far less likely to disagree” (2013, 149).

Above, we saw that Honig recommends two strategies to problematize any attempt to displace the political: reveal how the author struggles with the question of gaining compliance with a politics that ostensibly expresses human nature, and disclose the real-world problems with trying to shut down the *agon*. Here, I employ these strategies to show that Sunstein's technocratic vision both relies on coercion more than it admits and that its supposed objectivity can lead to shortsighted policies.

Consider Sunstein's approval, as OIRA administrator, of rules to increase the fuel economy of cars and trucks. Sunstein uses this case as a paradigm of how the regulatory state can arrive at wise outcomes in ways that produce results that gain the assent of all parties (2013, 81–89). The law requires automobile manufacturers to place stickers on new vehicles identifying their fuel economy. There are multiple ways to convey misleading information. Just listing miles per gallon (MPG) does not convey how there are greater cost savings by moving, say, from 20 to 25 MPG than from 40 to 45. Assigning the car a fuel efficiency grade of A, B, or C may signal that the government is rating the car as a whole rather than just its fuel efficiency. After consulting with experts and reading public comments, the regulators designed a label that nudges consumers to buy more fuel-efficient cars and automobile manufacturers to target these consumers. The benefits to the new label include less pollution, more money in the pockets of consumers, greater energy security, and more time for drivers who have to refuel less frequently (2013, 72).

The first thing to note is that the procedure to make the label did not follow a calm calculation of costs and benefits. The automobile industry contested the letter grade system and said that it represented a heavy-handed approach by the government. "Undoubtedly their self-interest was at work. They feared that a low letter grade could reduce sales" (2013, 87). Sunstein explains that "we were ultimately convinced that the industry critics had some good points" (2013, 88), and yet he never identifies what those good points are in addition to reduced sales, a point that he dismisses as self-interested. In *Simpler*, Sunstein also neglects to mention that his role as OIRA administrator coincided with the federal government's \$80 billion bailout of the U.S. automobile industry. In other words, the federal government had a financial interest in ensuring that the U.S. automobile industry was not harmed by fuel economy regulations. As it turns out, the case of labeling cars for fuel efficiency is saturated with politics.

Furthermore, Sunstein never considers the possibility that a transportation system built around public highways and private cars—rather than, say, public expenditures for urban transit and railroads—may be a major contributor to the problem of climate change and air pollution. In May 2016, New York issued a public warning that the air quality index (AQI) had surpassed 100 and that people should curtail automobile travel and, instead, use public transportation where available. This advice, while sensible given the ground-level ozone levels, confronts the problem that Robert Moses—the architect of the highway

system around New York City and, through his disciples, around the country—built a transportation system predicated on cars owned by the upper- and middle-classes rather than buses used primarily by the poor (Caro 1975). American policymakers in subsequent decades have been disinclined to build an affordable and efficient public transportation system that is the norm in much of the developed world.

Sunstein seems uninterested in reopening the debate about public transportation in our country. According to the president of Clean Air Watch in an op-ed written before Sunstein's confirmation hearing as OIRA administrator, Sunstein thinks that "it 'might be better' to help future generations deal with global warming by 'including approaches that make posterity richer and better able to adapt' than by 'reducing emissions'" (O'Donnell 2009). In other words, like many of the University of Chicago economists that Sunstein cites favorably in *Simpler*, he is wary of expensive federal regulations to address global warming. Perhaps more important for the focus of this essay, Sunstein evinces annoyance when anybody challenges him or one of his OIRA rulings. Whenever a member of his staff asks about how a particular interest group would respond to one of his decisions, he replies: "That's sewer talk. Get your mind out of the gutter" (5). Sunstein is not one to admit that his judgment is fallible or that his decisions are contestable.

Reading Sunstein's work through the lenses of Honig's *PTDP*, however, gives us the disposition, tools, and reasons to challenge Sunstein's virtue theory of politics. Honig invites us to be angry whenever anybody claims to have settled the big questions and to claim that we can now replace politics with administration. She teaches us to look at blind spots within a political theory, including strange silences and evasions about what has to happen for the theory to work in the real world. And she presses us to ask about the costs of a theorist trying to bracket questions that should perhaps be reconsidered.

Conclusion: Honig as Virago

In *PTDP*, Honig confronts the accusation that her celebration of *virtù*—from the Latin *vir*, "man"—may be problematic because of its masculinist connotations. She replies that her conceptual persona is the *virago*—"a 'turbulent woman,' a 'whirlwind,' a 'woman of masculine strength or spirit' ... who is both human and a force of nature" (16). This image helps us visualize Honig's role in contemporary political theory.

Many political theorists are drawn to the vocation because they want to address real-world problems and become overconfident in their prescriptions. According to Honig, there is a place for virtue theorists, and in fact it is hard to envision a political theory that does not have traces of a virtue politics that seeks to harmonize ideas and structures,

people and practices. In her book, Honig focuses on the virtue theorists at the forefront of the liberal-communitarian debate, but as the previous section shows, her framework may also help us confront liberal technocrats who seek to minimize contentious political debate.

As a *virago*, however, Honig is not interested in building theoretical edifices that settle political questions. She is a risk taker, a provocateur, a transgressor of intellectual and political boundaries. Political theorists virtually always take certain presuppositions for granted, and Honig challenges us to unearth and problematize those presuppositions. Much like a rock and roll song that energizes a rebellious spirit, Honig's *PTDP* motivates theorists to leave behind their established categories and frameworks and "let in a bit of free and windy chaos" into their political thinking.²

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Notes:

(¹) The Hopkins school has a complex relationship with Kant and the Kantian tradition. On the one hand, the school thinks that Kantian moral philosophy often enough "smells of cruelty" (in Nietzsche's famous phrase). On the other, the school looks for resources within his philosophy—such as his reflections on the sublime, the Enlightenment, and affect—for ways to challenge the dominant Kantian tradition. In addition to *PTDP*, see Bennett 2001, Coles 1997, Connolly 1999, Saurette 2005, and Tampio 2012.

(²) The quote is from Deleuze and Guattari (1994, 203).

Nicholas Tampio

Fordham University



No AccessBook Reviews. Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics. Bonnie Honig. Romand Coles. Romand Coles. Sponsored by the Southern Political Science Association. Article DOI. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2132090>. Bonnie Honig (born 1959),[1] is a political, feminist, and legal theorist specializing in democratic theory. In 2013-14, she became Nancy Duke Lewis Professor-Elect of Modern Culture and Media and Political Science at Brown University, succeeding Anne Fausto-Sterling in the Chair in 2014-15. Honig was formerly Sarah Rebecca Roland Professor of Political Science at Northwestern University and Research Professor at the American Bar Foundation. In her book *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (Cornell, 1993, awarded the 1994 Foundations of Political Thought Book Prize for best first book in political theory[4]), she develops this notion through critiques of consensual conceptions of democracy. In this book, Bonnie Honig rethinks that established relation between politics and political theory. From liberal to communitarian to republican, political theorists of opposing positions often treat political theory less as an exploration of politics than as a series of devices of its displacement. Honig characterizes Kant, Rawls, and Sandel as virtue theorists of politic In this book, Bonnie Honig rethinks that established relation between politics and political theory. From liberal to communitarian to republican, political theorists of opposing positions often treat political theory less as

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