

II. Political Science – Perspectives on Governing

The phrase “political science” refers to (1) the products, the body of social science knowledge about politics, government, and public policy; (2) the processes, the methods of academic and professional study for public life in human society; and (3) the people, the community of scholars and students who share an interest in governing. Of course, subject matter, the process of studying the subject matter, and the people who are involved are all interrelated. In order to systematically understand the state of the art in political science, you must know basic information about politics, government, and public policy, but you also must know something about “doing” political science. And ultimately, disciplined knowledge requires knowledge of the discipline. Knowledge of the products, the methods, and the people who form the academic community are important building blocks for understanding political science.

A. The Product - Political Science as Knowledge

The literature of political science is vast. By convention, we organize materials into sub-fields within the discipline including the areas of national political institutions, constitutional law, state and local government, public administration, public policy, comparative politics, and international relations. Specialists study each of the areas in great detail. In fact, many political scientists think of themselves as concentrated in a sub-specialty such as congressional or presidential studies within the specialty of U.S. political institutions. These

specialists produce many research studies, and they write about their research for other scholars, political practitioners, and students.

1. Conference Papers – Preliminary Research Findings. Political scientists gather at annual meetings around the country and around the world. Some conferences are totally dedicated to a specific subfield or even a particular topic. Other conferences are gatherings of people from many fields, and their special interests are accommodated within the overall conference program. The basic organizational unit of a political science conference is the *panel*, a small group of three-to-four presenters who speak on a common topic. Panels are further organized into *tracks*, subfield or topical groups of related panels. This type of conference organization allows a person to sit in on a variety of different topical panels or to specialize and only visit the panels in a subfield. During the conference, presenters get feedback from other panelists and attendees, and they use the feedback to strengthen their research.

2. Research Articles – The Peer Review Process. Many of the better conference papers are submitted to peer-reviewed academic journals. The academic journal is the workhorse of any discipline. Researchers from universities and institutes submit research manuscripts to one of a number of specialized journals. The editor of the journal sends the manuscript to other specialists in the field. The name and other identifiers on the author's manuscript are stripped so that there is a *blind peer-review* process. Reviewers comment on the manuscript and recommend that the editor publish it, reject it, or ask that it

be revised and resubmitted. Until a research project meets this test, it remains outside of the knowledge base of the discipline.

3. Scholarly Books – Topical Synthesis. A political scientist may produce a large body of related work that leads to a book. Working alone or in partnership with another content specialist, the author may contribute new knowledge about a concept or a public person or an important political event. Hundreds of new scholarly books of political analysis, biography, and current events are published every year, often by university presses. Another type of important scholarly book is the edited work collected from many authors on a common topic. The editor(s) assemble the material and often write an introduction and conclusion that preview and summarize the collected materials.

4. Textbooks – Synthesis Across Topics. Political science textbooks are syntheses of research findings and professional experience in the field. Professors

or researchers who have spent a great deal of time reading and conducting research in an area pull together material from a variety of sources. This textbook is just such an effort. The textbook writer relies on his or her *tacit understanding* (Polanyi, 1966)

Box 1.1 Publication Timetables

We assume that a textbook with this year's publication date contains the latest information in the field. However, the textbook narrative may be older than that. The first chapters of the text were probably drafted two years before the last chapters. The chapters then have been in revision for a year as the author tries to accommodate reviewers' comments. And then of course the research articles upon which the chapters were based were under consideration for a year at the journal. And the research itself preceded the journal manuscript by a year or more. At best, some of the information in today's textbooks is 3-4 years old.

of the specialty in order to weave a coherent narrative from specialized tidbits

published in research journals, papers presented at professional conferences, and other reliable information. Again, peers review chapters of the textbook without knowing the author's name or affiliation. After they comment, the textbook company and the author revise the chapters to accommodate reviewer comments.

Textbooks are not usually intended to be groundbreaking works. Their purpose is to communicate basic information to a college-age audience. In fact, they are training materials as much as they are scholarship. This is not meant to disparage this and other textbooks. Rather it is intended as a caution to you, the reader, that far more detailed and sophisticated information stands behind the generalizations found in your texts. Any textbook is an orientation to a field of study, not the final word in the field or the profession's cutting edge research.

In terms of political science as product, the published research represents a body of knowledge about politics, government, and public policy. When we are asked what we are studying in college and we answer "political science," we are referring to a corpus of published material. There is a great deal of political science information to be had, and it is growing at an accelerating pace.

B. The Process - Political Science as Method

In order to study politics in a productive way, certain practices or conventions have to be followed. The same everyday reliance upon "normal science" characterizes all human enterprises that we refer to as scientific. People

who share the current framework for studying politics form a scholarly community, or what we call an *academic discipline*. It does not matter if the political scientist works in government or in a research institute or in a university or whether one studies institutions or policy. All are trained in a similar manner, read similar literature, and gather at many of the same professional conferences. Members of the discipline support and police each other in a communal effort to advance the study of politics. In many ways, the discipline shapes the way that we create knowledge about politics, government, and public policy.

Political scientists and other social scientists including economists, sociologists, cultural anthropologists, and social psychologists develop *social science methods*. Although the particular techniques used in each social science differ, they share a canon of philosophy of science. There are principles of reasoning and justification that philosophers of science have formalized in their study of what we call *epistemology*, the study of knowledge claims. Advanced study in these principles and the research methods that follow from them are the core of graduate education in the social sciences. The graduates of advanced programs go on to form the nucleus of research institutes and teaching universities, and they take their shared orientation and methods with them. We call this shared frame of reference a *paradigm*. At any one point in time, a single paradigm dominates a discipline (Kuhn, 1962).

Of course, methods do change. Over time, new concepts are developed and new techniques are created to measure those concepts. We create new

models that yield new hypotheses. There are always mavericks that open the way to new ways of studying politics. Sometimes the process is evolutionary, and sometimes it is revolutionary. The knowledge base in textbooks appears to be stable, belying the real flux of research.

Occasionally, a truly revolutionary insight appears in our midst. We may even witness a whole new subfield emerge, or a distinctive approach may take over dominance of the profession, a so-called *paradigm shift*. At such moments, academic disciplines are not always polite and inclusive. Advocates for different approaches battle it out for grant money, new faculty positions, novel courses, and ultimately their own graduate training programs.

Nevertheless, it is important for you to understand that a body of methodology underpins the facts that we think we know about politics. Political scientists use these methods in a variety of subject matter areas ranging from state and local government to international relations. Every day, new research findings are being published. Our understanding of politics changes ever slightly or radically in response to new knowledge in the field.

1. Concepts as Building Blocks. Creative ideas form the foundation of all human knowledge. The insights of natural science, fine art, the humanities, music, technology, and the social sciences all exist in our minds before we share them as knowledge. We must conceptualize something before we can know it. Reality – or the truth “small t” – therefore exists in our minds. There is little that

we know in any immediate, primary sense. Even our experience of our mother's love is interpretative.

Some epistemologists believe that there is a world of ideas that corresponds directly to a "real world" that exists independently of our perceptions (Ayer, 1952: 138). These "realists" suggest that we share a concept such as "race," but distinctive races exist in the world whether we perceive them or not. The challenge in their view is to make our perceptions conform as much as possible to reality.

Other epistemologists deny that there is a knowable reality apart from our perceptions of it. These "instrumentalists" believe that we create reality when we name things (Hoover, 1992: 18). Race is socially, not biologically defined. Concepts work for us, so we retain and share them. When they fail to be useful, we discard them and adopt a newer understanding.

Another term helps illustrate this distinction. Sociologists use a concept that we call *social class*. The concept is useful in describing how human societies appear to organize themselves into strata. The upper levels of society are more wealthy and secure, while the lower strata are poor and at risk. There is also a middle class that enjoys many of the fruits of prosperity and contributes a great deal of the productive work needed in contemporary societies.

As political scientists, we are naturally interested in class-linked political ideas and agendas. What are the "blue collar workers" thinking about at election time? Are members of the "wealthy elite" trying to influence the outcome of an

election with their campaign contributions? Will the broad “middle class” turn out to vote in an election year when the economy is in good shape? But do social classes “really exist?” Karl Marx obviously thought so. But does a concept like social class work with one set of assumptions -- e.g., Marx’s theory of class conflict -- and fall apart under a different set of assumptions, e.g., Auguste Comte’s theory of social mobility and economic progress? Again, treating the concept of social class as an instrumental notion that need not “really” exist out in the world allows us to use it when it is called for in a model and avoid it when does not work in another.

There are trade offs between realistic and instrumental definitions. Realistic concepts link us to a rich past replete with significant philosophical speculations. We keep company with Plato and Confucius when we contemplate the social strata of societies. Instrumental definitions are less profound but are far more measurable. An instrumental thinker would settle for “socio-economic status” over social class and suffer the theoretical disconnect that such a shift entails. However, he or she could then proceed to build an index of socio-economic status (SES) from earnings and education data and without excessive worry about whether the index “really” reflects social class.

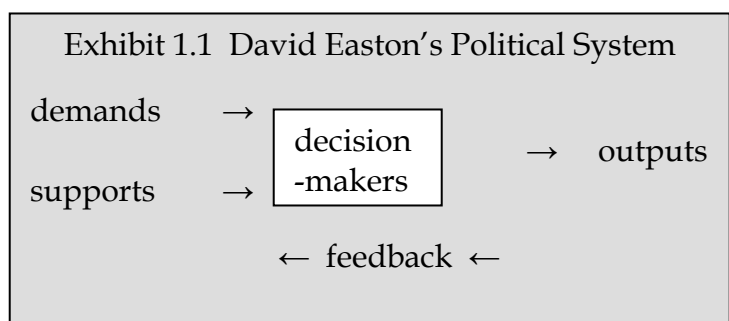
It is important to realize that in the shift from realistic to instrumental truth claims, the whole logic of social science becomes more tentative. If indicators of concepts were said to be *isomorphic* (perfectly equivalent) with the full theoretical notions themselves, then we would be arguing about Truth again.

With instrumental logic, we are free to make findings of fact – albeit tentative ones – within a relatively efficient system of knowledge production. If in the United States, African Americans vote disproportionately Democratic or if middle class voters increasingly report themselves as independents, we can document the phenomenon and move on. We are not making assertions about the elusive “Nature of Man” (sic).

2. Models as Chains of Reasoning. Models are pictures or metaphors that relate concepts to each other. Their goal is to weave plausible explanations together for later testing. We posited that race influences party preference in the United States. We represent that possible relationship as: *race* → *partisan preference* which is in turn a specific case of the realist’s “causal” model: $C \rightarrow E$ or in the language of the instrumentalists: *independent variable* → *dependent variable*. In other words, we model the relationship between two concepts as being an elementary causal chain. The use of an arrow to suggest the relationship and the placement of the preceding event to the left are conventional.

Complex chains of reasoning can be built from such humble beginnings.

David Easton (1959) has constructed a systems analysis of political life using the conventions of causal modeling. In his systems model, demands for action



originate in the political task environment. A relevant set of decision-makers

will then act on the demands provided that adequate supports (public revenues, public opinion) are also present in the environment. Once outputs (public policies) are put into effect, they have some great or small effects on the task environment from which the original problem arose. With feedback in hand, demands are refined, supports may change, and decision-makers may fine tune future policy. The systems device gives us a robust and dynamic model for relating many features of public affairs to each other.

Theodore Lowi (1979) has discussed an “Iron Triangle” model of the policy development process. His metaphor is the geometric figure of an equilateral triangle with a political player at each corner. The lobbyist, the legislative staff member, and the bureaucrat have an informal relationship reflected in their regular social interactions. They literally “do lunch” and talk about their superiors’ policy concerns. Lowi believes that these relatively junior, unelected people routinely negotiate policy content and then communicate the “deal” to their superiors.

The simple causal model of racial influences on partisan preference, the more elaborate systems model of policy-making, and the Iron Triangle of influence are good examples of how visual devices can help us grasp abstract principles. A phrase from natural science, a geometric shape, a literary metaphor, or an algebraic expression each can serve as a model. The *heuristic*, or creative, value of a model resides in its ability to formalize concepts and

relationships between concepts. For that reason, we cannot exhaust the number of types of models; they are bounded only by the imagination.

3. Explanation as Knowledge Claim. In political science as in all of the social sciences, we seek to describe and explain phenomena in the areas of life that interest us: in our case politics, government, and public policy. But what does it mean to “explain” something in the social science sense of the term? A social science explanation relates observable facts to relevant theories producing a “systematically articulated and comprehensive body of maximally reliable knowledge claims” (Gregor, 1971: 21). Research products from such activity provide practical facts and interpretations that enable us to understand politics, government, and public policy.

There are several social science notions that are central to the practical business of doing political science. In order to achieve a measure of reliability in our knowledge claims, we have to be aware of issues related to measurability, hypothesis testing, and correctly prescribing the unit of analysis for study. An elementary understanding of these concerns will help you appreciate how the work of social science is carried out.

a. Measuring Concepts. We say that a concept has been *operationalized* if and when we can specify the conditions for its measurement. We can objectively note the changing values for the concept, and so we often refer to an operationalized concept as a *variable*. In epistemological terms, the concept “becomes” a variable when it is operationalized. Race is measured by self-

reported group membership, and partisan preference is measured by self-reported voting behavior. Operational transformations like these permit us to examine relationships between variables by specifying hypotheses that can be factually tested.

b. Hypothesis Testing. Models suggest testable relationships, or *hypotheses*, between variables. Social scientific knowledge is *empirical*, not theoretical. Only relationships that are supported by factual observations can be said to be “causal” within this social science paradigm. This means that if our theories and the models that we develop from them suggest that race is associated with partisan preference, then we can find factual data to “back up” that assertion. In this regard, we have speculated that African Americans disproportionately favor Democratic candidates. We should be able to find voter exit surveys that have asked people of different races how they voted in particular elections. If over time African Americans predictably have voted for the Democratic Party, then the hypothesis is supported. If there were no difference in the rate of Democratic voting between blacks and whites, then we would have to accept a *null hypothesis* that no causal relationship exists. If we were surprised and observed that whites voted for Democratic candidates in greater proportions than did blacks, then we would have to accept an *alternative hypothesis*. The proposition that race influences partisan preference is therefore testable within the framework of current social science methods.

c. Prescribing the Unit of Analysis. Hypotheses can be tested at different levels of measurement. For example, we can ask individuals about their voting preferences, or we can look at aggregate data. In the first instance, we would use a scientific sample of 1,200 people leaving the voting precinct who are willing to be interviewed. Our unit of analysis is the individual voter. But we could also look at data for states. We could use aggregated polling data to examine how many of the 50 states had solid majorities of African Americans supporting Democratic candidates. In the first instance, the unit of analysis is the individual; in the second example, the unit of analysis is the state electorate.

The choice of an appropriate unit of analysis is sometimes a theoretical decision and sometimes a practical one. If our hypothesis is closely tied to a general theory of individual behavior, then we will prefer individual level analysis. For example, if we need to know “why” black voters favored Democrats, then we’ll have to ask them. On the other hand, if we simply want to make a group generalization and then move on, aggregate data may be fine. Similarly, all social science research involves some data collection and analysis expense. If we are grant-funded scholarly researchers who need to and can afford to measure a hypothesis at the individual level, then we will pay to have the 1,200 exiting voters interviewed. If on the other hand, we are journalists who are trying to make sense of voting trends on election night, we will likely use the data from the 50 states. Both theoretical and practical considerations guide the unit-of-analysis decision.

3. Political Science as Method Summary. There is far, far more to political science methods than our glimpse at measurability, hypothesis testing, and units of analysis reveal. Whole courses are devoted to learning how to properly analyze political data. Some political scientists devote their entire careers to developing and teaching analytic techniques. And yet our point in this introduction is to suggest that doing political science is not a haphazard process. Rather it offers a selection of concepts, models, and methods with which we can build on our ever-expanding knowledge base.

C. The People - the Political Science Community

Political science departments are standard features of most colleges and universities. In fact, political science has been a part of the college curriculum for a long time. In most colleges, students are required to take a course in American Government. In many, students also choose to take classes in other political science topics. For example, students who are majoring in journalism, criminal justice, or social science education often are required to take a course in state and local government. Students pursuing international studies degrees are asked to take courses comparative politics and international relations. And of course political science majors are offered many choices of specialty courses ranging from classical political theory to politics and the media. We are a community of wide-ranging interests.

1. The Study of Political Science. The study of politics is as old as civilization itself. Each historical period and each culture group have thought about politics in its own way. From ancient Egypt to Machiavelli's Italy to modern Russia, thoughtful people have reflected upon who they wanted to lead them and how leaders should behave. For simplicity's sake, we can think of the history of studying politics as involving two epochs, the ancient and the modern. The *ancients* created, defended, and criticized their own political institutions, and they studied the arts of governing, diplomacy, and war. And the craft of studying politics was communicated in terms that worked for the people of those times and places. Although some scholars find objective discourse about how politics works in ancient texts, most archaic work addressed *normative questions* about how government *should* work. In the Middle East, the communication was through fables. For Europeans, the medium was philosophical tracts. Ancient Chinese thinkers wrote short, cryptic lessons. Each ancient society chronicled its thoughts on politics, government, and public policy in its own way.

By contrast, the *moderns* have relatively recent origins. The gradual development of scientific attitudes during the Enlightenment (the late 1600s and the 1700s) made possible the collection and analysis of observable facts concerning politics, government, and public policy. It is during this time that the term "political science" came into fashion along with sister terms like "natural science." The empirical questions about the world of politics were amenable to observation and study. By chronicling and comparing different countries,

Enlightenment scholars including Montesquieu and Jefferson hoped to find an order in societies like the biologists were discovering in nature. Others such as the Frenchman Antoine-Nicolas de Condorcet even expected to discover social laws comparable to those of physics. Western societies were alive with objective intellectual inquiry in all areas of life. The Enlightenment's political thinkers moved easily in the scientific circles of their day.

Several important strains of social scientific thinking emerged during the late 1600s. Intellectuals were questioning the religious dogma of their times and the social institutions that religious elites underwrote. In Great Britain, the divine right of kings and the moral certainty of dogma surrounding the crown were questioned by people who we call Puritans (Phillips, 1999). On a partisan level, this led to a civil war between the king and Parliament. On a theoretical level, it opened the way for applying scientific reasoning to human affairs. Two examples of this intellectual ferment are rationalism and empiricism.

a. The Rationalists. Are nature and human affairs within nature subject to fixed, mechanical laws? Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) thought so. Hobbes perceived that "every event is a motion and all sorts of natural processes must be explained by analyzing complex appearances into the underlying motions of which they consist" (Sabine, 1937: 458). By this he meant that social affairs including politics could be reduced to what we would call formulae. Once the fundamental laws of human nature were discovered, they could be expressed and taught as easily as are the laws of physics. This rationalism can be seen in

the 1700s in the work of the Scotsman Adam Smith (1723-1790) and the Frenchman Marie Jean Antoine Nicholas de Caritat, Marquis de Condorcet (1743-1794), and it has returned in modern times in formal theories of governance of political economists.

b. The Empiricists. We associate the Englishman John Locke (1632-1704) with the concept of natural law. He believed that our common sense enables us to build social institutions that harmonize with our essential human nature. To Locke, we are essentially private persons with desires for owning property and speaking our minds. Locke's emphasizes the importance of the experience of the senses rather than intuitive speculation or deduction. We can observe human behavior empirically, and the material facts speak for themselves. This pragmatic outlook resonated with North Americans, and Locke's work is important to understanding founding thought in the United States.

The Scotsman David Hume (1711-1776) argued that there is a vast chasm between theory and observable reality. Theories are conceptual devices of the mind, while facts are observable events in the behavioral world. Two factual events may be discovered together and may in fact be coincidental, but an assertion of cause and effect is an intellectual abstraction that can be plausible but never really "true" (Sabine, 1937: 599). Hume would have us put more faith in what people do than what they say. People justify their actions with all sorts of theoretical notions, but most of us are simply seeking our own best interests (Harmon, 1964: 519). Hume anticipates by almost 200 years the great explosion

of behavioral research in political science that includes public opinion and voting studies.

The Rationalists and the Empiricists produced some of the finest epistemological thinking of the Enlightenment. There were many other important political theorists of Enlightenment, among them the communitarian Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) and the political sociologist Charles Louis Montesquieu (1689-1755). The philosophers influenced important public men such as Edmond Burke, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson, and these writers in turn shaped the practical politics of their day.

Other aspects of the Enlightenment operated to help give birth to political science as we know it. Among elites, the Protestant Reformation broke the monolithic hold that the Roman Catholic Church had on intellectual and political thought in Europe. In fact, the long alliance between absolutist monarchs and the Church in Rome fueled nonconformist thinking among Protestant merchant princes and political reformers.

Within the mass public, things were changing as well. The printed word and the growth of literacy made social science part of the mass culture. Skepticism replaced orthodoxy in Christian religious thought, opening the popular mind to natural reason. Democracy made the public's views relevant to politics, government, and public policy. In other words, the intellectual ferment of the Enlightenment was not purely the province of intellectuals. A growing,

literate middle class with nonconformist theology or secular values felt entitled to a politics of their own.

2. Ideologues and Their “Science.” Political science as a social science does not aspire to be the handmaiden of causes. In fact, our brief sketches of concepts, methods, and the beginnings of the modern discipline may have convinced you that political science is dispassionate in its search for the truth (small “t”) about politics, government, and public policy. However, ambitious politicians have hijacked the discipline in certain societies at certain points in history. They have tried to use our resources and our credibility to underwrite their notion of the Truth (capital “T”). The results have been disheartening.

Ideologues are political players who seek to elevate their belief systems, or *ideologies*, to the guiding principles of social organization. They believe that all of our politics, institutions, and policies should serve the advancement of the ideology. Examples of modern political ideologies are German fascism, Chinese communism, and Islamic theocracy. The opposite of ideological commitment is *pragmatism*, an outlook that favors practical problem solving over the advancement of any belief agenda. We will have a great deal more to say about modern ideologies and pragmatism in Chapter Three. Our goal now is to demonstrate how ideology has threatened the independence and integrity of the discipline.

a. The Fascists. During the 19th Century, many societies were committed to national ideologies. In North Atlantic countries, the scientific theory of evolution

mutated into belief systems about innate human capacities (eugenics) and social progress (positivism). There were many negative consequences. Racism was championed as “scientific,” and minorities were politically disenfranchised. Racial segregation was institutionalized in the law and enforced in separate and unequal public accommodations. Public policies forbade mixed marriages, restricted immigration, and encouraged imperialism abroad. The tendrils of a racist ideology cast as pseudo science reached into virtually every walk of life. From lynching in the American South to attempts to exterminate European Jews to ethnic cleansing in the Balkans, we have struggled to free ourselves from the mental shackles of racist ideology.

The National Socialist (Nazi) Party of Germany hijacked that country’s intellectual infrastructure. Only social science that supported the *fascist* regime and its mission to create a vast homeland for a superior “Arian race” was tolerated. Other ideas were banned, and political scientists who were Jewish or who would not conform to the fascist ideology had to flee the country. In fact, many came to the United States and joined political science faculties here. It would ultimately take the combined armed forces of the liberal democracies and the Soviet communists to defeat Nazi Germany and her totalitarian allies Italy and Japan. The consequences of extreme ideology were measured in the deaths of six million Jewish Europeans, 25 million young Allied and Axis soldiers, and 30 million members of civilian populations all over the world.

b. The Communists. The *communists* hijacked political science a second time during the 20th Century. Their ideology contends that working people live under the thumbs of ruthless capitalists. The labor of industrial workers and



agricultural peasants are mere commodities to wealthy people and corporations. To the communist ideologue, the social sciences serve the interests of the elite and thereby enslave the masses. They would reformulate

political science around the theoretical concepts of *dialectical materialism*, a secular philosophy that purports to liberate the mind by revealing manipulative behavior in politics, institutions, and public policy. Once minds are free, the masses can be extolled to revolt against their capitalist masters.

Two streams of social science flow from the spring of dialectical materialism. One branch is the doctrinaire pronouncements of party hacks whose loyalty has secured them academic positions. Their social science has been an essentially historical denunciation of the liberal democracies and the capitalists who control nations' politics, institutions, and public policy. Using selective historical anecdotes, the party faithful find reasons to support their communist regime and its positions. A more intellectually distinguished stream of social science is a school of thought that we call *critical theory*. The critical theorists were the very intellectuals who the Nazis had driven from Europe. Distinguished social scientists including Theodore Adorno, Max Horkheimer,

Jurgen Habermas, and Hanna Arendt brought a less doctrinaire logic of liberation to political science. In fact, some have argued that their work represents an alternative paradigm to the mainstream rationalist/empiricist outlook on social science. But the critical theorists are the exception to the rule of moribund communist political science. For the communists on the extreme left – as with the fascists on the extreme right – social science is the legitimate handmaiden of party politics.

c. The Theocrats. Perhaps the greatest irony of the 20th Century has been the reemergence of *religious fundamentalism* as a political force. Recall that the Enlightenment was made possible only when religious dogma receded so that a secular science could advance. When legitimate social inquiry supplanted feverish religious inquisition, people could question authority and not be heretics. And yet the embers of religious dogma and intolerance have never totally burned out. There is a wave of Islamic fundamentalism sweeping the non-industrialized world from North Africa to Indonesia. *Theocratic* regimes have installed repressive governments, and these governments have often sponsored terrorism aimed at the industrialized nations, capitalist and communist alike. The world finds itself at war, a conflict as much between belief systems as between nation states.

There is little room for reason and science in a theocracy. All important political, governmental, and public policy questions are decided by clerics who claim to have a corner on the Truth (capital “T”). There can be no political

science, as we understand it where free scientific inquiry itself is banned. When modern humanity regresses into illiteracy, fear, and envy, dogma replaces knowledge. The commitment to the truth is replaced by a fanatical desire to crush all but the revealed Truth.

We will return to our discussion of political ideology in Chapter Three. For now, suffice it to say that dogma is hostile to social science. Extremists of all ilks press their prescriptive Truth at the expense of what we usually consider objective truth.

3. Mainstream Political Science Today. The political science discipline that we study in this book is a secular, nonpartisan enterprise. We are not the handmaidens of political or religious regimes. In fact, the roots of our professional values are found in the revolt against dogma (Hoover, 1992: 142.) This is not to say that political scientists and political science students do not have personal beliefs. Rather as professionals, we commit ourselves to open inquiry and suspended judgment. In effect, our personal political and religious opinions are ours to enjoy in our free time, and they are not inherently more valuable than those of other, non-scientists.

a. Our Shared Ethic. Our social science values bind us together in a very loose bond of professional community. We are not all interested in the same subject matter; we do not all use the same research and analysis techniques; and we will certainly not all end up living the same professional lifestyle. We will specialize in our focus, our methods, and ultimately our outlook on the

discipline. And we share a social science ethic and we submit to the peer review process described earlier to give our work credibility and keep us together as an academic discipline.

Our commitment to *open inquiry* means that we do not limit ourselves in terms of concepts, models, or hypotheses. No areas of politics, government, or public policy are “off limits.” There are no “forbidden questions.” Open inquiry is important because we do not want people in secular or ecclesiastical authority to permit or forbid us placing items on our research agenda. We have to be free to take our work where our curiosity and imagination lead us.

Suspended judgment means that we try our best not to shape our findings to fit our personal beliefs. Our goal is not to justify our personal opinions or the beliefs of any group or authority. We are not obliged to either defend or attack prevailing knowledge claims about politics, government, or public policy. Rather, we expect to be pleasantly surprised by new insights in our research and that of others. This kind of fairness of mind is the essence of objectivity.

b. Formal Theorists. One major branch of political science follows the tradition of the rationalists who we earlier discussed. We sometimes refer to this school with the discipline as the *formal theorists* because they employ algebraic models of macro social processes to explain individual and collective political decision-making. They are also referred to as political economists and positive political theorists.

Formal theory attempts to explain political phenomena in terms of people making rational choices (Riker and Ordeshook, 1973). On the individual level, why do people choose to vote or stay away from the polls? Are there costs -- such as time away from work or home -- associated with voting? Can individuals justify to themselves that investment of time and energy? In other words, what benefits accrue to the person who votes? In the balance, is voting worth it? On the collective or mass level, how do legislative coalitions come together and fall apart? What logic guides partisan groups as they try to compute which actions are most to their advantage? Whether the unit of analysis is the individual or the group, the formal theorists find algebra, calculus, and other mathematical tools helpful in modeling political phenomena. Their explanations are *deductive*, asserting that specific applications can be drawn from the power of their mathematical models to fit known societal phenomena.

c. Behavioralists. Another branch of the discipline has continued to develop the traditions of the empiricists. These political scientists study the political actions in an effort to generalize about the group or society that they are studying. In this sense, they build up an understanding of governing through a process of *induction*, reasoning from the specific to the general. They perceive that knowledge built up from observable behavioral foundations makes a solid foundation for a scientific understanding of politics, government, and public policy.

The *behavioralists* use observations of individuals to describe and explain the actions of political players, government officials, and public policy-makers. Do women vote more often than do men? Have more educated voters favored one party of policy over another? How often do members of interest associations actually participate in organization activities? The behavioral methodology often uses data bases made up of many individual records. At other times, behavioralists use quasi-experimental techniques to see how people will respond to political stimuli. Will prospective voters react negatively to a male candidate with a beard? How do research subjects respond to examples of negative campaign advertising? In case of survey research and quasi-experiments, the behavioralists reason that the key to understanding the actions of citizens, political players, government officials, and public policy-makers is how they actually behave.

d. Institutionalists. The methodologically sophisticated political scientists have no corner on the knowledge market. The discipline still needs careful, well-documented studies of political players, institutions, and public policies. What were the sources of Theodore Roosevelt's national popularity? How do high court justices deliberate on sensitive cases? How do legislative committees function in parliamentary and congressional systems? Biographies, case studies, and legislative histories are but a few of the valuable descriptive media used by *institutionalists* to inform the specialized learner. In an era of ambitious international study, there are almost limitless opportunities to produce new

descriptive knowledge of political institutions. There is literally a whole world of politics, government, and public policy awaiting the descriptive scholar.

e. *Comparativists*. Another step in building our discipline's knowledge about political institutions around the world is the comparative perspective. The *comparativists* treat a political jurisdiction such as a nation state, a subnational province, or a set of large cities as the unit of analysis. They collect a variety of aggregate data for these jurisdictions in an effort to systematically compare them. What is ranking of the voter turnout rate in democracies? Is the extent of literacy in a country related to its voter turnout? Within the United States, are voter registration requirements associated with variations in statewide turnout? There are inferential statistics that make it possible to summarize and generalize about comparative data. With such mathematical tools, the comparativists can make inductive generalizations about the political world.

4. Political Science as Community Summary. Political scientists share a discipline but have many diverging interests. The broad scope of studying a concept like governing of necessity has made specialists of us all. In fact, many would reasonably contend that our typology of only five subfields does a disservice to the complexity of the discipline. Perhaps it does. The public administrationists who study government operations often claim a subfield or even a separate discipline for themselves. And the same could be said for many other specialty studies. We simply hope to introduce you to some of the variety of approaches to politics, government, and public policy that characterize the

contemporary discipline. We are not out to exhaustively catalog the practice of political science throughout the country and around the world.

Our central point is that there is great diversity within the discipline. You will find one or more areas of study that will most interest you. You will attend specialized conferences, read specialized articles, and explore specialized books. You will supplement your general knowledge of governing with rich discoveries related to your special interests. Over time, you will become highly motivated to master the particular methods used to study your subfield. Some of you will run computer programs, and others will read biography. But you are welcome to do both. As we said in the case of model building, you are limited only by your imagination and industry. Political science is a large tent under which many very independent and creative scholars seek shelter. We are a community of individuals, not of clones.