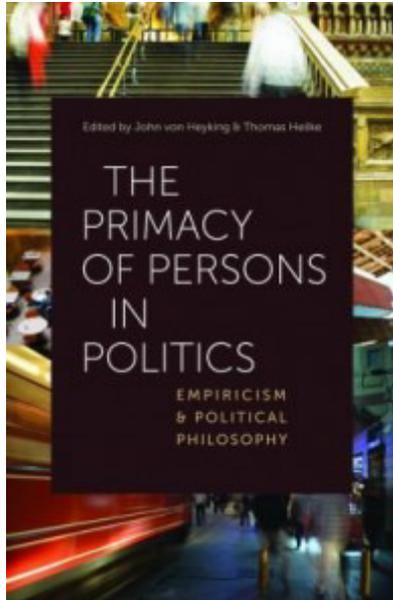


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by *Lee Trepanier*

Thomas Heilke's and John von Heyking's edited volume, [*The Primacy of Persons in Politics: Empiricism and Political Philosophy*](#), explores the nature of political activity by German political scientist, Tilo Schabert. In an empirical study of François Mitterand and former Boston mayor Kevin White, Schabert examines the daily exercise of political power in two distinct contexts in the tradition of classical political philosophy. From this study, Schabert concludes that political activity is fundamentally a creative act and that a study of politics is inseparable from the person participating in those politics.

Politics is creative because politics itself is in a state of flux, for which political analysis must account in a paradoxical analysis. This paradox contains three dimensions: first, political power is paradoxical because the governed must give power to the governing; second, creativity is paradoxical because the creative politician enters politics "mid-story" where people have been living independent lives apart from him; and finally, politics is paradoxical because it is an attempt to bring unity to a group of people with each possessing his or her own free will. The study of politics is therefore the study of the persons as they are the agents of creative acts. Political decisions and institutions exist only because persons are the agents behind them; and the persons behind them are unities of different aspects of their lives which they convey in stories to others while living in freedom where they take responsibility for their actions. Freedom thus plays a key role in the constitution of persons, allowing them to engage the world creatively and to take responsibility for it.

Schabert's theory of politics is the first chapter of the volume: the remaining eight essays are responses to it. The first two essays consider broad, contextual questions concerning creativity and modern politics. David Tabachnick argues that Schabert's thesis of politics as creativity not only sheds light on the crisis of technological domination and existential ennui of modernity but also can lead to tyrannical rule. Toivo Koivukoski continues to this line of inquiry by asking whether a politics conceived as creativity diminish the rules, laws, and institutions that formally recognize every citizen as a human being. Doesn't a politics of creativity reduce human beings to the masses of humanity while elevating only a few individuals as "persons"?

The next three essays focus on specific conceptual aspects of Schabert's theory of politics. John von Heyking explores how friendship are required for a politics of creativity, while Thomas Heilke examines how institutions set boundaries to political creativity. Finally, Dan Avnon investigates the tensions between the autocratic qualities and the democratic imperatives of a person who wishes to participate in politics. All three of these contributors raise the question of how one can evaluate whether politics is creative or something else: when is friendship creative and political? When should institutions be reformed or rejected as creative political acts? When is a person who rules creative or tyrannical in his or her decisions?

The following two essays empirically consider case studies that simultaneously support and question Schabert's work. Alexander Thumfart examines the politics of a post-Communist German city where the formal institutions of power are balanced against an informal network of personal relations. Politics is understood as a state of flux between these two systems of formal and informal power. András Lánctzi also explores this theme by looking at how individuals have remained the same in post-Communist Eastern Europe even though the institutions have dramatically changed to provide the illusion of democratic legitimacy. Both of these contributors raise the questions about the proper relationship between these two systems of power and whether creativity should play a role in either one.

The final essay concludes the volume by considering Schabert's theory of the person in the tradition of French sociology. Erik Neveu looks at three key elements of Schabert's theory – primary of the persons, creativity, and friendship – and suggests these concepts can be introduced and incorporated into the discipline of sociology in France. Here we see how Schabert's combination of empiricism and political philosophy can cut across both disciplines and cultures in contributing to our understanding of the world.

The Primacy of Persons in Politics provides a novel approach to the study of politics, and, more broadly, reality itself by emphasizing the person and contending that politics is creative in nature. Schabert blends political philosophy and empiricism in a useful manner to clarify rather than obfuscate the subject of his study. Although some important questions have been raised about this approach to the study of politics, Schabert's theory of persons and politics provides a pathway to understand how reality may actually operate.