Research Statement
David Thunder
Researcher & Lecturer, Institute for Culture & Society, University of Navarra
www.davidthunder.com

In my I aim to reach a deeper understanding of the first-person standpoint of persons who seek to live meaningful and worthy lives in community with others, in addition to the social and institutional conditions under which this aspiration can be satisfied. Due to the complexity and breadth of these questions, my research inevitably straddles the fields of ethics, political philosophy, and social theory. Issues I address include the ethical risks of role-playing, the role of impartiality in moral judgment, our responsibilities toward the distant needy, the philosophical justification of human rights, the challenge of building community in an individualistic culture, and the limits of consent as a ground for political legitimacy.

My study of politics departs from the bulk of work in political science and political philosophy, insofar as it does not accept that political phenomena, whether institutions, values, norms, or virtues, can be adequately explained using political frames of analysis. In particular, I reject the age-old assumption of political philosophy, dating back to Plato and Aristotle, that political regimes and institutions are the fundamental driving force of social order. On the contrary, I aim in my research to reinterpret political activities and institutions as expressions of broader principles of social order such as social solidarity, loyalty, and justice, while I view political activity as aimed at enhancing the overall quality of social life rather than as defined by some specifically "political" task like the monopolisation of the means of coercion (Weber), the arbitration of violent conflict (Hobbes), or the maintenance of public order (Oakeshott).

Research Phase I: Ethics in the Public Square
In the first phase of my postdoctoral research, my research agenda was shaped primarily by a desire to better understand the meaning of political order from the standpoint of a responsible person who, as Harry Frankfurt would put it, "takes himself/herself seriously," coupled with a determination to recover a broad and integrated understanding of human action and life in community with others, something that is not contemplated by the main current of modern social and political theory, which tends to isolate legal, economic, and political activity from broader values and concerns that affect the human person *as such*. During this initial phase of my career, two questions have been of special interest to me: first, how can individual persons find the knowledge and motivation to contribute to the public life of their communities in a responsible and effective manner; and second, how can individual persons remain faithful to their own ethical commitments as they exercise their social and civic roles? I have discussed the first question in two articles, one published in *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* ("Am I My Brother's Keeper? Grounding and Motivating an Ethos of Social Responsibility in a Free Society," 2005) and another in the *Journal of Social Philosophy* ("Rethinking the Ethics of Giving: The Normative and Motivational Inadequacy of Resource Management Approaches to Beneficence," 2015). I have undertaken an in-depth study of the second question in my book, Citizenship and the Pursuit of the Worthy Life (Cambridge University Press, 2014 - available on Amazon in Kindle and paperback editions).

Research Phase II: Governance & Social Coordination After the Nation-State
The next phase of my career, starting in 2016, involves a shift from the ethical standpoint of the individual person to the social and institutional perspective: an ambitious and wide-ranging investigation of the problem of governance and coordination in a social space marked by morally and culturally heterogeneous communities. Framing freedom and self-government as aspects of everyday community life rather than specialised political values, I seek to develop a profoundly de-centered account of civic order that attributes an important coordinating function to the state but envisages a more robust role for civil society in the activity of self-government, and rejects any conventional notion of state sovereignty. This move is justified, in my view, by the cultural and moral diversity of modern societies combined with the right of communities and associations to advance, within reasonable moral limits, their own distinctive values and way of life. A decentered account of governance and civic order is justified on a pragmatic level by the fact that the levers of social order, both local and global, are increasingly located in economic and civil society organisations rather than in state agencies. Although the project is partly inspired by the neo-republican concept of non-domination (whose leading proponents are Pettit and Skinner), it advances a more constructive concept of freedom as creative participation in the generation and maintenance of a flourishing and just community. While I will draw on social scientific analyses of modern social order, my main goal is to develop an attractive *normative* ideal of freedom, cooperation, and governance that exploits the opportunities latent in the globalisation and fragmentation of social order.

One of the distinctive contributions of this novel account of civic order is its distinctive manner of engaging with the challenge of forging sustainable civic bonds in a plural social order. My account proposes a decentered, confederal model of governance, consistent with a wider social distribution of governmental functions than distributions permitted by standard state-based accounts. This account has the potential to engage with the problems of community life as they confront ordinary people, in ways that statist and cosmopolitan conceptions of governance have fallen short. As the state comes under pressure from internal fragmentation by political and religious conflict and external usurpation by global economic markets, and communites across the world confront rapid transformations and unprecedented challenges, this project is a timely attempt to develop a fresh model of political community suitable for the social and economic conditions of 21st century societies.

At the heart of the project is the conviction that we need to discover a new form of governance and civic order, rooted less in politics narrowly construed and more in the latent power of civil society organizations to promote and defend a decent and humane civic order, and to exercise a wide range of governance functions traditionally attributed to the sovereign state. Affirming the legitimacy of a confederal republic that incorporates diverse and overlapping political communities implies a radical reappraisal of a range of political concepts such as political community, citizenship, popular sovereignty, political representation, democracy, patriotism, and common good, insofar as the classical (and modern) premise of the unity and supremacy of the political regime is put in question.