



# Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics (Contestations: Cornell Studies in Political Theory)

By Bonnie Honig

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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 politics, arguing that they rely on principles of right, rationality, community, and law to protect their political theories from the conflict and uncertainty of political reality. Drawing on Nietzsche and Arendt, as well as Machiavelli and Derrida, Honig explores an alternative politics of *virtù*, which treats the disruptions of political order as valued sites of democratic freedom and individuality.

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By Bonnie Honig **Bibliography**

- Sales Rank: #714423 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Cornell University Press
- Published on: 1993-04-15
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.04" h x .71" w x 6.70" l, .90 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 304 pages



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### Editorial Review

#### Review

"Bonnie Honig concludes the introduction to this fine book by invoking the *virago*: the female warrior who will not be contained within categories that oppose masculinity against femininity or human rationality against the forces of nature. It is a fitting emblem for a book that takes up and perturbs an opposition that functions variously to divide reason from violence, liberal humanism from poststructuralist skepticism, and feminine passivity from masculine bravado. This is the opposition between *virtú* and virtue, and Honig calibrates it against a new measure she terms the 'displacement of politics.'"<sup>1</sup> Lisa Disch, *Political Theory*

"Honig's sharp genealogical sensibilities and insights, her development of a position of agonistic amendable authority, the questions which she raises and the soothing answers she refuses, come together in an excellent book that engages and provokes its readers in ways which exemplify political theory at its best, animated but not displaced by politics."<sup>2</sup> Romand Coles, *Journal of Politics*

"Thinkers as diverse as Plato, Aquinas, Hobbes, Locke, and Marx have relied, explicitly or implicitly, on the belief that there is some set of political and social arrangements most conducive to the maximization of human well-being and happiness. Bonnie Honig's illuminating and disquieting book provides an acute and much-needed analysis of some of the consequences and implications of this teleological assumption for contemporary political theory and, more generally, for the ways in which people tend to conceive of politics. Indeed, Honig argues that politics itself, at least insofar as it entails or expresses ultimately irreducible conflict, dissonance, resistance, and agonistic struggle, has largely been displaced from or written out of political theory."<sup>3</sup> Lawrence J. Biskowski, *American Quarterly*

#### About the Author

Bonnie Honig is Nancy Duke Lewis Professor in the departments of Modern Culture and Media (MCM) and Political Science at Brown University. She is the author of *Antigone, Interrupted; Emergency Politics: Paradox, Law, Democracy*; and *Democracy and the Foreigner*.

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