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Dear Fellow Political Theorists,

We write about a matter which concerns our collective good as political theorists, and with a suggestion about how each of you individually can contribute to it.

As some of you may know, in the world of journals, a measure called “impact factor” has become increasingly important in several dimensions of academic life, including decisions by libraries about whether to maintain their subscriptions to particular journals and decisions by publishers about whether to continue publishing them. Although impact factor is a problematic metric to say the least, it is used by publishers, libraries, and authors to determine the ranking, the reputation and hence the continuing prospects of all academic journals.

The impact factor (IF) of a journal article is measured by the frequency of its citation in other journal articles appearing on a list of journals maintained by the marketing firm Thomson Reuters. There is a one-year IF, i.e. citations that occur within one year of an article's publication, and there is a five-year IF. Thomson Reuters decides which journals are on its lists and decides on the relevant classifications for journals, e.g., biology or political science. In this regard, it is worth noting that the few journals of political theory that Thomson Reuters (T/R) currently lists for comparative assessment are categorized under its “Thomson Scientific Category/Political Science,” not its “Arts and Humanities” Index.

Apart from objections many may have to measuring the value of our work this way, the specific problems with “impact factor” for political theory scholarship are immediately obvious. 1) Although political theorists do publish in journals of political science, we frequently publish and are cited in journals that do not appear on the T/R Political Science list. 2) T/R places political theory journals within a list of political science journals that is not the best frame for assessing our authors' scholarly impact and significance. 3) There are, in any case, only three journals of political theory among the 100 journals in the T/R Political Science list (*Political Theory*; *Journal of Political Philosophy*; *Contemporary Political Theory*). Other political theory journals we may value and in which we publish are not on this list. 4) Political theorists tend not to employ the same practices of citation one finds in journals of social science research and methodology making up the vast majority of the T/R Political Science list. (It is telling that, due to its high impact factor, and especially its one-year impact factor, *Political Analysis* is currently ranked first out of the 100 journals in the T/R Political Science category). 5) Along with much of the humanities, political

theorists dwell as much or more in books than articles. Books, published or cited, do not register in "impact factor."

All of this said -- and absent the prospect of a successful campaign to get libraries and publishers around the world to eliminate impact factor from their decisions about which journals to sustain and which to suspend -- we need to respond directly and intelligently to the realities of the journal ratings and rankings system. This can be done effectively by more frequently citing *journal* articles in political theory and political philosophy when publishing in political theory and social science journals. (NB: Self-citations are downgraded in calculations of IF.) Since IF is supplemented by some attention to "usage" statistics by libraries and publishers, we can also use political theory journal online sites for purposes of downloads and HTML/PDF links to articles or abstracts. This might include inserting links to articles in political theory journals on your course syllabi, or on personal/professional websites.

Here is the difference very small changes in our individual practices could make: If each political theory article published in any journal on the T/R Political Science list were -- where relevant and appropriate to the subject matter -- to *add one or two citations* of articles from *Political Theory*, the *Journal of Political Philosophy*, or *Contemporary Political Theory*, the "impact factor" of those journals would leap. That improved impact factor would more accurately reflect the standing and importance of these journals in political theory, political science, and related fields, and it would also help secure the future of these journals. Of course, citations of articles from political theory journals not yet appearing on the T/R list would also boost the "impact factor" ratings of such journals and improve their prospects of survival.

So, this is a plea, from two Executive Editorial Committee members of *Political Theory*, whose own Luddite tendencies are to refer mainly to books of the long dead, to slightly adjust our citation practices. Cite articles from your favorite journals when you write journal articles. Cite your friends, cite your enemies, but cite! You can still write about Spinoza, Maimonides or Marx and you don't have to change your arguments a whit.

Sincerely,

Wendy Brown
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Anne Norton
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Members, Executive Editorial Committee
Political Theory: An International Journal of Political Philosophy