If we take seriously the conclusions of the sociologists of knowledge, then our scientific output is very much shaped by the ethical perspectives we hold. In that event, by failing to encourage within the discipline creative speculation about political alternatives in the largest sense, we cannot help but imprison ourselves within the limitations of the ongoing value framework. As that framework begins to lose its relevance for the problems of society, its system-maintenance commitments must blind us to the urgent questions emerging even for the immediate future.

David Easton, 1969
“The New Revolution in Political Science”
*American Political Science Review*, p 1058

This is a required course for political science majors. The reasoning behind imposing that requirement is political theory is considered by many political scientists—not all—to be an essential subfield-component of the discipline. There are some political scientists who look at political theory differently. While they tolerate it as a subfield, they hold with some degree of disregard and likely would prefer to see it relegated to philosophy or history departments. Indeed, the terms ‘political theory’ and ‘political philosophy’ are fairly interchangeable and at one time, ‘political history’ meant pretty much the same thing. The reasoning behind this disregard is mostly bound up with arguments about whether or not political science is, or can be, or should be a rigorous ‘scientific discipline’ that imitates the natural sciences; in short, whether political science should confine itself to empirical hypotheses that can be measured/tested for validity.

That said, since the times of Classical Greece (the 5th and 4th centuries BC), a select number of thinkers have considered basic, normative, political questions. They address topics such as justice, freedom, equality, citizenship, constitutions, institutional arrangements and the state. These are always informed by fundamental beliefs about human nature and capacity.

If we look at political thinkers throughout history it is obvious that different thinkers at different times have taken up. Plato’s *Republic*, one of the most influential works in political theory, was written during the Peloponnesian Wars between Sparta and Athens and focused on justice and the form of the Greek city-state—Sparta and Athens offered two sharply contrasting visions of politics, citizenship and justice. Machiavelli wrote *The Prince* with an eye on how a leader (the ‘Prince’) could maintain power when Italian city-states were beset by continuous political unrest. Thoreau and Locke wrote during a time when
religion was losing its grip and men were confronted with the issue of natural rights and when men should revolt against or disobey governments. Marx wrote during the early parts of the industrial revolution and was concerned with the plight and abuse of workers (just as some may be today with those who work for McDonalds or Walmart). Martin Luther King, Jr. picked up on the topic of when we are obliged to disobey laws but perhaps accept punishment for doing so.

Even though various political thinkers were addressing issues of their times, the topics they addressed do have an enduring quality. For many, justice is no less important today than it was during Plato’s time, freedom and our obligation to obey laws are still important just as they were for Locke and Thoreau, economic equality is important for some just as it was for Marx. Seeing that and understanding how the enduring political issues we have faced throughout history constitutes the value of studying political theory.

We tend to think that the above questions are purely a matter of personal opinion. In this course that is not really the point. Rather, the argument is that your understanding how these questions have been addressed throughout history will broaden your thoughts/opinions about the conduct of our political life. In short, you exhibit discipline in your arguments and thinking.

The major objective of this course is to come to appreciate the role that normative values that have political content play in society. Closely connected to this is in improving your ability to see basic values in play in most all political questions we face today—in short to be able use real examples to illustrate the importance of normative values.

A lesser, but still important objective is for you to appreciate the contribution that various thinkers throughout history have contributed to our understanding of basic political concepts and values.

Text: The required text for the course is:

*Introduction to Political Theory, second edition.* Authors are Hoffman and Graham. It is not a text of original writings of political theorists and takes a relatively modern view on some issues. We can talk about this on the first day of class but I frankly find reading original excerpts from many famous theorists now dead for two-three hundred or more years to be tedious. You can find them online and I will develop a list. But my primary reason is I wanted a text that considered many ideas in a contemporary frame. The text does reference ‘great thinkers.’ But it also considers, for example, global issues—not a topic addressed by many theorists.

Class assignments, by date, are below.

1 Jan 8th First Class--Introduction

2 Jan 14th Read: “About Nazism: Nazi Ideological Theory” http://www.nazism.net/about/ideological_theory/

Read: “About Nazism: Nazi Ideology” http://www.nazism.net/about/nazi_ideology/

Read: “What is Socialism?” http://www.wisegeek.org/what-is-socialism.htm


5 Jan 23rd Read: “Political Theory as a Vocation” by Sheldon Wolin Available on Oaks

6 Jan 28rh Read: “Political Theory as a Vacation” by Larry Spence Available on Oaks

These initial readings frame the course in some important ways—.

7 Jan 30th First in-class exercise (Debate)

8 Feb 4th Read: “The State” in text—Chapter 1

9 Feb 6th Read: “Freedom” in text—Chapter 2

10 Feb 11th Read: “Equality” in text—Chapter 3

11 Feb 13th Read: “Justice?” in text—Chapter 4

12 Feb 18th Read: “Democracy” in text—Chapter 5

13 Feb 20th Read: “Punishment” in text—Chapter 7

14 Feb 25th First in class test

15 Feb 27th Read about Ideologies in text and "Liberalism"--Chapter 8

16 March 11th Read: "Conservatism" in text--Chapter 9

17 March 13th Read: "Socialism" in text--Chapter 10

18 March 18th Second in-class exercise (Debate)

19 March 20th Read "Feminism"--Chapter 14

20 March 25th Read "Ecologism"--Chapter 16

21 March 27th Read "Fundamentalism"--Chapter 17

22 April 1st Third in-class exercise (Debate)

23 April 3rd Read "Human Rights"--Chapter 18

24 April 8th Second in class test

25 April 10th Read "Civil Disobedience"--Chapter 19

26 April 15th Read "Political Violence"--Chapter 20

27 April 17th Fourth in-class exercise (Debate)

28 April 22nd Read "Global Justice"--Chapter 21

Course requirements:

- 2 tests will be administered in class. Each will count for 25 percent of your grade.
• A final comprehensive example will be given which will count for 35 percent of your grade.
• Short quizzes will be given throughout the course. These will be based on the assigned readings. Overall quiz average will count for 15 percent of your grade. Based on the number of quizzes given, I will drop between 2 and 4 of your lowest scores before averaging. Please note that sometimes I give quizzes that just require your signing an attendance sheet. These will be scored as either 100 or 0.
• I reserve the judgment of awarding up to ten points for class participation—which I take seriously.
• Final Grades will be calculated as follows:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tr>
<td>93-100</td>
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<td>90-92</td>
<td>A-</td>
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<td>87-89</td>
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If you correspond with me by email it is very important to follow these rules:

Address the email to feltsa@cofc.edu.

In the subject header POLI 150.03 (your last name). Putting your name in is especially important if you send me a message from other than your CofC gmail account, e.g., you use another gmail account, hotmail, or whatever. If you do not put POLI 150.03 and your name in the subject line I often have no way of identifying you from any other email.

Computers and texting: There will be no open laptops or tablets in class. I consider texting to be the same as talking in class—call me old-fashioned if you will, but it is discourteous to me as well as your classmates. Moreover, there is ample experimental evidence that you cannot do two things at the same time . . . if you are texting, you are only paying partial attention to class. So, no texting is permitted either. Violation of either of these rules will result in punishment at my discretion.

Honor code: I expect you to adhere to the College's honor code. Violation of this code is serious and can result in your expulsion or the awarding of an administrative “F” for the course. More information can be found at:

http://studentaffairs.cofc.edu/honor-system/