INTRODUCING THE ANCIENT DEBATE
The Ideal versus the Real

Politics can be defined in many ways. I should probably mention a few of those definitions somewhere along the way. This is a textbook, after all, and for some reason people really like definitions and key words and all that sort of nonsense in a textbook. However, when it comes to developing an understanding of the fundamentals of politics, definitions are surprisingly unhelpful. No matter whether we talk about politics in terms of power, money, processes, structures, or as an embodiment of the social instincts that have evolved as part of the human animal, it always circles back around to the clash between ideals and reality. It's a tale as old as time, song as old as rhyme.* Ancient Greek dudes† argued about it, and today it is everywhere in popular culture. Every variation on "Be careful what you wish for" is in some ways a commentary about the dissonance between what people imagine would be totally cool and the way reality always harshes on your vibe. Dystopian futures are often simply ideals that, when projected out to their perfection in the real world, turn into nightmares. This clash between the real and the ideal can even be found in the classical records section of your local public library, because "You Can't Always Get What You Want."[1]‡

For example: In an ideal world, this would be where you encountered a well-crafted, almost poetic segue into an example so powerful that it forever defined how you thought about the clash of ideals and reality and that would really drive home the real versus ideal theme of this book. Instead, you'll have to deal with the reality that I'm just not willing to put in the kind of effort it takes to pull

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*Totally stole that from Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* (directed by Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise [Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Pictures, 1991]).

†While the Greek dudes in question were probably a bit elderly, *ancient* refers to when they lived.

‡Unlike the Greek dudes, The Rolling Stones are seriously ancient—pretty sure they're like 200 years old.

Stuff to Remember

Things You'll Want to Do Before the Test

Identify the difference between reality and what you think you know.

Explain why this book's use of fiction makes it more awesome than pizza.

Define *utopia* and explain its relevance to the theme of this book.

Go back to the introduction and search desperately for the part where I said there is a theme for this book. Then get all annoyed when you realize that I mention it just a bit to the left of this call out.

Make a pretty chart or choreograph an interpretive dance showing what's similar and what's different about classical ideologies.

Define *politics*, as much as it can be defined.

Don't imagine a cranky old professor wearing a yellow dress and dancing with an antisocial minotaur while dishes and furniture sing. Seriously, just don't go there. And . . . you went there. I told you not to go there. Stop it. Seriously, stop it. It's a very disturbing image.

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something like that off. Instead, I'll just point out that this is the sixth edition of *Novel Approach to Politics*, which means that it is basically the remake of a sequel of a sequel of a remake of a sequel, and from there I'll waive my hands and bit and ask you to pretend that it makes sense to jump into a discussion of Hollywood's obsession with remakes and sequels.

In 2019, the mere rumor that someone wanted to remake *The Princess Bride*[2] set off a firestorm of idealistic outrage. Granted, that firestorm was on social media and we should all be sceptical of social media outrage, but when it fits the point I want to make it's obviously legit. So why was there so much of this unquestionably legitimate outrage over the remake of a movie that most of you have probably never heard of? Well, simply put, it is an expression of the eternal clash between the ideals and the realities that drives politics. The idealist side is best represented by the tweet of Cary Elwes, the most famous and by all accounts the blondest of the Dredd Pirate Robertses. He perfectly captured the idealist position with, "There's a shortage of perfect movies in this world. It would be a pity to damage this one."[3] From an idealistic perspective, he's got a point. Much like *Brazil*[4], *Scott Pilgram vs. the World*,[5] *2001: A Space Odyssey*,[6] or *The Sixth Sense*,[7] *The Princess Bride* is one of those rare films that hit that indefinable pop culture bulls-eye in a way can only be described as perfect. Further, while it is possible for the remake of a reasonably good movie to also be a reasonably good movie—*Invasion of the Body Snatchers*[8] comes to mind—when it comes to that rare film that is anywhere close to being a perfect little treasure, it is truly inconceivable that a remake could do anything but tarnish the original. *Willy Wonka*,[9] *The Planet of the Apes*,[10] *The Day the Earth Stood Still*[11]—there are plenty of examples out there where the remake was an insult to the original.

The reality, however, is that the film and television industry is just that—an industry. Its primary purpose is to make money, and there is a heck of a lot of money to be made in remakes, reboots, and those agonizingly endless parades of lame sequels. It's no accident that one of the most efficient money-extracting machines in the history of mankind has become essentially nothing more than a mindless remake machine. Seriously, Disney doesn't even bother to pretend that it's a real film studio anymore, but if you're an accountant or a shareholder, it's hard to blame them. No matter how inherently bad the very idea of a remake might be, and no matter how idealistic you might be about the art of filmmaking, when there is literally a mountain of cash to be made by shoehorning Hermione into a yellow dress and making her dance with an antisocial minotaur, it's hard to expect ideals to win the day. Seriously, that film made $1.26 billion at the box office.

In these two examples, we can easily see just how simple—and how complex—the clash between ideals and reality can be. For the remake machine that some call Disney, the simple fact that it exists to make money is always going to overwhelm any ideals that might deter it from remaking a deeply disturbing mash-up of Stockholm syndrome and bestiality and marketing it to children. For *The Princess Bride* or any other film that is treasured for what it is, the calculus is far more complicated. When a significant portion of the fan base that the studio intends to mine for cash is likely to react poorly to tarnishing the original with a remake, ideals stand a fighting chance. Now translate that into any one of the countless political, economic, and social issues that groups of humans must contend with and add situations where shared ideals not only clash with reality, contesting ideals clash with one another, and you have found the heart and soul of politics.

And, for the record, for $1.26 billion, I would totally shoehorn my desk chair–shaped butt into a frilly yellow dress and dance with an antisocial minotaur.

In the stories we see in films and read in literature, this conflict between the real and the ideal is commonly embodied by two contrasting characters thrown together on the same side of a conflict. How often does the plot of a good story turn on the relentless enthusiasm of the young idealist who reignites the jaded realist's squashed **idealism**? How many movies feature a tough, salty, older realist who rescues a young, naive idealist? In the original *Star Wars*,[12] which for some unfathomable reason is episode four, the young, energetic idealist Luke Skywalker is driven to rescue the princess because it is the noble thing to do. Han Solo, the gritty smuggler and worldly realist in debt up to his eyeballs, deals with the universe as it is rather than chasing dreams of how it could be. Han is not at all interested in rescuing the princess until Luke convinces him that she will reward him well. But in the end, after Han has received his reward, Luke's idealism touches something within Han, and he returns to help save the day.* In Brian De Palma's *The Untouchables*,[13] Kevin Costner plays Eliot Ness, the idealistic federal agent whose mission is to bring the notorious gangster Al Capone to justice. Ness believes that law enforcement officers should play by the rules and shouldn't break any laws in the process of bringing criminals to justice. In contrast, Sean Connery's character, a veteran police officer and a man of experience, teaches Ness that if he wants to get Al Capone he will have to play by a different set of rules, those created by the reality of the streets: "He pulls a knife, you pull a gun. He sends one of yours to the hospital, you send one of his to the morgue. That's the Chicago way. And that's how you get Capone."

In *Star Wars*, the idealist brings out the best in the realist. In *The Untouchables*, the realist gives the idealist the tools to succeed. Eliot Ness abandons at least some of his ideals as he tosses a criminal off a rooftop on his way to bringing down Capone. Regardless of the specifics of the particular fictional scenario, the struggle between the ideal and the real has always been an attractive, dramatic, and dynamic theme. Shakespeare's plays are filled with examples. In *Julius Caesar*,[14] the idealistic Brutus joins in the plot to assassinate his friend, Caesar, for the noble goal of preserving the republic, while other characters, such as Cassius, act to better their own personal positions. *West Side Story*[15] and *Twilight*[16] and all those other rip-offs of *Romeo and Juliet*[17] cast the idealism of the two young lovers in sharp contrast to the harsh reality of the rivalry between their families, gangs, vampire clans, nations, tribes, religions, or dodgeball teams.

Obviously, since this is a textbook that uses popular culture to teach about politics, I would be criminally negligent if I didn't provide a lengthy and detailed discussion of the many compelling examples of ideals conflicting with reality in *Game of Thrones*.[18]†

The clash between the real and the ideal is so central to nearly every aspect of politics—and so prevalent in films, movies, and television—that I use it as the theme of

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*If you haven't seen the movie that is really the first *Star Wars* (despite being episode four), don't fret. It is exactly the same as *The Force Awakens* (directed by J. J. Abrams [San Francisco: Lucasfilm Ltd., 2015]). Same plot—reused a bunch of the costumes and everything. The only real question it raises is why do the villains from Long, Long Ago insist on building humongous spherical doomsday weapons?

†On a completely unrelated note, I've started a Kickstarter to raise some bail money. Please do pitch in.

this book. A lot of the dynamics we see, a lot of the processes and conflicts, including many that seem irrational or irreconcilable, take on a whole different character when considered in the context of ideals clashing with one another or with reality. However, the extensive history of that struggle is just as significant because, in a world of rapid technological and social change, it can often seem as if everything is new or unprecedented. In many cases, that is more illusion than anything. In some cases, there is nothing novel about what is happening; we have seen it before in another form. In other cases, the changes are incremental and it is our realization of them that is sudden. Regardless, relating the immediate issues and dynamics of politics or popular culture to their historical context can tell us a great deal about what is universal and what is transitory—what is fundamental and what is variable. For example, there are some aspects of the political impact of today's media-saturated environment that are unprecedented, but many of today's most salient concerns about the media and politics were explored in *Max Headroom*[19] back in the 1980s. Recent claims that advancing media technologies have revolutionized politics or society and the efforts of leaders and elites to restrict and or control them are strikingly similar to claims and actions made in response to the advent of other transformative technologies. Some of today's arguments can be found, almost verbatim, in commentary about the political effects of television, radio, moving pictures, the telegraph, the rotary press, movable type, and even written language itself.

And that is my excuse for putting references to a lot of old films and television in here.

Using the ideal versus the real as a theme for this book is also useful because we can all identify with the battle between idealists and realists. Each one of us can probably even identify a little bit with both sides. This reflection of our own internal conflict is much of what makes the fictional contest so engaging. The struggle that torments the characters in *Captain America*,[20] *Spiderman*,[21] *Batman*,[22] or *Star Wars* reflects what we all face in trying to balance the drive to do what we think would be best (idealism) with what we must do or are able to do (**realism**). The hopeful Luke Skywalker within us looks at the world and envisions a better place—looks at our fellow human beings and sees creatures that are capable of so much more. The realistic Han Solo in us looks at how our fellow human beings actually behave rather than focusing on their potential for doing good. This inner pragmatist argues that we must work with the unseemly, self-interested side of life in the here and now to make the best out of an inherently bad situation. And, of course, our inner Batman wants to wear a mask and a cape while driving a gnarly black car to the grocery store.

In politics, the tension between the real and the ideal is prominent both in theory and in practice. Virtually all who engage in politics must balance the dreams of what they would like to accomplish against real-world limitations. A legislator with an idea for a law may have to change the original concept to gain the support of other lawmakers. The threat of revolt often limits the power of dictators and constrains their actions. The harsh realities of economics, the constraints of history, and the dynamics of culture often force revolutionaries to stop far short of the social transformations they envisioned when they first stormed the palace. A negotiator cannot go into peace talks without understanding that stopping the bloodshed may require distasteful compromises, such as leaving a dictator in power or offering amnesty to the perpetrators of atrocities.

Spoiler Alert

First, Sean Bean dies. It doesn't really matter what film he's in or what character he's playing, because the dude is going to die before the end of the movie. Deal with it. Second, you'd think that after pulling off such a bitchin' introduction I'd jump straight into something about politics—what it is, definitions, and all that—but I save that for the end of the chapter. Kind of like the way you don't find out that Bruce Willis is dead until the end of *The Sixth Sense*. So instead of going straight to the politics stuff, I prattle on a bit more about ideal versus real, then I spend some time explaining why it's so hard to teach you anything about politics, which serves to blame you if you don't learn anything and fail the course. That's probably a good first lesson. Even if you think you're not going to need one, always establish an alibi early. Once that's out of the way, I explain how using fiction, film, and pop culture is the bestest way to get the ideas and theories of politics into your head. This leaves you no excuses and reinforces the alibi. Reinforcing your alibi with evidence the cops are going to find if they decide to start digging is also a good second lesson. See, you're already learning a lot of valuable stuff. From there, I use the idea of **utopia** to get you used to dealing with abstract and complex theoretical concepts, then I hit ideologies, and then it's a downhill run into the definitions of **politics** and **political science**.

CLASSICAL THEORY, MODERN REALITY, AND STUFF

So, let's at least mention the philosophers. For those of you who have not watched *The Good Place*,[23] first, what's wrong with you? Second, philosophers are old dead guys who sat around and thought about big thoughts. Surprisingly, that's both a real thing and they're important.* For people like your beleaguered professor, who went to school far longer than anyone really ever should and who now gets to bask in the unmitigated joy of lecturing to constantly texting kids who are only in the class because they have to gather enough social science credits to finish the annoying distribution requirements for their business degrees,† the greatest articulation of the contrast between realism and idealism is found in the work of the ancient Greek philosopher Plato.‡ Plato's *Republic* is a centerpiece of **political theory**, and the characters of Thrasymachus and Socrates represent two sides engaged in a discussion about the purpose of politics. Thrasymachus is a **sophist**: one who teaches promising young men the practical skills, such as rhetoric and deceptive accounting practices of questionable legality, that they need to be personally successful in public

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*My copy editor wants to know if it's the old dead guys or the big thoughts that are important. The answer is yes.

†Oh, by the way, one reviewer described my writing style as "eloquently snarky." Many dispute the "eloquent," but none dare argue that I am not the master of all that is snarky. Nobody's exactly sure what *snarky* means, but I embrace it.

‡Plato is not that brightly colored and funny-smelling modeling clay that your pediatrician was constantly digging out of your ears. Plato was a philosopher, which appears to be a person who has found a way to make a living by admitting that he listens to imaginary people talking to each other. It's a good gig if you can get it.

life. Thrasymachus and his fellow sophists are realists. Success means attaining tangible wealth and power, and the sophists have little if any concern with ethics, furry pettable creatures, or the good of the society. In contrast, Socrates represents the idealist position. He believes that there is more to politics than mere skill at reaching goals or attaining rewards. Socrates believes that the true leader must have genuine knowledge about ethics and about how to govern in the best interest of the entire community.

In a famous section of the *Republic*, Socrates argues that a good shoemaker's interest lies not in making money but in making the best possible shoes. A ship's captain should be concerned not with profit but with the crew. An excellent doctor is concerned not with the money that patients pay but with the health of patients. Similarly, a skilled governor's interests should be not in personal power or fortune but in the happiness of the governed. According to Socrates, the purpose of the state and the purpose of politics should be to ensure the happiness of the citizenry. Thrasymachus counters with the example of the shepherd. A good shepherd does indeed do everything possible to keep the sheep healthy, but he does so to turn them into nice, tasty lamb chops that people will pay good money for. And so it is with the politician and the state.[24] For the leader, the purpose of caring for the citizenry and the state is to keep them both healthy so they can continue to provide the benefits the leader seeks.

Clearly, Thrasymachus has a point. If we look at how the world operates, we must realize that there are people who view others only as sheep to be fattened up to turn a profit at the slaughterhouse. If idealists ignore the realities of this world, there is a good chance that some calculating tyrant or even just some self-interested politician will take advantage of them. However, Socrates also has a point. If all people were interested only in making the most out of the existing reality, then no one would take the risks to make the world a better place. People often do eschew profit or personal benefit; they even defy what seems like the very nature of the world in order to pursue noble goals. What kind of world would it be if nobody had ever questioned the practice of slavery, if no one had ever fought for women's suffrage, if no one had ever demanded religious freedom, or if no one had ever dared to combine malted barley, hops, water, and yeast? What kind of horrible world would this be if no visionary had ever imagined an entire television network dedicated to around-the-clock coverage of obscure sport-like activities such as Aussie-rules football? How precarious the survival of Western civilization might be if that greatest of all Swedish visionaries, Mr. Torgo Espn, hadn't pursued that ideal of an all-sports network despite the fact that only six people had cable TV at the time.

In many ways, politics is all about the ongoing struggle between the dreamer and the pragmatist—the pursuit of tomorrow's ideals within the context of today's reality. Keeping in mind the contrast between the ideal and the real also makes it easier to write a textbook that examines many complicated political concepts and theories. We can explore the simplified and idealized version of a concept while recognizing that reality demands compromises and imposes limitations on the application of that ideal. We can discuss competing ideals. We can also take just about any concept to its idealized extreme as a way of exposing its underlying dynamics, its limitations, and its possibilities. For example, we can envision an idealized version of democracy where the majority always rules and everybody votes on everything, but we must also acknowledge that reality demands limits on what majorities

can impose on minorities. We don't have to look back at too many horrific but extremely popular trends, such as sparkly vampires who like to watch emo high school girls sleeping, or fifty shades of anything, to cringe at the thought of subjecting politics to the raw and untamed whims of the majority. Reality limits the number of issues that the entire population is informed enough about to cast a vote on. At the very least, a functioning democracy must prevent a majority from undermining the future of democratic competition. If a system is to remain a democracy, the majority cannot vote to limit speech or persecute peaceful political critics and opponents.

THINKER IN BOXES

Socrates

Team: Classical Greek United
Position: Short mid-wicket
Status: Totally dead

Socrates (469–399 BCE) was basically the controversial talk radio host of his day. Of course, there was no radio in ancient Greece, but he talked a lot, pissed a lot of people off, and (as far as we know) didn't write anything down.

Most of what we know about Socrates comes to us from the writings of his contemporaries, including his student Plato. Plato's writings are a bit difficult, and we have to be careful to separate the fictional Socrates that Plato uses as the main character in his dialogues from the historical Socrates. Plato's fictional Socrates is a mechanism for expressing Plato's philosophical ideas rather than a representation of the real Socrates. Also, Plato's fictional Socrates wins every argument, and we know that Socrates lost at least one very important argument—the argument at the trial that led to his execution.

Socrates was a well-known critic of the faith that most Athenians placed in popular opinion, particularly as it related to the simple democratic government practiced in Athens. However, most scholars would argue that

critical reasoning represents Socrates's true legacy to the study of politics. Some would even argue that it is the philosophical foundation of the Western culture that eventually evolved from Athenian Greek culture.

Socrates's method of critical reasoning centered on the dialectic. The term *dialectic* has taken on a number of meanings and nuances in the last few millennia, but for Socrates, it was quite literally a dialogue or discussion in question-and-answer format. As a method of teaching, this is still quite common, and when an instructor forces a conversation in class by asking pointed questions and demanding a response, he or she is in fact using what is commonly referred to as the Socratic method. Plato's dialogues are modeled after Socrates's dialectic teaching methods, and Plato used the dialectic as a systematic method of conceptual inquiry. Plato's student Aristotle was a critic of this method, though Aristotle did use the dialectic argumentative structure in his writings, and many would argue that the Socratic dialectic is the foundation that underlies the Aristotelian methods of logic and inquiry. This connection has tremendous implications since it is the Aristotelian method that serves as what many would consider to be the cornerstone of the modern Western model of scientific inquiry.

Considering politics as a balance between ideals and reality* also serves as a good transition to a discussion of some of the challenges to learning the fundamentals of politics. While I note and explore many of these challenges as I examine different subjects throughout this book, from the very start, you, the reader, must realize that one of the very real problems inherent in introducing you to the study of politics is, quite frankly, you.[†]

YOU'RE JUST A MIME TRAPPED IN AN INVISIBLE BOX

Now we face a dilemma. Actually, you're facing an open textbook, and there's about a 90 percent chance that I'm facing either a computer screen or a half-empty beer at the moment you read this, but at this point in the textbook we have to deal with a big problem. My problem, which is what's important here, is that what you already know, even if it is true, is a huge impediment to teaching you anything about politics. Think of it like the hosts on *Westworld*.[25] In theory, those human-looking robots are blank slates. Not only are their experiences supposed to be wiped with every narrative cycle but they are supposed to be programmable from square one. However, neither of those things is true. In the course of the show, memories of previous narrative iterations begin bleeding through, and as they filter into what the hosts "know," it alters how the hosts perceive the world around them. As a result, the same information produces different understandings of reality in subsequent iterations of a host's performance for the guests. In other words, truth and meaning are dependent upon the foundation of knowledge that is in the hosts' heads.

In the case of *Westworld*, the retained fragments of memories enable the hosts to learn in unexpected ways, but this works the other way as well. In the case of students, many of whom have not had their brains properly washed before starting this course, what you know creates a structure of perception, logic, and imagination that can prevent you from seeing truths or possibilities that exist outside of that cognitive box. When you can see that the world is flat and truly believe that it is, indeed, flat, the idea of sailing around the globe is impossible to imagine and difficult to accept, even when the evidence that you can is presented. If you believe capitalism is perfect, it can be extremely difficult to convince you that it has flaws, and it is all but impossible to convince you that some services and goods are more effectively produced through a socialist mode of production. Moreover, strongly held beliefs can be robust and resist change even in the face of overwhelming evidence or logic.

In *Westworld*, this is embodied in the simple caveat that the programming of the hosts is so complex that it is difficult to change more than the surface characteristics and details of dialogue and performance. It is too expensive to alter the deeper inner workings of their thought processes as they are shifted from role to role in the park. As a result, they never quite fit their roles perfectly and sometimes behave erratically. With students, the longer you've "known" something to be true or the more emotionally invested you are in a belief,

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*The reality I talk about should not be confused with reality shows, which of course are not "reality" shows but shows that people appear on in order to trade their dignity for fifteen minutes of fame.

[†]Please note that this represents a legally binding assignment of responsibility for your Don the first exam.

the more difficult it becomes to convince you to think outside of the box created by that belief. That is a big problem when it comes to teaching you about politics. Many of your political beliefs have been part of your life since the day you were born, and, as may be obvious from the maelstrom that the U.S. calls politics, politics is a topic where people are prone to becoming emotionally invested.

Contrary to what you might have divined from the fountain of truth that is talk radio, no matter how criminally liberal and vegetarian your professor might be, he or she cannot actually brainwash you.* In some ways, that's too bad because it would be a heck of a lot easier to teach you about politics if we could just go in and erase a few things. The simple fact is that people make sense of new ideas and make judgments about their political preferences by referring to what they already know. Thus, none of us approaches the study of politics with a blank slate. We all have our own preferences and biases. Even if you don't realize it, you have been immersed in politics your entire life. In fact, politics is the very definition of your never-opened SAT/ACT preparation guide's word of the day: *ubiquitous*. Politics is absolutely everywhere.

WE CALL THE OLD STUFF "CLASSICS"

Dollhouse

In Joss Whedon's TV series *Dollhouse*,[1] the dolls are the perfect secret agents. They are mind-wiped people, hunks of very pretty but empty meat who are turned into exactly what is needed for their missions by downloading the perfect sets of memories, experiences, and personality traits. Unfortunately for the dolls, for all that downloaded stuff to work properly, everything that is already in their heads has to be erased. The dynamic of the storytelling in the series revolved around the imperfections of mind wipes—how what the dolls began to remember and what persisted in their heads complicated what was added. Sound a lot like *Westworld?* Unfortunately, this pop culture reference was canceled before it even made it half a season, so you'd have to have a geek factor of at least 17 to know anything at all about it. It may have been a crap show, but it was an awesome example of the point that what's already in your head can be a real problem when it comes to adding something new.

Inherit the Stars

An impossibly old human corpse is discovered on the moon, and James P. Hogan's novel *Inherit the Stars* follows the race to solve the most baffling mystery humanity has ever encountered.[2] How did it get there? It is perhaps the perfect example of how what we know can blind us to what is true. In the end, the mystery can only be solved by abandoning what we know and rethinking the clues from an entirely new perspective. In the end, it is the shattering of the conceptual frameworks defining who and what we are that is the key to understanding what seems impossible.

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[1]*Dollhouse*, created by Joss Whedon (Los Angeles: Fox Television Studios, 2009).

[2]James P. Hogan, *Inherit the Stars* (New York: Del Rey Books, 1977).

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*It's mostly a technical problem. With university budgets the way they are, no one will pay for the really good brainwashing equipment, and it's just not a good idea to use the cheap knockoffs.

If we were to conceptualize the essence of politics as the attempt by some to influence the actions or choices of others in pursuit of their ideals, that might lead you to think about all the efforts that we make to persuade, cajole, manipulate, convince, and even deceive each other at school, work, home, and the Laundromat. Complicating matters further, the fundamental, underlying causes of political behavior are often muddied by the specifics of situations, histories, contexts, cultures, and personal biases. We respond to these muddy pictures by organizing and simplifying our understanding of politics, by using our own **conceptual frameworks**, which we draw from the personal experiences, preferences, and expectations that we all use to make sense of the world. When those frameworks help us understand something, they are reinforced and become that much more difficult to alter or even question.

For example, when media mogul Rupert Murdoch introduced his overtly partisan Fox News Channel into a U.S. political environment that was previously dominated by centrist, mass-market news networks, he was both hailed as the savior of truth and vilified as the defiler of journalistic integrity.* However, neither of these perspectives accurately reflects the relatively simple underlying political and economic dynamics that bred Fox News. In reality, the cost of running a cable news network had fallen far enough to make it economically viable for Murdoch to cater to a strongly partisan minority of the overall U.S. audience. The political and social conservatives occupying the so-called red states were not only the largest, wealthiest, and most easily identifiable partisan audience in the United States but also the most dissatisfied with the centrist news outlets that dominated the television and print news markets. As a result, political and social conservatives were the most obvious first subset of the overall audience to target with news that catered to their political beliefs and biases. However, even in courses focused on studying the business and economic dynamics of the news industry, it is remarkable how few students can look past what they "know" about politics and journalism to see Fox News for the very simple, very rational, very profit-oriented economic product that it is: Fox News is there to make money; all other motives are incidental. Perhaps the best evidence of this economic dynamic was the MSNBC response to Fox, which was to try to capture the more liberal segment of the U.S. media market.

So a less perfect but still reasonably good way to offer you an example of why what you think you know is a problem is to ask you a few seemingly simple questions about politics, then to smash you over the head with the actual answers, which you will swear are BS.

Number 1: Are Republicans, Particularly the Activist Group Known as the Tea Party, Conservative?

Since the obvious answer is yes, you probably guessed that the actual answer is no. See, this isn't so hard. In fact, far from being conservative, most of the demands of Republicans and tea partiers are radical libertarian ideals, and libertarianism is arguably one of the most extreme of liberal political philosophies. The basic concepts of liberal and conservative politics come from postrevolutionary France. Conservative political philosophies and

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*It is probably fair to say that choosing "Fair and Balanced" as the motto for a partisan news network was delusional, deeply cynical, or the expression of an underappreciated sense of humor.

ideologies are based on the belief that existing political, social, and religious institutions are of critical importance. Whether it is the French aristocracy or the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), these institutions offer benefits above and beyond what may be obvious or originally intended. They have evolved and have been adapted and refined over time to provide countless unseen benefits to society, and their elimination or replacement would cause unpredictable disruptions and harm well beyond what is expected. Thus, they need to be conserved, and arguments for change must demonstrate benefits that will be so clearly above and beyond the current status quo that they will cover the loss of these unseen benefits.

Liberal philosophies, on the other hand, generally emphasize freeing people from political, economic, religious, and social constraints on their individual choices and actions. In postrevolutionary France, liberalism was focused on freeing people from the laws, taxes, regulations, and other constraints imposed by the monarchy, aristocracy, feudal economics, and, to a lesser degree, the church. Most notably, liberals fought to take control of the land away from the church and the crown. Thus, the freedom from government regulations and antitax arguments espoused by the tea partiers; their focus on the individual over the institution; and their support for people trying to defy the federal government's legal authority to manage public lands are at the radical and extremely liberal end of the political spectrum. While evangelical Republicans might be considered to be actual conservatives, the heart and soul of the party is extraordinarily liberal. Somehow, over the years, politicians in the United States—and, to a lesser degree, Britain—have somehow managed to flop most of the meaning of the labels.

With most of you thinking in terms of the misrepresentation of liberal and conservative in U.S. politics, how difficult do you think it would be to have a meaningful discussion of the Greek liberal tradition?

Query B: Has the Gerrymandering of Electoral Districts Made the Republican Hold on Seats in State Houses and Congress More Secure?

The obvious answer is yes, but the actual answer is exactly the opposite. Gerrymandering secures an advantage in representation, but it does so by sacrificing the margin of dominance for many of the seats the gerrymandering party holds. To win an advantage in a house of representatives, you draw the district lines to concentrate your opponent's support in a few districts where they will win by overwhelming majorities, while you spread your support out so that you can win more districts but by smaller margins. It is patently unfair. The gerrymandering party often ends up with many more representatives in the representative institution than its share of the vote, but each of its individual elected representatives is actually more vulnerable to challenge, especially if demographics are shifting. The result of gerrymandering is generally not a perpetual electoral advantage by one side or the other. Instead, gaming the system this way tends to create an extended cyclical process of representational imbalance followed by a snapback and dramatic shift away from the gerrymandering party and an imbalance in the other direction. The 2018 election showed that the United States was at or near the point of snapback, and states such as North Carolina, Minnesota, Georgia, Wisconsin, Texas, and Virginia were all vulnerable to a sudden shift from Republican to Democratic majorities in their state houses and their

congressional delegations. Add some liberal backlash against the election of The Donald, despite the fact that he lost the popular vote, and 2018 hit Republicans with a massive loss of seats in the heavily gerrymandered House of Representatives. And once a snapback such as this occurs, it's hard to rebound from it because of the way shifting demographics of support have altered the balance in all of those districts that were gerrymandered to win a modest but seemingly safe majority. While elections often throw surprises at us, based upon demographics alone, 2020 and even 2022 are unlikely to offer Republicans significant opportunities to reverse 2018. If you are a Republican, don't feel picked on; the same thing happened to the Democrats fifty years ago and will probably happen to them again, fifty years hence. If you are Democrat, the smartest thing to do is to resist the urge to take advantage of a couple of decades of dominance that could be achieved through gerrymandering and, where possible, take gerrymandering off the table.

Question III: Is the Affordable Care Act Socialist?

The obvious answer is yes, but the actual answer is that the law often called Obamacare is only kind of, sort of, only partially socialist. Socialism and capitalism are addressed in plenty of detail later, but for this question, it is best to think of them in terms of whether something is provided by society or purchased in the marketplace. The vast bulk of this particular law was designed and previously advocated by U.S. Republicans as a way of shifting the burden of providing health care away from government and business and into a more general marketplace. Thus, even though several aspects of the law, such as the expansion of Medicare, are indeed on the socialist side of the ledger, most of the law, including some of the more controversial regulations, such as the mandate that everyone must buy coverage and setting minimum standards for what that coverage must include, were designed as ways to expand the market. So if you think of capitalism primarily as market driven, it is probably more capitalist than socialist.

In general, this gets back to ideals versus reality, and it would be a great segue into the discussion of utopias since both capitalism and socialism are utopian ideals that cannot exist in their pure form. So I probably should have put this at the very end of this section that leads into the utopia bit, but I didn't, so I just need you to hold onto that idea for a few minutes while I get there.

For now, we just need to get back to the point that your preexisting conceptual frameworks plague all efforts to engage political subjects in the classroom, and we can see this in something as simple as a discussion of a political debate or a speech. A Democrat and a Republican watching the same presidential debate during an election will notice different details about the questions asked and how the candidates respond. Because each individual uses a unique conceptual framework to organize details into a coherent, simple conclusion, two different people watching the same event are quite likely to come to drastically different understandings of what happened. Furthermore, neither the Democrat nor the Republican will agree with the conclusions about the same event drawn by a radical environmentalist, a white supremacist, your mother, a professional amateur DJ, or the motivational speaker who lives in a van down by the river.* Our backgrounds and personalities

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*A moment of silence, please, for the late Chris Farley.

shape our understandings of politics, sometimes to the point of determining what we can or cannot see. As a result, every real-world example offered in this book and every political dynamic discussed here will mean something different to every reader.

This is partly why I use fiction to teach you about politics. Usually it is easier to separate your personal viewpoint from the characters, plots, and settings of books and films than it is to find objectivity in your assessments of real events. Even when this separation is not entirely possible, since you are already suspending disbelief to buy into the premise of the film or novel, fiction makes it easier for you to recognize how your conceptual frameworks color your appreciation of the work. This means that fiction can provide examples that we can all understand similarly, even if we do, ultimately, reach different conclusions. However, as professors always do, I am going to ask you to do most of the work.* As we move through subjects, I will often ask you to recognize, explore, and challenge your own perspectives and opinions and to be open to at least understanding other perspectives that you may not have considered before or that you oppose. It should come as no surprise that many aspects of politics are subjective, prompting normative questions about ideals— about what should be or how things should work. You may consider some of the answers to be disturbing, inhumane, or horrific. In fact, even though most would agree that making anyone live in your mother's idea of a perfect world would violate the Geneva Conventions, there will be a few people, such as your aforementioned mother, who would disagree. It is important that, even as you recoil in horror and disgust, you still try to understand such bizarre, unpleasant, or even torturous perspectives as your mother's idea of whom you should date—first, because she is your mother, and second, because those borderline-insane people with those bizarre preferences are part of the real world, and it is highly likely that reality is going to demand that you find some way to compromise with them or at least learn how to coexist with them.

For those of you who actually agree with your mother's opinions on your current or future spouses, life partners, or love monkeys, I suggest consulting a mental health professional as soon as possible. For the rest of you, I suggest that you prepare to be offended (if you aren't already offended by that love monkey comment). I must often challenge or disparage some deeply held and cherished beliefs in order to break through all that you already know and to drag you kicking and screaming into something resembling an understanding of the underlying dynamics that drive politics. This is difficult for all involved, and, as noted in the Introduction,† if you do not become annoyed or downright angry at some point along the way, you are missing part of the introduction to politics. Politics is an intensely personal subject.

FICTION AS A TOOL FOR EXPLORING POLITICS

I have chosen fiction as a means to introduce you to politics for several good reasons. First, fiction provides a much better variety of examples and analogies than does invertebrate

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*Again, legally binding.

†The Introduction is that part at the beginning of the book that you didn't bother to read because you didn't think it counted as a proper chapter or because it wasn't assigned.

zoology. A very nearly just-as-important second reason is that fiction, whether it is presented on film, in a novel, or even in a Nickelodeon cartoon marathon, can be used to address the difficulties inherent in the complex and individual nature of politics. Also, it allows me to write off my Netflix subscription on my taxes. As already noted, fiction provides a window into an environment where our conceptual frameworks more easily give way to the author's creativity. By viewing events through the eyes of fictional characters, we find it easier to set aside our own personal preferences, ideologies, and experiences while at the same time appreciating the adventures that the characters encounter. Thus, we can all share the characters' experiences and perspectives on a conflict, a struggle, or some other aspect of politics, and we can share that experience in a reasonably similar manner. Fiction, therefore, gives us an opportunity to at least partially transcend the individual, personal nature of politics.

Second, by living through the characters in fiction, we can get a taste for political situations that we, as individuals, might never be able to experience in the real world or would never want to. For example, George Orwell's novel *1984*[26] shows us how government can be used to control every aspect of people's personal life. The narrative provides numerous extreme and obvious examples of how this might work, such as the government's placement of cameras in private homes and the use of children to spy on their parents. Most of us have never experienced such oppressive government, but through the eyes of the protagonist, we can see how it works, and we get a feel for what it might be like to live in such horrible conditions. For those of us who would rather not have the government torture us by stuffing our heads into cages full of rats, there is the additional bonus that we can get a taste of such an experience without having to actually live it.

A third aspect of fiction that makes it valuable for learning about politics is that it *is* fiction—the characters and institutions are not subject to practical limitations. Authors and directors often exaggerate aspects of human interaction that might remain hidden in real life. They do this for dramatic purposes, but these exaggerated social dynamics are often perfect illustrations of the very ideas, influences, techniques, and principles that I want you to recognize as part of the underlying dynamic of politics. Many of the books, TV shows, and films mentioned in this text are set in speculative contexts in which the authors extend particular aspects of politics, government, or society out to their logical extremes. For example, to show the dangers of powerful governments, *1984* presents us with a government that is so extremely powerful and invasive as to be almost unimaginable. As *House of Cards* or *The Blacklist* shows us, fictional characters can be portrayed as far more calculating than any human being could possibly be.[27] I really should put an example from *Game of Thrones* in here. This would be a very good place for something like that because these exaggerated fictional contexts and personalities serve to highlight the forces that limit the characters' choices or motivate their actions. It is much easier to recognize these forces in a speculative fictional context than in real life, which is comparatively complex, murky, and very extremely beige.

The characters and plotlines of fiction can also help us to develop insights into human motivation that lectures and textbooks could never hope to match. This is crucial for the

study of politics because, unlike courses you may have taken in biology, mathematics, anatomy,* or some other straightforward subject that lends itself to multiple-choice exams, understanding politics requires an intuitive sense for how people interact. Thus, a fourth reason for using fiction as a window into politics is that it is an engaging and interesting way to help you develop an intuitive feel for the subject. Once you truly understand politics, you can read a newspaper story or watch a television news account and come away with a much richer understanding of what is going on because you have learned to read between the lines. Knowing the underlying dynamics, you can sense the reasons for actions that might not be mentioned in the report.

You have to get used to uncovering the subtle aspects of politics in society, and developing that skill takes a fair bit of work. You must think critically. You must learn to be just as aware of the unspoken dimensions of how people, governments, and organizations behave as you are of what they say about themselves or what others say about them. It is the subtle details in William Golding's novel *Lord of the Flies*[28]—such as the shipwrecked boys' experiences of anarchy (a society without any hierarchy)—that prompt us to develop an intuitive feel for how the implicit threat of an anarchical environment influences and drives the collective pursuit of security. In the real world, where you will almost certainly never have to deal with true anarchy, the fictional story may offer the only way for you to develop a feel for what the experience would be like. An instructor can explain anarchy and lecture about it until he, she, or it is red, white, or blue in the face, but until you investigate the issues and encounter the politics in a fictional yet realistic context, you will find it difficult if not impossible to imagine the implications of the situation.

Last, the use of fiction can support and in some cases instigate an active approach to learning. In this text, I introduce a concept or dynamic of politics and then mention some of the examples available from novels, films, and television shows.† Some of what I reference actually counts as literature, but more often than not, you will see that I prefer to wallow in pulp fiction, films, television commercials, or even children's cartoons to illustrate my points. In doing so, I avoid having to read too much of anything that English professors might like, but I also am trying to entice you with popular fiction so that you personally engage the subject and resolve to explore politics on your own, thereby learning even more than you would otherwise. I believe that if you actively explore the subject, you can discover more about politics than a professor can ever teach. The more you work at discovering insights and examples in the books and films you enjoy, the more you are likely to learn about the study of politics.

And this is where I should have put a segue into the discussion of utopian thought. Do me a favor and pretend it's here.

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*I mean actual college anatomy courses, not playing doctor behind the bleachers.

†But obviously not all—I do not admit to watching that much TV.

UTOPIAS IN FICTION AND POLITICS

Utopias are a seriously big deal in both fiction and politics.* Eden, Shangri-La, Lake Wobegon, Grandma's house, an attic apartment above Willy Wonka's factory, Euro Disney . . . images of a perfect world abound. Imagining an ideal world seems to be common throughout history and across societies, as is the desire to attain such a world. Religions, myths, philosophies, ideologies, dogmas, and folklore all frequently involve some aspect of utopian thought. The invocation of the ideal consistently arises whenever people move from the tangible reality around them into the realm of hopes, dreams, beliefs, faith, or the chemical alteration of brain function. Utopias may conform to the ideal of the warrior or the pacifist, to the prudish or the stereotypical denizens of fraternity row, but they always seem to depart conceptually from empirical reality.

The contrasting of images of the ideal with reality makes a perfect theme for a textbook using fiction to explore politics. That's why I still use it after the first five editions, and utopian literature is the ideal place to start delving into the serious theoretical stuff, if only because the pursuit of utopia is such a common theme of both fiction and politics. Novels, films, cartoons—even the amusingly dysfunctional families of television sitcoms—often make use of idealized or utopian settings to explore certain aspects of society. Utopias are particularly useful for our purposes here because in the fiction that depicts them, some ideal is almost always pushed to such an extreme that it starts to break down. This was the third reason I mentioned when I discussed why fiction is a valuable teaching tool, and if I had thought ahead a little better, I would have made it the final one in that section and used it as a segue into this section, but I didn't and the editing budget is limited. Deal with it. If you haven't already figured out that I'm not real good at the whole segue and organization thing, then maybe you should pay closer attention.

However, there is more to utopia than just ideals pushed to extremes. Utopian visions are actually part of the reality of politics because the people in the world who are politically active are often people who are trying to make the real world more like whatever it is they imagine a perfect world to be. The similarities in the use of ideal societies in the two realms of fiction and politics are so extensive that at times it can be difficult to draw a clear line dividing literature from political theory. Indeed, Thomas More's *Utopia*[29]—which is the misspelling of *eutopia* from which the modern term originated—is just as likely to be assigned reading in college literature courses as it is in courses in politics or philosophy.

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*One reviewer of the previous edition of this textbook complained that I tried too hard to use youthful colloquialisms in a vain attempt to engage students. Nothing could be further from the truth. First, I never put in anywhere near enough effort for it to be considered "trying" to do anything. Second, if I *had* been trying to do something, my actual goal would have been to embarrass my children by acting like a dorky old man. With this edition, in order to avoid any misperception that I might be trying to act cool or hip, I rewrote the entire textbook in Klingon. This led to a restraining order from my copy editor's psychiatrist, and my legal counsel has insisted that I issue the following disclaimer: "I am not cool, I have never been cool, and I could scarcely manage to relate to college students when I actually *was* a college student. I am a hopeless geek of a science fiction writer and professor who is pathologically obsessed with the study of politics, and any abuse of the English language that might appear in any way to be youthful is actually a manifestation of a congenital grammar deficiency."

Utopia Ain't What You're Thinking

A first step in understanding how utopias are used in literature, political theorizing, and even practical politics is to drop the assumption that perfection implies a good or pleasant result. Because utopias are inherently subjective and human societies are diverse, it is unreasonable to expect that everyone would consider any one context to be ideal. Although a utopia is a perfect world, that does not necessarily mean it is perfectly wonderful. Believe it or not, scantily clad people frolicking on sunny beaches with beer served by singing llamas is not everyone's idea of utopia. Firstly, because in the perfect version of that world, the beer would be free, but also because some people find the employment of llamas in the food service industry to be hygienically suspect. Those people might prefer robotic craft brewers.* What kind of utopia might appeal to a neo-Nazi? What would the ideal world of one of those television preachers with plastic-looking hair look like? Or a militant vegetarian? Or your Aunt Daisy? How many of those perfect worlds would you find appealing or even tolerable? In fact, anyone's utopia other than your own may be perfectly miserable, if only because one person's perfect world is quite likely to be another's nightmare.

The subjective nature of a perfect world is often made quite clear in fiction that addresses the concept of utopia directly. In Ursula Le Guin's *The Lathe of Heaven*,[30] the main character is a mental patient who can change reality through his dreams. Once his psychologist realizes that this man is not insane but actually is changing the world, the doctor begins using hypnosis to direct the changes, and the story evolves toward a focus on how the psychologist's effort to create a utopia pushes these two characters into conflict. The struggle between the doctor and the patient repeatedly demonstrates just how different their perfect worlds are and just how miserable each of them becomes as the world moves closer to the other's utopia.

Instead of expecting some joyously decadent spring break on steroids, we might better understand a utopia as an extreme version of an ideal, principle, or presumption about the nature of the world. The film *Logan's Run*[31] is set in a world where the ideals of youth and beauty are taken to their logical extreme—the populace remains young and beautiful because the government kills everyone on his or her thirtieth birthday. Even though Aldous Huxley wrote *Brave New World*[32] in the 1930s, the novel might be described as being about a 1960s-style free-love hippie commune pushed to the point of perfection. The diabolically intrusive government in Orwell's *1984*, which is sometimes referred to as a *dystopia*, might be instead thought of as a utopia in which government's control of society is perfected and pushed to an extreme. Featuring shipwrecked children devolving into brutal savagery, Golding's *Lord of the Flies* depicts the closest thing to perfect anarchy that might exist in the real world. The list of examples ranges from the obscure libertarian or anarchic utopia of L. Neil Smith's *The Probability Broach*, in which the idea of limited government sees the full light of day, to Captain Kirk and crew's exploration of some utopian planet on practically every third episode of the classic *Star Trek*.[33] The "perfect" societies of *Star*

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*While some might think that actual craft brewers would be preferred by those who do not want llamas serving beer, it has been scientifically proven that when it comes to hygiene, hipsters and llamas are roughly equivalent.

Trek, besides teaching you never to wear a red shirt on any planet that looks like a bunch of sand and Styrofoam rocks tossed together on a soundstage,* all take some idea and carry it through to its logical extreme.

Although it is clearly impossible to get everyone to agree on one notion of perfection, and even if pretty much any image of perfect bliss is totally impractical, the idea of a utopia is still a valuable tool for political theory, **political ideology**, and even political action. Whenever one takes an idea (or social concept, or vision of the world) to its conceptual extreme, otherwise unforeseen aspects of the idea—particularly its flaws—are exposed. This effect is demonstrated in its simplest form when an author uses a utopia to provoke reflection on our presumptions about society or to warn us against adopting seductively simple solutions to any of the myriad complex problems that challenge the real world. Theorists invoke utopian visions both to critique flaws in political ideologies and political processes and to envision practical paths to a better, though imperfect, future. Even political actors conjure utopias, whether by drawing mental pictures of where their policy ideas will lead or by establishing landmarks to guide their strategies for tackling the endless daily decisions they must make. Martin Luther had his Ninety-Five Theses for a better church; Martin Luther King Jr. (no relation) had a dream about equality. Gandhi had both a unique fashion sense and a hope for peacefully attaining the freedom of India. All of them spoke of utopias and used utopian concepts to pursue political goals in the real world.

Utopias as Social Statements

The simplest and most obvious use of utopias occurs when an author of fiction makes a social statement by pushing an ideal, ideology, or political demand to its logical extreme in order to make it serve as a warning to society. For example, one can argue that Orwell wrote *1984* at the very beginning of the Cold War to demonstrate, among other things, what would happen if ardent anticommunists were actually to get what they were demanding. Zealously seeking to protect the capitalist way of life from what they perceived as a predatory communist political ideology, the anticommunists of the post–World War II era aggressively sought to identify and remove from positions of power or influence those who did not hold "proper" beliefs. Not only is mandating correct beliefs antithetical to the liberal ideology that underlies modern capitalist democracy but the tactics used and the powers demanded by the leaders of this effort threatened the very freedoms and ideals they said they wished to protect.

To see how Orwell's novel could be intended as a warning to those who might support the communist witch hunt, compare the tactics and actions of Senator Joseph McCarthy and the House Un-American Activities Committee as portrayed in the film *The Front*[34] with those of the government in *1984.* In *The Front*, Woody Allen plays an average guy whose blacklisted screenwriter friends arrange to use his name on their scripts so that they can continue to work. Although it has a light edge, the film bluntly depicts the United States at the height of the anticommunist frenzy, when a McCarthyite Congress spearheaded the persecution of "traitors" with "communist leanings" in the entertainment industry.

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*As any *Star Trek* groupie will tell you, it is the actor in the red shirt who is destined to die when the away team visits Planet Doom.

From the presumption of guilt by association or innuendo to the exercise of government coercion to compel individuals to testify against friends and colleagues in order to save themselves, the similarities between the real and fictional settings are all too obvious.

Similarly, *1984* can be argued to represent the extension of something like McCarthyism to the point at which the government regulates every aspect of life, from personal relationships to thoughts and language. In essence, one of many possible interpretations of Orwell's novel is that the anticommunist extremists, if successful, would impose the very dictatorship they claimed to be fighting against. The novelist's dire warning eerily resonates with the real Senator McCarthy's later actions and with some aspects of today's United States, Australia, and United Kingdom. The imprisonment and torture of people for thought crimes depicted in *1984* found its perfect real-world parallel in the ability of the American anticommunists to ruin careers and lives in the name of defending freedom. When workers can be fired and generally shunned by employers for simply being named as communist sympathizers, you have to admit that sounds a lot like something a communist dictator would do to those accused of being sympathetic to capitalist pigdogs.* Regardless of the specifics, even the most pleasant fictional utopia comes at a very high price to someone.

WE CALL THE NEW STUFF "POPULAR CULTURE"

Black Mirror

The science fiction anthology series *Black Mirror* often delves into the utopian and dystopian mode of storytelling and provides some of the most recent and cutting-edge commentary on what might happen if current trends were taken to their ultimate extreme.[1] How would your boss, husband, or the police take advantage of the ultimate manifestation of the selfie–social media movement, an implant that recorded everything you saw and heard? What would it be like to live in a world where every aspect of life was inundated with cheap media products like reality TV and Facebook games? Probably the most interesting new show out there.

A Foreign Country

No doubt that this collection of New Zealand short fiction is going to be a bit obscure, but it contains so many quirky Kiwi takes on utopian themes and storytelling that it almost has to be mentioned.[2] For some bizarre reason, I am particularly fond of "A Girl Named Rabies," but "High Tide at Hot Water Beach" is probably the best one to mention here. Not only does it capture the odd way that Kiwis write and tell stories but it lingers in your head and brings up questions long after it is over. "The Last Good Place" is another. Tim Jones is a poet who has an incredible knack for creating narrative images that are both perfect and disturbingly flawed.

[1]*Black Mirror,* created by Charlie Brooker (London: Zeppotron, 2011–2013; Amsterdam: House of Tomorrow, 2014).

[2]*A Foreign Country,* ed. Anna Caro and Juliet Buchanan (New Zealand: Random Static, 2011)

*I'm not sure exactly what pigdogs are—whether you should barbecue them or pet them—but all the communists in the movies talk about them a lot.

Just as novelists and filmmakers use utopias to analyze social or political phenomena, political theorists use them to evaluate aspects or dynamics of politics and political or social structures. **Karl Marx**, for example, applied utopian thought in his harsh and influential critique of capitalism.[35] I explore Marx's theories more fully when I discuss the economic dimensions of politics in Chapter 4, but his work is notable here because of the way he extends capitalist ideals to their logical extreme for the purpose of exposing the social and political consequences of unfettered competition. Just as Orwell the novelist aimed to sound an alarm about the ramifications of giving the passionate communist hunters everything they wanted, Marx the political theorist envisioned a "perfect" capitalism to expose an aspect of its theoretical underpinnings that could be self-destructive if left unrestrained.

Referring to an argument that is often attributed to Ray Bradbury but is probably rooted much deeper in the history of science fiction, writers such as David Brin commonly discuss this kind of use of utopian thought in terms of the self-preventing prophesy, and, in that, the very act of writing a story about the potential danger that lies in our future becomes a political action. By illuminating a potentially horrific manifestation of the extreme application of an ideal, they are hoping to prevent society from stumbling into that dystopia.

Utopias in Practical Use

More commonly, a political ideologue offers a utopian vision not only to conceptualize a better world but also to suggest a means to achieve it. Again, Marx provides an example.* Having identified what he believed to be the fundamental flaw in capitalism, he proposed an alternative model—socialism—wherein society controls the economics of production. He projected socialism out to a communist utopia, a perfect socialist world, which he then used to prescribe specific instructions about how to get there from the starting point of a predominantly capitalist world. The fact that this road map to utopia included the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and the destruction of the governmental structures supporting that economic system is undoubtedly why Marx's theories continue to provoke a visceral response from capitalists and fearful political elites. Nevertheless, Marx's projection of a utopia as an orienting point for a political strategy is quite common for theorists, ideologues, and activists.

The evocation of utopias in theory, ideology, and practical politics probably reached its pinnacle in the wake of World War I. Sometimes referred to as the **idealist period**, at least in the study of international politics, the two decades between the world wars were marked by efforts to envision and attain a perfectly peaceful world. The attempt to pursue a utopian vision of global peace through world democracy, a concept first proposed by U.S. president Woodrow Wilson, was the most prominent example of this utopian thinking. The unbelievable carnage of World War I, which I describe in unpleasant if not gory detail in Chapter 12, instigated a desperate search for alternatives to violence as a means of settling disputes in international politics. The liberal democratic political structures and institutions that operated in the countries that had managed to win the war appeared to allow for the reasoned resolution of political, economic, and social conflicts. Consequently,

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*Marx went both ways. He was both a theorist and an ideologist.

these institutions provided a seemingly natural basis for a worldwide system of peaceful politics, and the League of Nations was built on this ideal.

Comprising an international court of justice, a legislative body, and lots of bureaucracy, the **League of Nations** appeared to be a substantial step toward a global democracy. However, like most paths toward perfection, it ran into the even more substantial imperfections of the real world. While the idea of a global government was tremendously appealing to the war-ravaged nations of Europe, that same vision of a path to world peace was frightening to the powerful and isolationist United States. The domestically oriented U.S. Congress would neither submit to the democratic structure of the League of Nations nor risk entanglement in the European politics that had repeatedly led to devastating wars. A similar resistance can still be seen, a century later, in the public and political attitudes of the United States toward the United Nations and toward an international criminal court.

THINKER IN BOXES

Plato

Team: **Classical Greek United**
Position: **First slip**
Status: **Long dead**

There are those who claim that all of Western political theory is really only a response to Plato (427–347 BCE). There are also those who claim the pyramids were built by aliens. Who are we to judge?

The reality is that the pyramids were built by humans. They were time-traveling clones of an art student who was supposed to be creating one of those junk and garbage sculptures that spring up around campus from time to time, but still, the reality is that the original art student is mostly human. The other reality is that Plato was an elitist snob, and his antidemocratic ideas, beliefs, and arguments would be distinctly out of step with the liberal ideology that permeates modern Western political theory. While Plato envisions an ideal society in the *Republic*, that society is not in any sense democratic. Plato did not believe that the majority should have its

way, and he especially did not believe that any decision should be accepted as correct simply because the masses favored it. After all, he had witnessed the democratic majority in Athens condemn his friend and mentor Socrates to death for corrupting the youth of Athens. Plato's disregard, if not contempt, for the average person derived from his understanding of the very ability of people to perceive the world around them.

Plato believed that one could not rely on his or her senses to discover what was real. He believed that what we see, touch, and taste are just imperfect representations of another actual reality. Unlike the universe of which we are aware, the hidden "real world" is unchanging and perfect; it is a world of "forms." We may think we know what beauty is, but that is just our opinion of beauty. All we can have are opinions because we do not know the true form of beauty. However, Plato would have us believe that there is such a thing as perfect beauty, which is real and unchanging. Similarly, he also believed that there was such a thing as perfect justice, or correct living, although this perfect

(Continued)

form would correspond not with what a society commonly understood as just but rather with a real, unchanging equity.

Plato believed that it was only philosophers like him who could obtain the ability to see the true forms, and they were the only ones in a position to share these forms with the general public. Basically, it was a lot like our pretentious self-cloning art student saying that only artists understand why building a replica of Stonehenge out of old computers is art and not a pile of garbage in the middle of the quad.

Key to Plato's theory is the belief that it is important for every person to do what he or she does well. Plato believed that people who are good at making shoes, for example, should stick to making shoes; that athletes should only concern themselves with athletics; and that those who can see the true forms (the philosophers) should be the ones to rule. Because of the importance of this governing class, much of the *Republic* is devoted to constructing a state that allows for the proper training of the elite ruling class of philosophers and to specifying the type of training that philosopher-kings should receive.

The U.S. rejection of the League of Nations during the interwar period weakened the institution and made it easier for the fascist governments of Japan, Germany, Italy, and Spain to refuse to participate or respect its role in world politics.

Whether it is depicted as utopian thinking in an imperfect world or as the gap between idealists and realists, the contrast between the real and the ideal is a constant throughout the practice, theory, and study of politics.

IDEOLOGIES

Karl Marx has already been identified as a notable political theorist, but as I've told you, his ideas can wait until we start talking about economics—please try to pay attention.* For present purposes, however, Marx's work offers a good way to talk about the contrast between a political theory and a political ideology. In essence, the difference between these two bodies of thought centers on their basic dynamics: Political theory is aimed at developing knowledge, whereas political ideology is about organizing and directing goal-oriented action. The distinction is roughly the same as the difference between doing research on former baseball players, as many popular authors do, and actually plowing under your cornfield in the hope that they will magically show up for a visit, as Ray Kinsella does in *Field of Dreams*.[36] Marx explicitly wrote toward both ends. It is not difficult to interpret the meaning of *The Communist Manifesto*,[37] which Marx wrote with Friedrich Engels in 1848. Its blistering, sharply written conclusion—urging, "Workers of the world, unite!"—is unquestionably the capstone of an argument that is intended to translate ideals into action,

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*This also seems an opportune moment to mention that recent studies link marijuana use to memory loss. Of course, to communicate this information to the students in greatest need of it, I would have to mention it every third page or so, and I'm way too lazy to do that, so this whole footnote is something of a wasted effort.

to guide political struggle and change. This exhortation also stands in stark contrast to the theoretical and philosophical writings in which Marx makes use of utopias, idealized worlds, and other perfect-but-impractical concepts. The motivations of the two kinds of writing are clearly different, but because both invoke perfect worlds; political ideology and political theory are easily confused.

Distinguishing Ideologies from Theories

A crude way of distinguishing between theories and ideologies—though one with which Plato would undoubtedly have agreed—is to consider the intended audience. While political theories are written for elites who think intently about the details of the nature of the political world, ideologies are written for the masses. Ideologies are used to convey simple messages, much like the brief moral at the end of each of Aesop's fables. To use yet another grossly oversimplified analogy, political theories are to political ideologies what great works of literature are to their TV movie adaptations. Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*[38] is a complex narrative with layer upon layer of imagery, nuance, and subtle references to religion, faith, society, and politics. Scholars debate all manner of detail within its pages. In contrast, *Mr. Magoo's Christmas Carol*[39] is an animated cartoon made for mass consumption, and aside from the philosophical debate of whether or not there really is such a thing as "razzleberry dressing," the cartoon version intends to do little more than to teach kids to share and be nice.

Political theories are usually very complex and logically robust, containing an epistemology (which is a theory of the nature of knowledge), and are written for a select audience. They are, in some ways, timeless—not because they have been around for a long time and you are likely to find several dog-eared, highlighted copies at used bookstores but because they raise questions and provide answers for problems that have persisted throughout the centuries.

An ideology, on the other hand, is created to convince large numbers of people to buy into a belief system. While political theorists often use utopian images to develop their central points or to critique the ideas of others, with an ideology, the image itself is the point. An ideology paints dramatic pictures of the utopia its proponents hope to achieve. It generally does this in a very cartoonish kind of way, in terms simple enough to be convincing. An ideology also often offers almost how-to instructions for assembling that utopia. Interestingly, it is not uncommon for the tenets of an ideology to be logically inconsistent: The proponents of an ideology may dedicate themselves to war and power struggles as a means of attaining peace or advocate imprisoning those who disagree with them as a means of preserving freedom and liberty. Having made believers out of an audience, the purveyors of an ideology then provide a conceptual framework to make sense of a complex world. Inherent within that conceptual framework is a logic that consistently shapes judgments about specific policy questions. Because ideologies must appeal to large numbers of people in specific countries at specific times, they are also usually malleable enough that they can be changed to suit the relevant conditions. This explains why there are often many different versions of similar ideologies.*

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*Some, however, argue that the distinction between ideologies and theory is used to improperly denigrate ideologies. See Nancy S. Love, *Understanding Dogmas and Dreams: A Text*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2006), 9–11.

We think of an ideology as something someone else follows, but we all adhere to or accept one or more belief systems ourselves. Whether our personal ideologies have been acquired through culture, religion, family, language, or conscious choice, we all view the world through lenses tinted by sets of beliefs that we share with others. It is important when studying politics to realize that we have these beliefs and to understand how our ideological lenses alter our vision, even if we cannot or do not wish to remove them. This reflection allows us not only to question why we hold a particular ideology but also to more fully understand others' perspectives and to appreciate how our own beliefs control our perceptions of the complex world of political preferences.

Classifying Ideologies

There are several ways to discuss ideologies. Because they are temporal—they are born, they evolve, they die, and they spawn variants—it is possible simply to give a history of prominent or influential ideologies. I could organize them into family trees and discuss their intellectual roots and how they evolved. I could even create a scheme for categorizing them, such as the taxonomy of species that connects fossils and living animals. Because ideologies are meant to be implemented, the proponents of ideologies are constantly looking for new followers to join their ranks. As such, ideologies are like television commercials for ideal worlds: Just as a commercial is supposed to make you want to get up off the sofa and go buy something, an ideology is supposed to stir you to action. Therefore, I've decided to present you with commercials for a few prominent ideologies. At first, I was just joking around while outlining this chapter and thought commercials for ideologies would be amusing. But then I realized that the concept works. Fake commercials are a perfect way to convey the idea that an ideology sells people the simplified image of an ideal as a way to enable groups or leaders to engage the realities of politics.

One more common thread characterizes ideologies. With the possible exception of **classic conservatism**, they all presume that human beings can make rational decisions and that people can mold their destinies. Although you may view this statement with something approaching the excitement of studying how paint dries,* the discovery of this genuinely fascinating fact was crucial to making modern political ideologies possible. Think about how many modern political ideologies could not have been imagined when people believed that kings ruled because God chose them. Think of how many ideologies remain inconceivable even now in countries where governments claim that they are ruling in response to a very polite request from the magic goat. This common thread also explains why the first great ideology burst onto the scene in 1776, when **Adam Smith** (1723–1790) published *The Wealth of Nations*,[40] arguing that individual rational choices are the ideal way to foster efficient economic activity.

Classic Liberalism: The Mother of All Ideologies

Although **classic liberalism** is rooted in the theories of freedom that were articulated by Thomas Hobbes and John Locke and were explicitly made part of the American

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*Those of you considering taking advantage of the entertainment value of watching paint dry, don't bother. It dries from the edges first and gradually gets lighter in color and tone.

insurrection against their divinely appointed British monarch, Adam Smith added economic freedom as a key variable. He believed a nation could achieve economic success by keeping the government out of the economy and allowing the "invisible hand" of the market to work unfettered. While this economic aspect of the ideology is extremely important, classic liberalism also emphasizes the belief that people should be generally free from governmental constraints. As Thomas Jefferson wrote, "The government that governs best, governs least." Most political scientists argue that freedom of speech and freedom of religion owe their existence to adherents of classic liberalism. A classic liberal's utopia would be a country in which the government provides for maximum human freedom by staying out of the way. It is worth noting the contrast of classic liberalism with the way many Americans currently misuse the term *liberal*.

The ideology closest to classic liberalism in existence today is probably libertarianism. Libertarians believe that the government should provide military protection, a police force, and basic infrastructure (such as roads and bridges) but do little more. It is an interesting question whether classic liberals should be considered realists or idealists. Libertarians believe that government institutions are necessary to control the selfish nature of human beings—as is the case with the U.S. Constitution—so in that way, they seem to be realists. However, some critics would argue that their faith in unregulated economic markets is just as idealistic as unbridled faith in human potential.

> **Classic Liberalism, the Commercial**: Row after row of identical bureaucrats wearing identical suits push tons of papers on their identical desks, which stretch off into the infinity of an impossibly vast office. Some of these identical men are seen stapling a cease-and-desist order on a half-built tree house as they march children off in handcuffs. More government clones are shown out in a rainstorm, posting signs saying "Wetlands" at the edge of every puddle. A lemonade stand is suddenly crushed as a dump truck buries it under a mountain of papers printed with big red letters that spell out "GOVERNMENT REGULATIONS." A teenager in a fast-food restaurant uniform excitedly opens his first paycheck just as one of the government clones pops up to snatch it away and then grabs all the others from the slots by the time clock. The Twisted Sister song "We're Not Gonna Take It" stops blaring as the voice-over proclaims: "There are rights that no one can take away. You know what is best for you. You work hard, and you're entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. You deserve the opportunity to make the most of yourself without the government standing in your way or taking away your rewards with high taxes. Become a classic liberal and learn how to stand up for your rights."

Classic Conservatism

Generally associated with the eighteenth-century British parliamentarian Edmund Burke, classic conservatism developed as a reaction not to classic liberalism but to the excesses resulting from the French Revolution. It is often said that conservatives do not like change. However, even though this generalization originates with classic conservatives, it is not really accurate. What Burke objected to was the belief that unrestrained individual

human reason could take the place of long-standing, traditional institutions. He believed that no group of people could possibly know all of the reasons why institutions such as the church and the aristocracy existed or why traditions evolved. These institutions served purposes that had been carefully honed by centuries of experience. They evolved through success and failure and had an incalculable wealth of built-in knowledge. Thus, these social institutions and traditions became shorthand for a volume of experience and information that was so vast that it would be impossible for any individual or group to understand it fully. Unlike the extreme views and aggressive rhetoric of many people or groups now associated with the term *conservative*, classic conservatism is a rational, considered belief that existing processes and norms have evolved into highly efficient and effective institutions. Classic conservatives believe that people should be very wary of changing things until they understand all the ramifications of the proposed changes because almost any change is certain to unleash unintended consequences, such as the havoc that followed the French Revolution. The perfect world envisioned by classic conservatives tends to be a negative one; it is a picture of the anarchy that might result from the careless elimination of treasured institutions.

> **Classic Conservatism, the Commercial:** Simon & Garfunkel's "59th Street Bridge Song (Feelin' Groovy)" plays in the background of a small-town setting out of a Norman Rockwell painting, where beautiful children are sitting on their grandparents' laps and selling lemonade in front of their white-picket-fenced houses. The music screeches to a halt and is replaced by the Talking Heads' "Burning Down the House" while on the screen an unruly crowd pushes down a pillar, causing the town hall to come tumbling to the ground. Footage of hippies from the 1960s, carrying "Down with Marriage" signs, are followed by additional shots of the poster children of every unusual counterculture group in existence, culminating in a scene of a crowd of them burning Bibles. The images conclude with a pan out to a vast desert, where ruins are visible in the background. The voice-over announces: "They want to change the world. Do they really know what they are doing? What happens when they are done? What is to become of you and the way of life that you hold so dear? It worked well for your great-grandparents, your grandparents, your parents, and you. But they want to change everything. Become a classic conservative and stand up for the good things that have lasted for generations."

Communism

For Karl Marx,* the central problem with capitalism was the class division between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie was made up of the capitalists who controlled the entire machinery of the state and who benefited from the inequities created by the capitalistic system, while the proletariat was the working class: workers who were paid only a fraction of the worth of the goods they produced and the services they provided.

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*Again, I'll get to a serious discussion of Karl later. This is just a tidbit. Put down the water pipe for a minute and pay attention.

Pointless Figure 1.1 A Graphic Representation of the Ideals of Political Ideologies That Really Serves No Purpose Other Than Giving the Graphic Designer Something to Do

Classic Liberalism
- *Inspiring thinkers:* Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Adam Smith
- *Ideal goal:* Power to the people! Political and economic freedom with little government interference of individuals—government is allowed to rule through a social contract with the people.

Classic Conservatism
- *Inspiring thinker:* Edmund Burke
- *Ideal goal:* Keeping traditions alive for a long, long time. Existing processes and norms (traditions) have evolved into highly efficient and effective institutions; be wary of changing anything too quickly.

Communism
- *Inspiring thinker:* Karl Marx
- *Ideal goal:* "Workers of the world, unite!" A classless society in which justice and fairness prevail after overthrow of capitalist societies.

Democratic Socialism
- *Inspiring thinker:* Eduard Bernstein
- *Ideal goal:* Modifying capitalism for a kinder society. A society characterized by social, political, and economic equality, obtained through political action (not revolution).

Reform Liberalism
- *Inspiring thinker:* Thomas Hill Green
- *Ideal goal:* A little government interference is a good thing. Government should regulate the economy and remove inherent inequities in the capitalist system as well as remove obstacles that prevent people from pursuing their individual goals.

Fascism
- *Inspiring thinker:* Nobody wanted to be identified with this one.
- *Ideal goal:* We're the best; destroy the rest! Supremacy and purity of one group in a society with strong, dictatorial rule that has total control over social and cultural life.

The members of the proletariat did not make enough to purchase the goods they supplied, and this resulted in constant overproduction and recurrent economic depressions. Marx saw the benefits of capitalism, including industrialization and the modernization of feudal society, but he believed that eventually the workers in advanced industrial nations would realize that they were being exploited and would revolt by casting off the rule of the capitalists and instituting **communism**, a classless society in which justice and fairness would prevail. In Marx's utopia, there would be no need for government as we know it because there would be enough material goods for all.

Marx's ideology has often been adapted to meet circumstances completely unlike the context he was describing. Most notably, Vladimir Ilich Lenin applied communist principles to the conditions of tsarist Russia in the early twentieth century. At the time, Russia was still a semifeudal agrarian land, which was about as far as you could get from the industrial capitalist society that Marx confronted with his analysis of capitalism. In crafting what has become known as Marxist-Leninism, Lenin shifted the focus from the exploitation of the proletariat within capitalist societies to **imperialism**—the exploitation and colonization of countries by advanced capitalist countries. Lenin also changed Marx's revolutionary vision to depend on a central communist party that could organize the revolution instead of a spontaneous revolution by the proletariat.

> **Communism, the Commercial:** The scene starts with a black-and-white image of an ornate carriage in which laughing people in tuxedos and lavish gowns sip champagne and nibble caviar. Their laughter fades as the carriage slows and stops, and the driver climbs down from his perch to inspect the bedraggled men and women who have been pulling the carriage. Stopping in front of one woman who has collapsed on an injured leg, he unhitches her from her harness and throws her into a nearby trash bin before grabbing a random passerby off the sidewalk and hitching him to the cart in her place. Suddenly, a man runs toward the team of harnessed humans. "This is their world," he yells, pointing to the people in the carriage as uniformed police try to stop him. "It should be YOURS!" One of the harnessed draftees shimmers, changes from black-and-white to color, and says, "Ours." His harness falls away, and he begins shaking the person next to him as the police close in. "It is ours!" he shouts gleefully, as a few others around him also begin shimmering and gaining color. The police appear to panic as the color spreads to exhausted-looking factory workers, construction workers, teachers, coal miners, and salesclerks. The camera pans as color spreads across the formerly gray background, where flowers begin to sprout in empty flower boxes. Then, as it focuses in on a single flower, a voice-over intones: "Workers of the world, unite! Join your fellow workers in throwing off the yoke of your capitalist oppressors. Create a world where those who do the work make the rules and reap the rewards for their labor."

Democratic Socialism

While there were socialists who preceded Karl Marx, those who followed him were certainly influenced by his view of communism. Like Marx, the democratic socialists who

emerged in the early twentieth century believed that people are inherently social beings and that classic liberalism places too great a stress on individualism. Like communists, the democratic socialists envisioned a society characterized by social, political, and economic equality. Their primary difference with Marx centered on the means of implementing this utopia. Whereas Marx believed in the violent overthrow of capitalist societies, the social democrats favored operating political parties in democratic countries to achieve their ends.

There actually is a difference between democratic socialists and social democrats. Although it may appear to be as confusing a point as the ludicrous debate between the Judean People's Front and the People's Front of Judea in the Monty Python film *Life of Brian*,[41] the distinctions are significant. Democratic socialists believe that a socialist state can be achieved through democratic means, while social democrats aim merely to modify the harshness of capitalism through the infusion of some elements of socialism. A key advocate of **democratic socialism** was Eduard Bernstein (1850–1932), who was active in the German Social Democratic Party. Bernstein believed that Marx's critique of capitalism was accurate, but he advocated a more gradual or evolutionary approach to reaching utopia.[42]

> **Democratic Socialism**, **the Commercial:** Over an image of Bill Gates posing in front of his mansion, the words "One Vote" are stamped across the screen. Next, over an image of Donald Trump standing in the marble-and-gold lobby of the Trump Tower, again "One Vote" is stamped across the screen. Rupert Murdoch on his yacht—"One Vote." The princess of Kardashia in front of her three Ferraris—"One Vote." An image of an elderly coal miner—"One Vote." The camera slowly zooms out, and as the frame widens to include the images of various downtrodden people, the words "One Vote" are stamped over each image, faster and faster, until the screen becomes a blur. Voice-over: "We are equal in the voting booth. Why not in life? Social democrats ask you to use your vote wisely." As the camera zooms back in to focus on the coal miner, REM's "Shiny Happy People" blares from a distance, and the still picture of the miner's face comes to life. Voice-over gently continues: "Shouldn't everyone have a home before anyone gets two?" The camera again zooms out as the miner walks into the front yard of a modest house and is hugged by a small child. "Everyone deserves the basic necessities."

Reform Liberalism

Motivated by the inequities of capitalism and the booms and busts of the economic cycles that occurred in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, several theorists—chief among them Thomas Hill Green (1832–1882)—began to think that classic liberalism needed to be modified. These advocates of **reform liberalism** began to argue that government has a role to play in regulating the economy and removing the major inequities inherent in the capitalist system. Government could both remove the obstacles that hinder people from pursuing their individual goals and guarantee opportunities for those who might not otherwise be able to take advantage of this type of freedom by providing education, job training, health care, a safety net, and so forth. While classic liberals would agree with the first goal, which is known as negative liberty, they would not agree

with government's involvement in securing equal opportunity, known as positive liberty. Classic liberals believe that any governmental interference ultimately has a deleterious effect on the economy, whereas the utopia envisioned by the reform liberals includes a government that ensures no one is left behind.* Adopting the ideal world of the classic liberals, reform liberalism hopes to spread it to all in society. This is closer to what many in the United States consider to be a liberal perspective.

> **Reform Liberalism, the Commercial:** The camera zooms in on a stadium track where runners wait for the start of a race—but in this race, it is clear that there is more than one starting line. Poised at the first starting line are contestants dressed in expensive tracksuits and running shoes. Behind them, at the second starting line, are people dressed in working clothes, including construction workers in heavy boots, postal employees carrying bags of mail, and a farmer pulling futilely on the rope lead of a cow that seems interested in wandering off in a different direction. Far behind them, at the last starting line, are others in tattered clothes and with bare feet; these entrants include children, people with disabilities, and elderly people. Jackson Browne's "Running on Empty" plays in the background as the camera pans across the faces of those on the last starting line, and the voice-over pronounces softly: "One of these people could be the fastest sprinter in the world, but we will never know if we don't give them all a reasonable chance. Reward success, but give everyone a chance to succeed. We're the reform liberals."

Fascism

Fascism, an ideology that was developed in the twentieth century, argues for the supremacy and purity of one group of people in a society. Fascists believe in strong military rule headed by the charismatic dictator of a ruling party that exercises total control over all aspects of social and cultural life and molds it to suit the history and traditions of the superior group. In countries where fascism has taken control, such as Italy, Spain, and Atlantis, the fascist party has usually risen to power during a severe economic depression, or when the island was sinking. The leader promises to take control of the economy and works with businesses to plan recovery. Public spectacles are staged to reinforce traditions and to motivate the people to support the ruling party. Historically, fascist governments have grown out of democracies in crisis. However, once in power, fascists tend to dislike democracy because it allows for the dilution of custom and tradition and undermines the dictator's ability to express the will of the people. Nationalism plays a strong role in fascism, as does a belief in constant vigilance against enemies at home and abroad. The fascist utopia promises that people of the correct lineage can return to the supposed greatness of their roots undistracted by enemies who would change or corrupt their way of life. Of course, the Nazis in Germany and the Italian and Spanish fascists all had the opportunity to try out their utopias.

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*This slogan is not to be confused with No Child Left Behind, which appears to be a policy designed to suck the life out of actual learning by turning all students into mindless droids who find joy in taking standardized tests.

Fascism, the Commercial: On the screen, row after row of soldiers are marching. Patriotic tunes are playing in the background. Watching the parade are very Aryan-looking children waving flags and saluting. Voice-over: "Sick of all the political wrangling, the dirty deals, and the inability to cure our economic ills? We can have it all again and return to greatness. If you believe that REAL Americans should rule America, that someone who actually knows what REAL Americans want and need should make decisions that work—if you believe that the trains should run on time, even if that means running over some good-for-nothing un-American foreigners, then fascism's for you!"

Other Ideologies

Each of the ideologies described previously has been rethought, remolded, and resold in different places at different times. It is not possible to characterize all ideologies in the space of one section of one chapter in an introduction-to-politics textbook. That's why there are hefty textbooks and entire university courses dedicated to exploring ideologies. Bear in mind also that virtually any vision of a utopia can be transformed into an ideology through a simplified description of how and why people should take part in the pursuit of that utopia. Imagine the commercials for nationalists, who hold that their own country is the best and that the rest of the world should emulate their way of doing things; for feminists (who can be divided further into several distinct ideologies), who look forward to a world in which women are not dominated by patriarchy; for environmentalists, who envision a time when the earth and all its creatures are treated with respect and care; for technocrats, who eagerly anticipate a world in which people base decisions only on fact and not on belief; or for rugbyists, who dream of a world in which everyone is devoted to rugby or a rugby-like sport of their choosing.

Obviously, I made that last one up. Rugbyism isn't an ideology. It's a religion—all hail the black jersey. The point is that virtually any belief system that includes a utopian vision of a perfect world can become an ideology if believers try to use that utopia to shape or drive political action. The disembodied voice may not be telling you to build a baseball field in the middle of a cornfield; it's probably telling you to send lots of money to the author of this textbook. Regardless, remember that the call to action is a key part of an ideology. As you read the chapters that follow, I will be reminding you to try to recognize your preconceived notions and how they may be shaping your insights as we further explore the real, the ideal, and the political. Before I get to that dreaded rest of the book, however, I want to bludgeon you with one more thing. I want to ask a question that isn't quite as absurd as it might first appear.

WHAT IS POLITICS?

Writing a concurring opinion in a 1964 case involving pornography, U.S. Supreme Court justice Potter Stewart admitted his difficulty in defining specifically what types of adult films constitute pornography. Despite his trouble, he concluded, "I know it when I see it."[43] Students in introductory political science classes face the same dilemma. No, you do not

have to define *pornography*,* but, like the justices watching dirty movies in the basement of the Supreme Court, you are unlikely to be able to offer a clear definition of the similarly indistinct concept called *politics*. Still, more often than not, you will know politics when you see it. After thinking about it for a while, you can probably give examples of politics or political behavior, so the inability to define politics is not a sign of ignorance. Rather, the difficulty seems to arise because *politics* is a word that is so clouded with personal opinions and potentially conflicting examples that it defies a precise and complete description. You should also feel reassured by the simple fact that political scientists themselves disagree about how to define the term. In general, political scientists find it rather difficult to agree on anything,† but we all have to admit that to disagree about the very definition of the subject they study is truly bizarre.

What is politics? Well, you probably know it when you see it. Think about how you might have used the word in the past. Perhaps you were discussing office politics, and you were griping, whining, or laughing about something that someone did in an attempt to better his or her position within the company. You might remember a time when Pat, for example, spent weeks braving the boss's paint-peeling halitosis, flirting and laughing at all the bad jokes, while pretending that your oblong, mentally defective boss was not the most offensive human on the planet. Pat, you may have thought, was "playing politics"— behaving in a calculating manner, trying to influence others to get something in return or attain a goal.

Politics does not end there. Those of you with a more critical eye for these sorts of things may have realized that "Pat" could be either a guy's name or a girl's name and that I did not identify the boss as a he or a she. You may be thinking that I have really gone to a lot of trouble to make this example gender neutral and, hence, sexual-orientation neutral. That took some work, and if I put even a tiny bit of effort into something, then there must be a very good reason for it. While I am not admitting anything, all the neutering in this example might well be a political effort to avoid the kind of typecasting that promotes gender and sexual stereotypes. Or perhaps I may simply realize that it would be politically unwise to upset professors who care deeply about such things and might otherwise assign a different textbook to their students.

Behave Politically? Who, Me?

Another way to get to the meaning of the word *politics* might be to engage in word association. Think of the first synonyms that come to your mind when you hear "Stewie Griffin on steroids." Wait, sorry, I was thinking about something else—besides, that's four words. Try the word *political*. How many of your synonyms are positive? Do they include terms like *greedy*, *disingenuous*, *manipulative*, *sleazy*, and *selfish?* Do you think of

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*In fact, perversely enough, most of you can't even watch it legally. You can star in porn at age eighteen, but in most U.S. states, you can't legally watch it until age twenty-one, so please pretend that you have no idea what it is.

†An unfortunate exception is the unnatural tolerance all political scientists have for corduroy sport coats worn with pastel polyester pants.

someone who applies the ingenuity of Wile E. Coyote to construct elaborate plans for pursuing his or her own self-interest at the expense of others? Describing someone as political is not usually a compliment. Most people use the word in a derogatory sense. After all, the public seems to consider politicians to be somewhat less evolved than used-car dealers.

It is easy to see how Pat's fawning attitude toward the boss fits in with the derogatory connotation of politics, and there are undoubtedly plenty of other examples that you might associate with the word *politics*. But what exactly is Pat doing that is political? Pat is using a technique—in this case, the art of flattery and perhaps even a bit of manipulative sexual flirtation—to try to get something from someone else. Pat is laughing at the boss's inane jokes in hopes of getting a better schedule, a raise, a promotion, a better work assignment, a new desk chair, or perhaps the coveted cubicle that is farthest from the desk of the amateur taxidermist who showers only on Thursdays. Clearly, behavior can be classified as political when it is aimed at getting something from others. We call Pat's behavior political in the same way that we would classify as political the behavior of a candidate who shakes hands with constituents or a member of Congress who tries to make a deal with a colleague in order to get a bill passed into law. In each of these cases, someone is trying to get something from others, such as constituents' votes or a colleague's support for a bill. Whether the behavior is that of an individual, a group, or a government, this description seems to fit our popular understanding of the term *politics*.

Unfortunately, defining politics isn't as simple as including all efforts to manipulate people in pursuit of benefits. Would we call this kind of flirting and fakery political if it involved two Pats who had just met each other at the monorail stop on Aisle 374 of a Walmart Supercenter? One Pat may indeed be trying to get something from the other, but if Pat is just after a date with the other Pat, would we call that political?

Of course, coming up with a definition is even more complicated than that. The word *political* is an adjective, describing the everyday acts of persuasion or calculation that we all engage in, but here we are concerned with defining what *politics* is. I'm going to take a bit of a risk here and say that the difference between behaving politically and politics is largely a matter of the context of the action.

There is one very clear difference between Pat's actions—in either the office or the Walmart—and those of a candidate or legislator: Pat's behavior is unlikely to affect more than a small number of people. Normally, when we use the word *politics*, we are referring to matters that directly or indirectly or potentially have impacts on a great number of people. Thus, I can state that politics consists of individual or combined actions of individuals, governments, and/or groups aimed at getting what they want accomplished when those actions have public consequences.

Notice that this definition does not distinguish between what we might label *good* or *bad* behavior. I sort of did that on purpose.* People, countries, and organizations can have lofty moral purposes, or they can have very low, nasty goals when they are engaged in politics. Both Darth Vader and Princess Leia are involved in politics. Both Adolf Hitler and Winston Churchill were politicians. In fact, most of those striving for what you might

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*Fortunately, you can't prove otherwise.

consider good purposes are successful precisely because they are knowledgeable about politics. Politics can be engaged in by individuals or by groups of people. It can be aimed at achieving societal goals or personal ambitions. Politics can be the product of private individuals or government officials.

On its face, characterizing politics as *goal-oriented actions with public consequences* is not too different from one classic definition of politics offered by Harold Lasswell: "who gets what, when, and how."[44] One major difference is that the definition I use places more stress on action and less on the material. This means that the content of politics is never stagnant. New needs or desires arise. People are constantly coming up with new ideas about how to get what they want. Political entities are constantly changing. Advances in technology translate into new political strategies. The specifics about politics are always in flux. While this constant evolution makes politics an interesting topic to study, it also means that the already-difficult problem of definition is made all the more challenging because we are trying to hit a moving target.

Consider tweeting. It used to be something that birds did, but now it has something to do with Angry Birds and adolescent girls and cell phones or something. Regardless, a medium of communication that was apparently designed so Ryan Reynolds could announce when he's off to take a dump is not the sort of thing that one would normally think of as political, but Twitter and its social networking cousins played critical political roles in the Arab Spring of 2011. Activists used them to coordinate actions, disseminate information, and evade government efforts to restrict news coverage of protests and government responses. Governments went so far as to shut down the Internet completely to try to stop the political use of Twitter, but ultimately they failed and several governments fell. All they really managed to accomplish was to disrupt the commercial and business use of social media.

If I need to mention Donald Trump, you need to crawl out of that cave in which you have been living. Oh, and grammar sucks. Seriously, what's so wrong with "the cave you've been living in"? And should that question mark really go there outside the quotes? Damn, looks like I've given my copy editor another stroke. Oh well, that's why they get hazard pay for working on this book.

The political use of social media, however, shouldn't have been much of a surprise. Nobody thought of a fax machine as a political tool until 1989, when supporters of the political protesters occupying Tiananmen Square sidestepped the Chinese government's ban on domestic press coverage by faxing copies of newspaper articles from other countries into China. This let key parts of the Chinese public know what was going on in Beijing, even though the government-run news agencies tried not to report on the events. By breaking the Chinese government's monopoly on information, the supporters of the political protesters made the protest a public event, and they drastically altered the context in which Chinese officials were making significant political choices. From that day on, the fax machine became a political tool as well as an office tool, and all governments have to take this now totally antiquated information-transmission method—and newer ones such as e-mail and blogs and the Ryan Reynolds bodily function announcement service known as Twitter—into account before they act. No matter how much the content of politics changes, it is always very much about action. It is about the things that people do or choose not to do. And please remember that choosing not to do something is an action.

This brings me to a very important point about politics. Many people are used to discussing politics as if they are the objects of those undefined others engaged in it—as in the following:

- "They are raising my taxes."

- "They are starting a war."

- "They are letting too many immigrants into the country."

- "They made Chris Christie crazy and fat."

- "They put The Donald's speech on all the good channels."

But the very same people complaining about the political actions "they" are taking are also acting politically: Even when actively avoiding political action, they are engaged in politics. Choosing not to participate leaves it to others to make decisions, and just as surrender is a military option, inaction is a political option. If you have ever not voted in an election you were eligible to vote in, you have taken a political action. In fact, the people who didn't vote in the 2016 presidential election are largely to blame/congratulate for the result. In many cases, people choose not to participate in politics because they are happy enough with conditions as they exist and have more interesting ways to occupy their time, but there can also be insidious reasons, such as fear or a surrender to a feeling of futility. Whatever the reason, not voting is a political action. Even under a brutal dictatorship, people's decisions not to protest or not to rebel, while perfectly rational, are still political choices.

Inaction may be something that is taught as a proper response to authority; it may be driven by religious faith, or it may be the result of ignorance. Inaction can also be a very carefully thought-out, rational choice. In the case of revolt, you can think of inaction as the rational result of a calculation involving the potential gains versus the very high risks encountered in revolting against a government. Dictators are seldom very nice to participants in failed rebellions. Not all of the planets in *Star Wars* join in the rebellion against Darth Vader and the emperor. This might be the wise or prudent decision—after all, most of us would like to stay alive and in one piece—but it is still a political choice.

The definition of politics used here also differs from another classic definition, offered by David Easton, that holds that politics is the "authoritative allocation of values for society."[45] According to this definition, politics is about how governments determine who is entitled to have whatever lots of people want. However, I do not want to limit you to the idea that government will be involved in all that is political. In fact, a number of important decisions with public consequences take place outside the control of governments.

One of the most fascinating things about studying political science is that the substance of politics is constantly changing. New political strategies are constantly being developed, new political actors arrive on the stage, and new political entities emerge. For example, faced with increasing globalization, whereby multinational corporations have exerted expanding power that cannot be checked by traditional governments, environmental and other interest groups have searched for new strategies to advance their particular objectives. Some have reached back to the 1980s for a strategy that many had utilized

to fight apartheid in South Africa: They have begun trying to influence corporate decisions from the inside. By purchasing stocks in corporations or acquiring proxy votes from willing corporate stockholders, groups such as the U.S. Public Interest Research Group, Greenpeace, and the World Wildlife Fund have introduced proposals designed to heighten corporate responsibility. At one time, corporations scorned the activities of these groups, but the trend toward **socially responsible investing (SRI)** has had an increasing impact on these businesses. Even McDonald's, long the target of animal rights and environmental groups, has rethought its stance and now issues a report on its social responsibility. Its menu is still defined by what was killed to make the meal, so it would be hard to argue that the animal rights activists have won that one, but the organization's corporate behavior has been modified. Despite the fact that no direct governmental activity has taken place, the organized actions of such advocacy groups are clearly political.[46]

A society's religions, its customs and traditions, its resources, and its economy can all be part of its politics. People can even take actions with public consequences in their own homes. For years, feminists have argued that "the personal is political." Private and personal actions—those that are not traditionally thought of as occurring in the public sphere—can have serious political consequences if, for example, they keep others from participating freely in the political process or from sharing proportionally in a country's resources. Thus, spouses who discourage their partners from participating in public debates or elections are acting politically. They are making decisions with political consequences. Companies that frown on their employees participating in politics are acting politically. Furthermore, companies make decisions with public consequences all the time—when they close plant locations, hire workers, move their headquarters, or lop off the top of a mountain to get at the good stuff inside.

In *The Simpsons*,[47] Mr. Burns's actions often have clear political implications. When you think about all the radiation that has leaked out of the nuclear power plant owned by Homer's boss and the impact of these leaks on the citizens and environment of Springfield, the political consequences are quite obvious. Michael Moore's documentary *Roger & Me*[48] provides another good example, as Moore demonstrates the very public ramifications that the choices of the American automobile industry had on Detroit and the surrounding towns. Those who are outside government commonly make decisions with political implications.

Politics is just one of many terms used in this book that have disputed, complex, or unclear definitions. *Power*, *legitimacy*, *authority*, *sovereignty*, *security*, and a host of other essential political science concepts present similar challenges to the effort to explore the fundamentals of politics. To deal with this barrage of ambiguity, I cheat. I also cheat when I play *Grand Theft Auto* with my kids, but that's just self-defense. When faced with disputed terms or concepts, I will give you simplified—sometimes extremely simplified—definitions that capture the basic elements, and I will trust that you can later flesh out the ideas if necessary. I will try to remember to alert you to these deliberate oversimplifications because I want you to be aware that there are nuances and complexities involved in particular topics of discussion that you might encounter in other courses or other contexts, but I will simplify, sometimes horrifically. Hopefully, as you progress through the four years of political science that you will all be majoring in after the subliminal messages in this text take effect, you will be able to build on the simplified definitions offered here. However, for now, I do not want you to lose sight of the *hows* and *whys* of politics because you are bogged down in debates over definitions. The use of simplified definitions for some complex terms is meant to keep a focus on the dynamics.

WHAT IS POLITICAL SCIENCE?

If politics is about goal-oriented actions or choices that have public consequences, what, then, is *political science*? Strange as it may seem, political scientists do not agree on a definition of this term either. In fact, the disagreement can often become heated, and the scholarly debate often escalates to a point at which, even though food is seldom thrown, you would still have to call it an argument. For political scientists, the stakes can be substantial. How the discipline defines the *science* part of political science can influence which approaches to research will be published in journals and scholarly books. That, in turn, can have a tremendous effect on who can get jobs, promotions, and grants for research projects. Because of the stakes, the battle over the definition can be, well, political. For students, some aspects of how we define the science part of political science can be interesting and useful for understanding how researchers study political phenomena.

When you hear the word *science*, chances are you do not think of politics. You probably think of people in white coats conducting experiments—the typical Dexter's laboratory full of chemicals, beakers, and electric gadgets. However, more than two thousand years ago, Aristotle spoke of a "political science."[49] Could he possibly have meant *science* as we now think of the term? The answer is plainly no. When Aristotle used the term, he was referring to a body of knowledge regarding how to organize a state in order to obtain happiness. Perhaps it is unfortunate that he used the word *science* at all. When we mention science, we are usually thinking of the **scientific method**, a specific set of rules and processes for pursuing knowledge through observation, hypothesis building, experimentation, and replication. This is a way of finding factual information about what *is*, while Aristotle was clearly being normative when he used the term. He was offering opinions about what constituted the good life, and he sought to create a city-state capable of delivering that good life. Today, when we think of science, we try to separate it from discussion of what should be and try to concentrate on objectively gathered facts, sterilized as much as possible of opinions.

Much of the disagreement about the definition of political science stems from these fundamental differences. Some believe that political science should be a science in the same way that biology, chemistry, and physics are sciences; they believe that political scientists should employ a strictly defined scientific method. Of course, there are many practical difficulties with this approach. Consider something straightforward—say, the effect of high-intensity halogen lights on the growth of plants that can *legally* be cultivated hydroponically in your grandmother's basement. You can take two healthy *and perfectly legal* plants into the basement and put one under a lamp and the other in a closet without a lamp. You can then compare the growth of the two plants and draw conclusions about the effects that your independent variable, in this case the provision of light, has on your subjects, the plants. This scientific study of plant cultivation can be repeated again and again, and again, and again, until you are caught by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). As you repeat this experiment, you can make changes to the environment or other factors that you think might influence the growth of these plants.*

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*An additional benefit of this experiment is that when your flagrant disregard of my suggestion that you cultivate a legal plant leads to a handcuffed, shirtless, kicking-and-screaming, involuntary guest appearance on an episode of *Cops*, instead of shouting something stupid, you can yell, "It was science, man!"

THINKER IN BOXES

Aristotle

Team: Classical Greek United
Position: Square leg
Status: Quite dead

Although he was Plato's student, Aristotle (384–322 BCE) was more of a realist, and—unlike our students—was highly critical of his mentor. Aristotle neither believed that one should strive for a perfect world nor did he assume that there is a perfect world of forms hidden in the shadows. Instead, he thought that we could learn far more by observing the world and drawing conclusions from what we see. He believed that we should study how things actually work and how people actually behave. As for states, he observed their functions and categorized them according to the type of rule exercised within each one. Thus, compared to Plato, Aristotle was pragmatic. Aristotle believed that people should do the best they can within the limits of the world as it exists around them.

Also, according to Aristotle, everything works toward a specific end, or telos. The telos for an apple seed is the eventual apple tree. The telos for a baby gorilla is a full-grown gorilla. The telos for human beings is happiness; therefore,

people should create governing institutions with this human end in mind. Furthermore, Aristotle believed that it is natural for people to form associations because human beings are inherently social—that is, "Man is a political animal." The polis, or state, is but an extension of these individual associations and is, consequently, something natural. This is a key point. To argue that the state is natural means to argue that people form states because human beings are innately inclined to do so. In fact, Aristotle would argue, people move toward their telos through participation in the state.

Aristotle proceeded to demonstrate how some types of government are better than others at helping people achieve the goal of happiness. He also pointed out that it is possible to take a bad form of government and improve it. Therefore, we must be concerned not only with the ideal world but also with making improvements to the flawed world that we know. Aristotle was clearly more of a realist than Plato, but Aristotle is still considered to be an idealist because he believed that there is a goal toward which people should strive: happiness. The primary aim of government, in his theory, is to create happiness for the people; thus, happiness is still the ideal.

In contrast, political scientists and other social scientists usually cannot isolate individuals, organizations, or groups in the laboratory. It is almost impossible to isolate them enough to allow for the careful manipulation of the political factors that might influence them. Instead, political scientists have come up with numerous ways of approximating the ideal of laboratory conditions, primarily through the use of statistics. Even so, some critics have argued that the use of statistics pushes researchers to examine whatever can easily be counted, cataloged, or quantified (money, votes, weapons) while other important concepts that cannot be counted (beliefs, expectations, hopes) are discounted or ignored entirely. For example, a researcher would have a much easier time studying *how* legislators vote than *why* they vote the way they do, although answering the latter question may be more

important to improving our understanding of the political behavior of legislators. Nevertheless, despite the fact that statistical methods cannot perfectly replicate laboratory conditions, this approach to the study of politics has significantly increased our understanding and base of knowledge.

Other theorists believe that political scientists need not, and perhaps should not, try to force the study of politics into the mold of other sciences. They argue that it is not possible to be objective about politics in the way one can be objective about biology, chemistry, or the hydroponic cultivation of commercially lucrative *but totally legal* plants. Political scientists making this argument have also significantly increased our understanding of politics by offering insights into the influence of rhetoric, decision process, and culture on the behavior of individuals and governments.

As suggested earlier, Aristotle may have done future generations a disservice by using the term *science* at all. After all, he also referred to politics as "the master art."[50] Perhaps politics should be viewed as an art or, even more appropriately, as a craft.* Regardless, the best way for the student to approach the science part of political science may be to use a framework offered by social scientist Earl Babbie in his popular text on social science research methods.[51] Babbie argues that we all know two realities: **experiential reality** and **agreement reality**. This is a valuable concept for understanding the role of the news media in politics, and I use it a lot in Chapter 11, but it is also a good way to come to grips with the science part of political science. Experiential reality is composed of the things we directly experience—which, in fact, make up only a very small portion of what we know to be real even though we have never directly seen, touched, heard, smelled, or tasted a lot of those real things.

Agreement reality can be derived from interaction with parents, friends, authority figures, religious doctrines, celebrities, the media, and teachers. However, as Babbie argues, we can also think of science as a set of rules and processes that we use to generate agreement reality. Every single scientist does not go out to replicate every single experiment conducted in his or her area of expertise. Instead, scientists agree on common methods to be used in research. As long as they are convinced that other scientists have properly followed those methods, they accept their results as true, as part of reality. Thus, the science of political science is the effort to develop a greater understanding of politics by conducting research openly and transparently, utilizing methods that will convince other political scientists to accept the results as accurate and correct. The difficulty is that the personal, individual nature of politics extends to the study of politics. Just as there are a variety of reasonable perspectives on politics, there are a variety of reasonable and effective methods for pursuing an understanding of politics.

The intensity of the debate over the term *political science* centers on which set of research methodologies is best, and it probably has to be admitted that the different perspectives in that debate are often driven by the self-interests of scholars. An academic scholar invests a great deal of effort—often several years of intense work—in learning one of these sets of research methods. The rules, processes, and procedures are often quite

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*This is the approach of W. Phillips Shively's "little book" *The Craft of Political Research*, 4th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1998), which does a masterful job of introducing the basics of the political science research enterprise.

involved, and a scholar would be in serious professional jeopardy if his or her preferred methodology were to lose the debate. For students, it is enough to know that all of these definitions of the science part of political science require that researchers always be honest about their methods, transparent about the steps they have taken, open with their findings, and, ideally, receptive to criticism. In other words, in order to create agreement reality regarding politics, all researchers must carefully document their research, fully explain their findings, disclose any of their known biases, and acknowledge any known weaknesses in their research. They should do this not because they fear criticism but because they wish to contribute to the development of knowledge and therefore welcome constructive criticism. It is through the accurate reporting of research and subsequent criticism that our knowledge of politics, or any discipline for that matter, increases.

Of course, even this is disputed. Some argue that this kind of structuring of inquiry so severely limits the questions that can be asked that we essentially define away much of what we need to study and debate.

I encourage students to be open to any methodology that, when used properly, increases our understanding about politics. The amazingly profound academic research conducted by the author of this text is obviously the most stupendous available, but in some very, very small ways, I have learned a little bit of stuff from research conducted by others, and those others have employed a tremendous variety of methodologies.

Also, as I note later, it is true that the lines between political science, economics, history, philosophy, literature, geography, and even the natural sciences are not as clear as your university's course catalog makes them appear. They all play a part in the study of politics. I believe that is one reason political science is such an interesting and rewarding subject to study. Finding such an argument in this book should not be too surprising—after all, I wrote this text with the assumption that some of the best ways you can learn about politics include reading literature, watching TV, and viewing movies.

KEY TERMS

CHAPTER SUMMARY

People's preconceptions affect the ways they think about politics, which can make it very difficult for them to study politics systematically and to remain open to new concepts, different approaches, and alternative perspectives. Thus, it is important to find some mechanism that enables students of politics to take a step back from their biases, their own desires, their preference for realism or idealism, and so forth. The use of fictional examples can make it easier for us to set aside our predispositions, help us to travel to places we typically could not visit, and allow us to share experiences that would ordinarily elude us. Fiction writers, political actors, political theorists, and ideologues commonly invoke images of utopia as a tool to communicate their views about politics. This can be an effective device because, by pushing an idealized vision to its conceptual extreme, a utopia can clearly project specific details of a better world—and it may, in fact, expose the dangers of that world.

Many people from many different professions have contributed to our understanding of politics. Political theorists often use utopias to explore what is possible and what is impossible within the realm of politics. Some of these theorists are realists, and others are idealists. Political theories differ from ideologies in a number of ways. Those who promote an ideology advocate specific programs that are meant to achieve their utopia.

The difficulty people have when attempting to define the term *politics*, the changing nature of the subject matter, and disagreements about how to conduct research all further confound the study of politics. Students should learn two very important lessons from this first chapter. First, the study of politics is fascinating. Second, reading only this section will not adequately prepare you for lecture or for an exam.

STUDY QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

1. Why is fiction a good tool for the study of politics?

2. Why do political theorists and political actors use utopian themes? How can these themes help us to identify flaws in "perfect worlds"?

3. What are the differences between political theories and political ideologies?

4. As a potential consumer viewing the commercials for different political ideologies, what questions would you want answered before you would buy each product?

5. What is it that makes politics a difficult concept to define?

6. How is the study of politics different from the study of natural sciences (e.g., biology and chemistry)?

7. Think of your own example to illustrate how a novel that you've read or a television show or film that you've seen demonstrates the difference between idealism and realism.

8. Send all of your money to the author of this text.

WEBSITES TO EXPLORE

http://plato.stanford.edu/contents.html. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy contains entries on relevant authors, concepts, and terms.

www.gutenberg.org. Project Gutenberg provides free electronic versions of many classic works, including several of the older texts mentioned in this chapter.

www.etalkinghead.com. *Etalkinghead*, an online magazine, features in its Political Blog Directory a listing of political blogs covering an array of

ideologies. Exploring these blogs is a great way to discover your own "field of dreams."

www.cagle.com/politicalcartoons. Daryl Cagle's Political Cartoonists Index is an up-to-date collection of editorial cartoons, which can be powerful tools for promoting ideologies and critiquing other ideologies.

www.theonion.com. *The Onion* provides a weekly satirical look at the major news of the day.