

A NOVEL APPROACH TO POLITICS

INTRODUCING POLITICAL SCIENCE
THROUGH BOOKS, MOVIES, AND
POPULAR CULTURE

DOUGLAS A.
VAN BELLE

5TH EDITION



A Novel Approach to Politics

5th Edition

SAGE was founded in 1965 by Sara Miller McCune to support the dissemination of usable knowledge by publishing innovative and high-quality research and teaching content. Today, we publish over 900 journals, including those of more than 400 learned societies, more than 800 new books per year, and a growing range of library products including archives, data, case studies, reports, and video. SAGE remains majority-owned by our founder, and after Sara's lifetime will become owned by a charitable trust that secures our continued independence.

Los Angeles | London | New Delhi | Singapore | Washington DC | Melbourne

A Novel Approach to Politics

Introducing Political Science through Books, Movies, and
Popular Culture

5th Edition

Douglas A. Van Belle
Victoria University of Wellington



Los Angeles
London
New Delhi
Singapore
Washington DC
Melbourne

Copyright © 2018 by CQ Press, an Imprint of SAGE Publications, Inc. CQ Press is a registered trademark of Congressional Quarterly Inc.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.



FOR INFORMATION:

CQ Press

An Imprint of SAGE Publications, Inc.

2455 Teller Road

Thousand Oaks, California 91320

E-mail: order@sagepub.com

SAGE Publications Ltd.

1 Oliver's Yard

55 City Road

London, EC1Y 1SP

United Kingdom

SAGE Publications India Pvt. Ltd.

B 1/I 1 Mohan Cooperative Industrial Area

Mathura Road, New Delhi 110 044

India

SAGE Publications Asia-Pacific Pte. Ltd.

3 Church Street

#10-04 Samsung Hub

Singapore 049483

Names: Van Belle, Douglas A., 1965- author.

Title: A novel approach to politics : introducing political science through books, movies, and popular culture / Douglas A. Van Belle, Victoria University of Wellington.

Description: Fifth Edition. | Thousand Oaks, California : CQ Press, [2018] | Includes bibliographical references and

index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017037936 | ISBN 9781506368658 (Paperback : acid-free paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Political science. | Popular culture—United States. | Politics and culture—United States. | Mass media—Political aspects—United States.

Classification: LCC JA66 .V28 2018 | DDC 320—dc23 LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2017037936>

Printed in the United States of America.

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

Content Development Editor: John Scappini

Editorial Assistant: Duncan Marchbank

Marketing Manager: Erica DeLuca

Production Editor: Veronica Stapleton Hooper

Copy Editor: Amy Hanquist Harris

Typesetter: Hurix Systems Pvt. Ltd.

Proofreader: Sally Jaskold

Indexer: Will Ragsdale

Cover Designer: Rose Storey

Brief Contents

1. [Preface](#)
2. [Introduction: Warning/Parental Advisory](#)
3. [About the Author](#)
 1. [1. Introducing the Ancient Debate: The Ideal versus the Real](#)
 2. [2. Why Government? Security, Anarchy, and Some Basic Group Dynamics](#)
 3. [3. Governing Society: We Know Who You Are](#)
 4. [4. Government's Role in the Economy: The Offer You Can't Refuse](#)
 5. [5. Structures and Institutions](#)
 6. [6. El Grande Loco Casa Blanca: The Executive \(in Bad Spanish\)](#)
 7. [7. The Confederacy of Dunces: The Legislative Function \(Not in Bad Spanish\)](#)
 8. [8. Brazilian Bureaucracy: Do I Even Need to Bother with the Jokes?](#)
 9. [9. Courts and Law: Politics behind the Gavel, Obviously, but What's under the Gown?](#)
 10. [10. Not Quite Right, but Still Good: The Democratic Ideal in Modern Politics](#)
 11. [11. Media, Politics, and Government: Talking Heads Are Better Than None](#)
 12. [12. International Politics: Apocalypse Now and Then](#)
 13. [13. Secret Government: Spies, Lies, and Freedom Fries](#)
 14. [14. Political Culture: Sex and Agriculture, Getting Rucked Explains It All](#)
 15. [15. The Lastest and Bestest Chapter: The Study of Politics](#)
4. [Appendix A: Fiction Appendix](#)
5. [Appendix B: A Strategic Approach to Writing for the Classroom](#)
6. [Glossary](#)
7. [Notes](#)
8. [Index](#)

Detailed Contents

[Preface](#)

[Introduction: Warning/Parental Advisory](#)

[About the Author](#)

[1. Introducing the Ancient Debate: The Ideal versus the Real](#)

[Classical Theory, Modern Reality, and Stuff](#)

[You're Just a Mime Trapped in an Invisible Box](#)

[Number 1: Is the U.S. Activist Group Known as the Tea Party
Conservative?](#)

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

[Question III: Is the Affordable Care Act Socialist?](#)

[Fiction as a Tool for Exploring Politics](#)

[Utopias in Fiction and Politics](#)

[Utopia Ain't What You're Thinking](#)

[Utopias as Social Statements](#)

[Utopias in Practical Use](#)

[Ideologies](#)

[Distinguishing Ideologies from Theories](#)

[Classifying Ideologies](#)

[What Is Politics?](#)

[What Is Political Science?](#)

[Key Terms](#)

[Chapter Summary](#)

[Study Questions and Exercises](#)

[Websites to Explore](#)

[2. Why Government? Security, Anarchy, and Some Basic Group Dynamics](#)

[Security Trumps Anarchy, Rock Smashes Scissors, but Will Someone
Please Explain How Paper Beats Rock?](#)

[A Model for the Emergence of Cooperation: Bobsville](#)

[Collective Action](#)

[Security](#)

[Power](#)

[Anarchy](#)

[Anarchy and Power](#)

[An Impetus for Government](#)

[The Context of Hierarchy](#)

[Alliances](#)

[Groups and Group Identities](#)

- [Group Identities](#)
 - [Conflict between Groups](#)
 - [Leadership Interests](#)
 - [Key Terms](#)
 - [Chapter Summary](#)
 - [Study Questions and Exercises](#)
 - [Websites to Explore](#)
- 3. [Governing Society: We Know Who You Are](#)
 - [Leadership Benefits](#)
 - [The Panopticon](#)
 - [Collective Action, Revolution, and the Use of Force](#)
 - [Atomization](#)
 - [Limits on Forceful Control](#)
 - [Legitimacy and Government Control](#)
 - [Got to Give the People What They Want: Elections and Public Goods](#)
 - [Balancing Force and Legitimacy](#)
 - [Legitimacy and Conflict within Groups](#)
 - [Conflict as a Source of Legitimacy](#)
 - [Key Terms](#)
 - [Chapter Summary](#)
 - [Study Questions and Exercises](#)
 - [Websites to Explore](#)
- 4. [Government's Role in the Economy: The Offer You Can't Refuse](#)
 - [Government All Up In Your Business, Yo](#)
 - [The Tragedy of the Commons](#)
 - [Grazing Sheep and the Temptation to Cheat](#)
 - [The Stag Hunt and Social Choice](#)
 - [From Farming to Fishing](#)
 - [Escaping the Tragedy of the Commons](#)
 - [Karl Marx—Student of Capitalism?](#)
 - [The Adolescence of Capitalism](#)
 - [Competition as the Driving Force in Capitalism](#)
 - [The Pool of Labor as a Common Resource](#)
 - [I Thought You Said There'd Be a Revolution](#)
 - [Socialism](#)
 - [The Yin and Yang of Capitalism and Socialism](#)
 - [Modern Stuff](#)
 - [Conclusionoscopy](#)
 - [Key Terms](#)
 - [Chapter Summary](#)
 - [Study Questions and Exercises](#)

[Websites to Explore](#)

[5. Structures and Institutions](#)

[Structures or Institutions?](#)

[Human Nature and Political Institutions](#)

[The Reality of Political Institutions](#)

[Context, Evolution, and the Unbearable Weight of History](#)

[Failed Institutions](#)

[Too Legit to Quit: Legitimacy, Information, and Human Nature](#)

[Civilization](#)

[Step 1: Know Your Terrain](#)

[Step 2: Choose a Basic Form](#)

[Step 3: Connect Your Government](#)

[Step 4: Build Your Institutions](#)

[Key Terms](#)

[Chapter Summary](#)

[Study Questions and Exercises](#)

[Websites to Explore](#)

[6. El Grande Loco Casa Blanca: The Executive \(in Bad Spanish\)](#)

[Oh Captain, My Captain](#)

[The Scorpion King on Grandpa's Farm](#)

[Kings and Presidents](#)

[Because God™ Said So](#)

[Authoritarian Oligarchy](#)

[The Democratic Executive](#)

[Sí, El Presidente](#)

[Yes, Minister](#)

[Democratic Executives as Heads of State](#)

[Democratic Executives as Heads of Government](#)

[Key Terms](#)

[Chapter Summary](#)

[Study Questions and Exercises](#)

[Websites to Explore](#)

[7. The Confederacy of Dunces: The Legislative Function \(Not in Bad Spanish\)](#)

[Boring History Stuff](#)

[The Tedium of Repetitive Redundancy](#)

[The Monotony of Religion](#)

[As Exciting as Accountancy 101](#)

[A Dreary Discussion of Democratic Legislatures](#)

[The Humdrum Function of Lawmaking](#)

[The Lackluster Function of Legislative Representation](#)

[Subsection for Tiresome Details about Representation Strategies](#)

[A Monochromatic Subsection on Types of Representatives](#)

[Featureless Subsection on the Function of Checking
The Wearisome Legislative Function of Legitimizing
How Hard Would It Be to Convince You That the Educating
Function Is Dull?](#)

[A Redundant Repetition of the Theme: Contrasting Legislatures in
Parliamentary and Presidential Systems](#)

[The Monotony of Gridlock in Presidential Systems](#)

[The Banality of Parliamentary Instability](#)

[The Unbearably Predictable Section Telling You That
Representation Is Also Messed Up Because Both Single-District
and Proportional Systems Can't Quite Manage to Function Ideally
... Surprise, Surprise](#)

[A Tired Attempt to Make Coalition Politics Interesting with a Lame
Example](#)

[The Facile Cataloging of Representation Flaws in District
Elections](#)

[A Dreary Bleakness in the Authoritarian Gloom: They Endure
Legislative Institutions, Too](#)

[Key Terms](#)

[Chapter Summary](#)

[Study Questions and Exercises](#)

[Websites to Explore](#)

[8. Brazilian Bureaucracy: Do I Even Need to Bother with the Jokes?](#)

[Bureaucracy, It Goes to Eleven](#)

[So ... What Is a Bureaucracy?](#)

[Do We Really Want Bureaucracies?](#)

[The Ideals of Bureaucratic Governance](#)

[Policymaking versus Administration](#)

[Bureaucratic Roles](#)

[There Be Flaws in Yonder Bureaucracy, Obviously](#)

[Overhead Democracy and Authority Leakage](#)

[The Iron Triangle](#)

[Agency Theory and the Responsive Bureaucracy](#)

[The Cockroach Theory of Bureaucracy](#)

[The Endy Part](#)

[Key Terms](#)

[Chapter Summary](#)

[Study Questions and Exercises](#)

[Websites to Explore](#)

[9. Courts and Law: Politics behind the Gavel, Obviously, but What's under the
Gown?](#)

[Law and Politics](#)

- [Law on the Books versus Law in Action](#)
 - [Symbols](#)
 - [The Political Functions of Courts](#)
 - [Dispute Resolution](#)
 - [Policymaking](#)
 - [Monitoring Government](#)
 - [Trial and Appellate Courts](#)
 - [Legal Systems](#)
 - [Civil Law](#)
 - [Common Law](#)
 - [Religious Law](#)
 - [Jurisprudence](#)
 - [Natural Law](#)
 - [Positivist Jurisprudence](#)
 - [Realist Jurisprudence](#)
 - [Types of Law](#)
 - [Private Law versus Public Law](#)
 - [Criminal Law versus Civil Law](#)
 - [Federal Law versus State Law](#)
 - [International Law](#)
 - [Constitutional Review](#)
 - [Key Terms](#)
 - [Chapter Summary](#)
 - [Study Questions and Exercises](#)
 - [Websites to Explore](#)
- [10. Not Quite Right, but Still Good: The Democratic Ideal in Modern Politics](#)
 - [Arrow's Theorem](#)
 - [Democracy and the Liberal Ideal](#)
 - [Direct Democracy](#)
 - [Representative Democracy](#)
 - [An Economic Theory of Democracy](#)
 - [Winner-Take-All Systems](#)
 - [Winners-Take-Their-Share Systems](#)
 - [New Zealand Elections—I'm Not Making This Up, Honest](#)
 - [The Real versus the Ideal, Again](#)
 - [Key Terms](#)
 - [Chapter Summary](#)
 - [Study Questions and Exercises](#)
 - [Websites to Explore](#)
- [11. Media, Politics, and Government: Talking Heads Are Better Than None](#)
 - [Reality and Beyond](#)
 - [The Whole China Charade](#)

[Your New Brain and the Creation of Reality](#)

[News Media and Politics](#)

[The Business of the News](#)

[The Political Soap Opera](#)

[Will He Bring Balance to the Force?](#)

[Elite Dominance of the Sources of News](#)

[A Vast Conspiracy?](#)

[The Mutual Exploitation Model](#)

[The Watergate Is a Hotel, No?](#)

[Of Cockroaches and Politicians](#)

[Protest and the Disadvantaged Voice](#)

[Understanding the Distortions Is the Key](#)

[Key Terms](#)

[Chapter Summary](#)

[Study Questions and Exercises](#)

[Websites to Explore](#)

[12. International Politics: Apocalypse Now and Then](#)

[Causes of War](#)

[Back to Anarchy](#)

[World War I Was Unpleasant](#)

[The Horror, the Horror](#)

[All Quiet on the Western Front?](#)

[Realism and War](#)

[Opportunity](#)

[Fear This](#)

[Balancing and Bandwagoning](#)

[Challenging the Realist Paradigm](#)

[The Not-So-Black Box](#)

[Why Kant Democracies Fight?](#)

[The Shadow of the Hegemon](#)

[“It’s the Economy, Stupid”—Karl Marx](#)

[Imperfection Is Cool, Honest](#)

[Dude, Think About the Fish](#)

[Constructivism](#)

[Roaring Mice and Vacation Hot Spots](#)

[Key Terms](#)

[Chapter Summary](#)

[Study Questions and Exercises](#)

[Websites to Explore](#)

[13. Secret Government: Spies, Lies, and Freedom Fries](#)

[14. Political Culture: Sex and Agriculture, Getting Rucked Explains It All](#)

[Political Culture](#)

[Consequences of Culture](#)
[If Not Culture?](#)
[Culture as Explanation](#)
[Applying Political Culture](#)
[A Thousand Miles to Nowhere: Isolation and Foreign Policy](#)
[Culture and Social Distance](#)
[Culture as Politics](#)
[The Sound of Black](#)
[The Haka in Texas](#)
[Cultural Ownership](#)
[Back to the Question of “What Is Culture?”](#)
[Key Terms](#)
[Chapter Summary](#)
[Study Questions and Exercises](#)
[Websites to Explore](#)
[15. The Lastest and Bestest Chapter: The Study of Politics](#)
[Here’s Where the Story Ends](#)
[The Study of Politics](#)
[American Politics](#)
[International Relations](#)
[Comparative Politics](#)
[Political Theory](#)
[The Applied Subfields](#)
[Public Policy](#)
[Public Administration](#)
[Public Law](#)
[Methodological Divisions in the Study of Politics](#)
[Conclusion](#)
[Appendix A: Fiction Appendix](#)
[Appendix B: A Strategic Approach to Writing for the Classroom](#)
[Glossary](#)
[Notes](#)
[Index](#)

Preface

This is not your grandparents' textbook, and I mean that in a way that goes well beyond the simple fact that you bought it and they didn't. I also mean it in a way that goes beyond the fact that I use novels, films, television, and pop culture to introduce students to the study of politics. The marketing people may be all giggly and twittery over the films and such, and people may like the idea so much that suggestions for novels and films to put in the book get flung at me like they were American Dodgeball Association of America regulation dodgeballs.* However, the real difference that sets *A Novel Approach* apart from the shuffling hordes of introduction-to-politics textbooks out there can be found in the way it expresses humankind's pathological fear of zombies.

* While it is true that if you can dodge a wrench, you can dodge a ball, books are a bit tougher. They open up and flop around in the air and don't fly straight.

I am, of course, talking about zombies in terms of the metaphorical roles they play in the narratives of the genre. Even when given a comedic twist in films like *Shaun of the Dead*,¹ zombies are always used to represent the relentless threats to life that we all must face. The fear of aging is a significant subtext in *Night of the Living Dead*.² In *Shaun of the Dead*, it's the weight of social entanglements with friends, lovers, and family. In *Zombies from Mars*,³ it's bureaucracy. In *Z-nation*⁴ and *The Walking Dead*,⁵ the zombies represent the rise of anti-intellectualism as a political and social force. In my current favorite, *iZombie*,⁶ zombies represent the loss of intimacy and individuality in the modern connected world. As a certified Zombitologist, I'm kind of an expert on these things, but you can, and maybe should, feel free to argue with me over any of those brash claims. However, I'm writing this textbook, so you don't get to argue with my claim that for an introduction-to-politics course, zombies represent the threat posed by a textbook that is so chock full of soul-crushing boredom that it will smother the mind and rot the flesh right off students' faces.

Generally speaking, introduction-to-politics instructors who aren't undead themselves hate using those kinds of soul-crushing textbooks. Enduring the overwhelming stench of a lecture hall full of half-living, rotting faces is a bit unpleasant, but to be honest, there isn't really that much of a gap between the personal hygiene skills of zombies and hungover eighteen-year-old boys, so that's not the real worry. Professors dislike mind-numbing textbooks because they make it really, really difficult to teach. In theory, a textbook should provide a foundation of material and information that all students share and that the instructor can teach from. The problem with that theory is that it presumes that the students read and engage the material in the text. Unfortunately, even when you manage to force students to read the book, getting them to actually engage the material on their own is rare. That was the real challenge that I wanted to tackle way back when I put together the

first edition of this book. I wanted to create a book that professors could teach from, rather than teach at. When instructors step up to the lectern, they need to know that there are certain sparks of thought and knowledge hidden behind that sea of undead faces.

The use of fiction is one of two critical aspects of *A Novel Approach* that accomplishes this. In fact, fictional examples allow me to both increase the complexity and nuance of the political dynamics addressed and create a book that all students can and will read. Because of the way that fiction exaggerates the forces driving characters, the way it often explicitly explores the political and social dynamics of choice, action, and consequence, *A Novel Approach* can actually engage the often-complex dynamics that underlie political phenomena more completely and more thoroughly than most introduction-to-politics textbooks.

Fiction, however, is only one of the two keys. The second is the style, or lack thereof, that I bring to the text. The narrative tone is casual, sarcastic, and occasionally just a bit crass. The argumentative structure varies from topic to topic. I play with the chapter structure. I even mess with the overall structure of the book. I have fun with it whenever and however the opportunity arises. This may not appeal to everyone. In fact, if you're a British academic who uses the word *proper* with serious intent, this book may very well endanger your health. However, for the humans reading the book, my snarky style should be mostly harmless and, more important, it serves a purpose well beyond providing an admittedly modest bit of entertainment. I also want to inject some uncertainty into the text. I want the turn of every page, the start of every paragraph, the jump to every footnote to include just a little anticipation of the unexpected. I want students looking for the next non sequitur, the next nearly appropriate example, or the next bit of crude narrative commentary. That uncertainty, that anticipation of the unexpected, does more to keep the reader engaged than all the car chases and sex scenes in the history of cinema.

The result is a text that can be used just like a regular textbook. It has all of the necessary stuff. In fact, because this approach makes it easier to get across some relatively complex theoretical ideas, in many ways there is more of the important stuff in here than you would usually find in an intro textbook. An instructor can add a couple of lectures to reinforce the topics and add a few examples each week, and the semester will just fly merrily by. I have tested that approach with this material, and it works quite well. Very few of the cute and fuzzy little lab animals suffered serious harm.

A Novel Approach can also be thought of as a textbook that reduces or eliminates most of the substantial barriers to using fiction in the classroom. Not only will students quickly get used to using fiction, but they can and will read it quickly. Two, or even three, chapters can be assigned per week, leaving half the semester or more for instructors to show or discuss any of the myriad of novels, films, and television programs of their choosing.

Another valuable result of this approach is a textbook that focuses on the "why" rather than

the “what.” *A Novel Approach* is a textbook that builds upward from the underlying theories and dynamics, a textbook that has several chapters that come before the starting point of most introduction-to-politics textbooks. This usually leads to students who can explain how the tragedy of the commons can be applied to Marx’s conceptualization of the pool of labor. By the end of the text, students will be armed with Arrow’s theorem, the dynamics of power in anarchic environments, the role of ideologies in practical politics, Downs’s spatial representation of the electorate, social contracts, the mediated construction of political reality, core and periphery in world systems theory, the differences between political structures and institutions Students should have these and a whole lot of other conceptual weapons in their arsenal, ready for attacking the complexity of social and political statements being made in fiction and, by extension, the world around them.

Of course, now that I’m chugging along into the fifth edition, I’ve gotten bored with all that. In the first edition, just getting it together was a challenge. In the second edition, I pushed the editorial army about as far as I could push them with my references to “naughty” things like purple smoke and the “stuff” that your neighbor’s dog leaves in steaming piles on your front lawn. The third edition was just a lot of self-promotion, so when I had to come up with something new to amuse myself in the fourth edition, I delved into the musty depths of geekery. It was fun. With the fifth edition, in addition to significant updates to include more recent examples and references, I back off the geekiest bits and add some additional discussion of pop culture and classics. My editors begged me to avoid the tumultuous storm of issues that have engulfed American politics. When that didn’t work, they threatened, and when that didn’t work, they bribed. It should be noted that they aren’t very good at bribing, so all I ended up agreeing to was that I would not refer to anyone as a short-fingered, terracotta hobgoblin, but they seem happy with that.

I strongly suggest that instructors examine [Chapter 13](#) very carefully before writing their syllabus.

SAGE edge for CQ press

This edition comes with a full range of helpful ancillary stuff for instructors and students, arduously prepared by Wendy Johnston, State University of New York Adirondack, so that I didn't have to. SAGE edge doesn't have a fancy osmosis machine, but it does have resources that will keep you on the cutting edge of learning. All the content is open access and available on demand at edge.sagepub.com/vanbelle5e.

SAGE edge for Students has mobile-friendly eFlashcards and practice quizzes, so students need never, ever be without *A Novel Approach*. Customized action plans provide tips and feedback on progress; chapter summaries with learning objectives reinforce all the stuff they should be learning in the book; and video and multimedia content present more to explore.

SAGE edge for Instructors makes your job easier with a bunch of quality content for a rich learning environment that helps students perform at a higher level. Go to edge.sagepub.com/vanbelle5e and click on "Instructor Resources" to register and begin downloading resources like a comprehensive test bank, editable PowerPoint® slides, an instructor's manual, and downloadable graphics from the book.

Notes

1. *Shaun of the Dead*, directed by Edgar Wright (Universal City, CA: Universal Pictures, 2004).
2. *Night of the Living Dead*, directed by George A. Romero (Walter Reade Organization, 1968).
3. Douglas A. Van Belle, "Zombies from Mars," *The Andromeda Spaceways Inflight Magazine* 40 (2009).
4. *Z-Nation*, created by Craig Englar and Karl Shaefer (The Asylum, 2014).
5. *The Walking Dead*, created by Frank Barabont (AMC Studios, 2010).
6. *iZombie*, created by Rob Thomas and Diane Ruggeiro-Wright (Warner Bros. Television, 2015).

Introduction: Warning/Parental Advisory

This Book Contains Politically Explicit Material

If you have ever dreamed of reading an introduction-to-politics textbook written by an overeducated jackass, this is your lucky day—unless, of course, the dream was a nightmare. But then again, people pay good money to watch horror films—especially those really horrific ones with sparkly vampires, so even if it is a nightmare ... whatever. Either way, your esteemed professor, the one with impeccable taste in textbooks, picked this one, and that means you're stuck with it. So I guess the real point I'm trying make here, in addition to the jackass thing, is that this book is written without any apologies, express or implied. I *will* offend you.

This is a dangerous book. Even after the valiant struggles of CQ Press's legions of brave editors—none of whom will ever be the same—this book far exceeds the acceptable levels of collateral damage for a textbook. Somewhere along the line, something in this book will upset you, at least a little. I make no attempt whatsoever to relate to youth culture. I don't bother to even try to engage the student experience or in any other way pretend that I'm anything other than an old and sometimes cranky, overeducated jackass. I will poke fun at, sometimes to the point of tormenting, everyone and everything. If you are a liberal, a conservative, a moderate, a capitalist, a socialist, an eco-fascist (which is actually an eco-socialist), a pirate banker, or a beloved cartoon character, I will upset you. Deal with it.

I blame politics.

Because of the very nature of politics as a subject of study, I don't even have to try to upset you. Don't get me wrong; as part of teaching about politics, I will occasionally try to annoy or provoke you. I will do whatever is necessary to force you to consider ideas that are contrary to what you believe or want to believe, if only so you can recognize some of your unnoticed beliefs, presumptions, and cognitive frameworks that provide the foundation for what you hold dear. This is a necessary part of learning to understand the dynamics of politics—and if I do not infuriate you at least once with a topic or pointed comment or a snide little evisceration of something you value highly, then I have probably failed to get you to really think about politics. Sometimes you need to get a bit riled up before you are motivated to look beneath the surface of the politics you see around you. And the more treasured your belief, the more certain you are in your convictions,* and the more you think you know, the more trauma you will suffer. I will blame you, the student, if I fail to inflict some minor mental trauma—I am a professor, after all, and blaming the student is the first thing they taught us in training camp—but given my ability to annoy just about everyone else in the world, I will be truly disappointed if I cannot manage to get you pissed off about something as controversial and as personal as politics.

* I'm not talking about your arrest record. Though it is impressive.

Politics is personal. It limits, defines, or enables even the most intimate aspects of your life. You cannot escape politics, and you cannot help but have preexisting ideas about politics, and it is those preexisting ideas that I must disturb in order to expose the underlying dynamics of the subject. Take the nice, safe, and completely uncontroversial topic of teenage sex as an example. Politics intrudes into just about every aspect of this most frantically brief but intimate of topics. In 1996, a seventeen-year-old girl was arrested in Idaho because she was both unmarried and pregnant. It seems that in an effort to reduce teen pregnancies, officials in Gem County decided to enforce an old and disregarded law forbidding sex outside of marriage, and the county's police officers were told to arrest young women who appeared to be pregnant but were not wearing wedding rings. While this incident probably deserves an honorable mention in one of those "bizarre but true" lists, the truly scary part was that the girl in question was actually convicted. She was found guilty of the alleged crime of fornication, fined ten dollars, and sentenced to three years of probation.

Most would probably agree that getting pregnant at seventeen is unwise, but if unwise were criminal, authorities would be obligated to arrest the entire population of Idaho, not just the impregnated ones. And regardless of how socially conservative or liberal you may be, you have to think that there has got to be a better way to curb teen pregnancy than arresting girls for getting knocked up.

There. Hold that thought.

Statistically, most of you agree with the claim that there had to be a better policy than giving unwed teenage mothers criminal records to help them through the difficulties of single parenthood, but some of you don't, and if you don't, you might be offended by the presumption that you would agree with what is actually a liberal policy position on the topic, and that is the heart of why politics is personal. In response to the letters criticizing the arrest and conviction of the girl, many people wrote scathing rebuttals that savaged the critics of the action and defended the policy as long overdue and a perfect way to change the thinking of the criminally promiscuous teens of the day. Yes, they actually did say "criminally promiscuous," and they meant it.

There. Hold *that* thought.

Right now, what are you thinking about people who would mean it when they call someone criminally promiscuous? What are you projecting onto them in terms of motive, reason, intelligence, compassion?

Since, statistically speaking, most of you are on the liberal side of the fence, particularly in terms of the politics of sexuality, let's work from there. Are you reducing the act of

criminalizing teenage pregnancy to a simple act of bullying? Are you thinking of the people supporting the punishment of the girl as power-hungry, self-righteous thugs trying to impose their moral code upon others? That is probably true of some, but in my experience talking to social conservatives in the United States, the anger they express when fighting against all that immoral hippy sex stuff sounds like it is driven by fear, not by a lust for power. If you ask social conservatives why they are so vociferously opposed to anything that even hints at the acceptance of any sexuality outside of their very narrowly defined moral boundaries, their answers are usually framed in terms of their own weakness, not a desire for power over others. They fear the message it will send will overwhelm their struggle to instill values in their naturally rebellious teenage children. They worry about the temptation it offers to those who wish to confine themselves to a very narrowly bounded sexual life but lack the willpower to do so. They repeatedly say things that suggest they believe that they themselves are weak, that they need the support of a community to resist temptations, that harsh punishments and a reduction in opportunities around them help deter them from giving in.

If you listen carefully, you will often find that people pushing extremely conservative positions on sex^{*} are expressing sentiments similar to the things that recovering alcoholics say about the support networks that help them stay sober. Consider the basics of the twelve-step approach to managing addiction. Admit that you cannot control your compulsion (weakness in the face of temptation); rely on a higher power for strength; rely on sponsors and groups (community) suffering similar compulsions to help you; make amends for the suffering caused by your compulsion; learn to live a new life with a new code of behavior; and help others who suffer the same compulsion. Applying that set of ideas to social conservatives is a far more complex way to think of them than just dismissing them as bullies, but it fits with the way many of the most earnest of them speak and behave. Maybe they are quick to forgive adulterers who express conservative values and ask for forgiveness because they see themselves as people who could also be easily be tempted. Maybe they feel threatened by social liberals advocating more acceptance of sexuality in the same way that addicts often feel threatened by people pushing the acceptance of social activities that might tempt them back into the grip of alcohol, drugs, gambling, or whatever other compulsions overwhelmed them. After all, addicts are often counseled to cut ties with the friends, family, and others who might pull them back into addiction.

^{*} Pun intended.

Maybe for social conservatives, arresting those teenage girls for being pregnant is not about punishing them, but instead is about adding a threat to help otherwise righteous girls who might be tempted to climb into the back seat of the minivan. Maybe for some conservatives, it is about power over people. Certainly it is for their leaders, but why would masses of people motivated by a desire for power follow those leaders so willingly and so slavishly? Perhaps for many who follow rather than lead, social conservatism is about fear of temptation and being part of the social support group that helps them resist that

temptation. For others, it might be a sincere effort to help other people by preventing them from hurting themselves, just like a liberal might offer support for all the alcoholics of the world by trying to ban advertising of alcohol or forcing tobacco to use plain packaging. Some conservatives might be driven by a duty to their deity. At the extreme, some may even believe that every time a teen's virginity survives a Saturday night it helps keep the apocalypse at bay.

If you are a social conservative and you are offended by being compared to addicts, tough. Buckle up, Buttercup, and pay attention to what I am saying to the liberals in the room. It can be easy for a liberal to reduce social conservatism to the simplistic idea that it is about controlling others by imposing their moral code upon everyone, but if many or most social conservatives have other motivations—particularly if their motivation is based upon fear and belief in their own weakness—how might the liberals' reductionist conceptualization actually lead to the wrong approach for engaging the conservative sexual position? * Are there ways that liberals can help social conservatives be the people they want to be without imposing their sexual morals upon the entire community? The answer is no, if you presume that it is about controlling others. However, if that presumption about motive is wrong, could the answer be yes if it is about supporting them in the same way that liberals support others who struggle to resist temptations?

* For your own sanity, get used to the lame puns. Assume they are all intended and deal with it.

Recognize that regardless of whether you are conservative or liberal you have to break away from your belief in order to even ask that question. Liberals have to break out of the belief that all conservatives are attempting to universalize their social mores in order to exert power. However, it's even more difficult for conservatives. To seriously consider the question of how liberals might be allies, conservatives first have to conceptualize themselves in terms of acting out of weakness. No group wants to believe that they are weak or vulnerable, but then they must also discard the belief that liberals are attacking them and trying to destroy the community they need to sustain the moral norms they want for themselves and their families. As you will learn in the forthcoming chapters, that is tremendously difficult. Since they are thinking in terms of community, all of the social psychological aspects of humans as communal or social animal's come into play and work against breaking from the belief. Believing in the threat from liberals helps them define their community, reinforces the idea that they belong, and encourages them to both commit more resources to the community and defer to the leadership of their community. With a small cadre of cynical leaders willing to manipulate those instincts in order to exert power, the related cognitive structures become mutually reinforcing and tremendously difficult to escape.

That is actually what I mean when I say that politics are profoundly personal. Yes, they intrude into specific intimate topics that your mother really hopes you think are personal,

but the truly personal part is the way your beliefs about yourself and others enable or prevent you from even considering certain questions. I will repeatedly tell you to question things, but you are the first and most important thing that you must question.

How To Read This Book

I was serious about the whole jackass thing. However, my unconventional style should not get in the way of the fact that this book is a serious effort to delve into the complex concepts and theories that underlie politics as a subject of study. Just because an example is from *Phineas and Ferb* or a beer commercial does not make the underlying point about politics any less relevant than if it was tied to an example I might pull from a discussion of comparative political institutions. It is just a bit easier to read. In fact, lightening things up with a bit of sarcasm and using fiction and pop culture to help give you a different perspective on the subject enables me to include more of the good stuff. It makes it easier for me to help you get past what you think you already know so we can delve into the underlying political dynamics.

There are a lot of ways to write a textbook on politics, and as you read this book, you should keep in mind that when I designed it, I wanted to create something that focused on the how and why of politics rather than just the what. As a wizened and extremely brilliant professor, I am struck by how many of the specifics in old textbooks are no longer relevant. If you go back to the 1980s, there were entire chapters on *politburo politics*. The odds are pretty good that most students reading this text have no idea what that term could possibly refer to. That is the nature of the subject, and it is an important part of why new editions of textbooks are constantly being churned out. It also exposes the problem of focusing on the “what” of politics. For both the teacher and the student, it is horribly tempting to focus on the what. Different types of parliaments, different categories of executives, different legal foundations, the history of different ideologies, different systems for serving this function or that function—it is easy to write exams that test that sort of knowledge, and it is easy for students to study categories and lists of things. The problem is that the world changes, and the what of politics changes.

In contrast, the parts of old textbooks that delve into the hows and whys of politics still seem to be relevant. As an obvious example, my discussion of why some democratic governments have two parties and why some have dozens is not that different from the one that I was taught back in the stone age. The basic theory is more than a half century old, yet it has lost none of its value. Thus, throughout this text I focus on hows and whys. All of the examples I use—whether they are real-world examples or fictional or asinine—are chosen to get at the underlying logic of politics. As I explain in the first chapter, fictional examples are excellent for this purpose. For the student, my pursuit of this goal should provide a hint of how to engage this text—you know, help me out a bit and look for the reason, cause, process, or dynamic I am trying to get you to understand.

Actually, I expect a great deal from you when you are reading this textbook. I expect you to explore the material. I expect you to think about the examples. I expect you to look for the

dynamics of politics in fiction. I expect you to consider the arguments of people who disagree with you. I expect you to realize that an introduction to political science is just that—an introduction, a starting place—and it is neither definitive nor complete. The one thing I most sincerely hope to provoke with this text is your interest in knowing more about politics.

About the Author

Here are a dozen things most people don't know about

Douglas A. Van Belle

1. I once backed over a Peugeot with a loaded dump truck—all the way over. But it was OK—Officer Van Lierop gave the screaming realtor lady a ticket for parking in a marked construction zone.
2. Ten days later, I backed into the front bumper of that same woman's brand-new insurance-money Peugeot. It was just a little bump, but it was enough to break off the little pin in the transmission that held the car in park, and that was enough to send it rolling down the hill. The car was going at least fifty when it suddenly realized it was going backward and did a full Starsky and Hutch around and into a very large tree. A passing botanist saved the tree. Officer Van Lierop gave the screaming realtor lady another ticket for parking in a marked construction zone.
3. Less than a week later, I was moving a flatbed trailer with two eight-foot-long sections of four-foot-diameter concrete pipe when I discovered that the physics of mass and momentum will kick the \$*& out of a 1972 Datsun pickup. I slammed on the brakes and managed to stop the roll backward down the hill before it turned into a train wreck, but the concrete pipes shifted and snapped the chain holding them in place. The first pipe hit the realtor lady's second new Peugeot (less than two hours off the lot) just behind the front door and spun it around so the second pipe hit the other side in almost exactly the same spot. The two back doors ended up touching each other in the middle of the backseat. Officer Van Lierop gave the screaming realtor lady yet another ticket for parking in a marked construction zone. The realtor lady walked home crying, and no one ever saw her again.
4. I used to call my Datsun pickup Hoser Truck. Hoser Truck was killed by a fat lady in a Ford Fairlane. She was going "at least fifty" when she hit it broadside. After rolling and tumbling nearly half a block down University Avenue, Hoser Truck came to rest, on its wheels (OK, three of its wheels) in the middle of a used-car lot. The car lot's fence was undamaged, and Hoser Truck had somehow ended up inside a ring of cars parked very close to one another. The cars in the lot were undamaged, and the police had to call the owner of the lot to unlock the gate so I could get out. The car lot was called "Buy a Wreck Cheap, Nothing Over \$500." I left the truck there and rode the bus home.
5. If you're going to park a 1972 Datsun pickup near the edge of a small cliff, try to remember that the parking brake never really worked right. Otherwise, it will cost you \$50 to have an old guy with a bulldozer pull it up off the beach for you.
6. At the end of my second-worst date ever, I ended up in a hospital emergency room with my possibly broken wrist handcuffed to a gender-indeterminate biker (who smelled like Pine-Sol) while I tried to explain to a similarly gender-indeterminate police officer (who spit when she or he screamed) how the cute blond girl had ended up with a broken nose.
7. Until my second-worst date ever, I thought that my Austin-Healey Sprite was the

best date car in the world. It was kind of ugly, most motorcycles could put its motor to shame, and girls didn't really like it, but it was so small that just getting a girl in the passenger seat counted as foreplay. The problem was that when two of the pistons in that screaming little engine decided to leave the other two, they took the entire drivetrain out of the bottom of the car with them. That snapped the gearshift handle hard to the right, and there was nowhere for the hand sitting on the gearshift knob to go except up and into the face of the cute blond girl in the passenger seat.

8. If you happened to be driving down I-5 just outside of Woodburn, Oregon, in September of 1987 and you saw a bunch of fraternity boys roasting marshmallows and hot dogs over the smoldering remains of a Winnebago, I was the one wearing a green sweatshirt.
9. Just in case you were wondering, a 1972 Datsun pickup won't fit inside one of those big ten-foot concrete sewer pipes. Not even if you get a running start.
10. Also, just in case you were wondering, a tow truck isn't powerful enough to extract a 1972 Datsun pickup that is jammed halfway into a ten-foot sewer pipe. A 1968 GMC pickup is. It has to get a running start, and you want to be smart enough to realize straightaway that the back bumpers of the trucks just ain't gonna handle it, but if you hook the chain to the frames, it'll work.
11. I once set the unofficial Kansas record by flying a motor home more than fifty yards through the air. On the third day of a grand summerlong tour of the United States, I was driving down the freeway just outside WaKeeney, Kansas, when the aforementioned motor home was hit by what the people in the insurance business call a "lateral microburst." Humans call it a big gust of wind. It lifted the brand-new motor home from the right-hand lane, flipped it over, and deposited it on its side on the far side of the center median, blocking both oncoming lanes. No one was hurt, but I did suffer a deep muscle bruise when I was hit in the head by a thirteen-inch TV that I had just set up to play *The Lion King* for the kids. I had also just told my lovely wife, "Stop being neurotic. The stupid TV isn't going anywhere."
12. My lovely wife repeatedly and frequently reminds me that she is going to carve "Stop being neurotic. The stupid TV isn't going anywhere" into my tombstone.

Dedication

This book is dedicated to the Sheriff's Secret Police. Without their benevolent enforcement of so many edicts that are quite similar to laws, Night Vale would just be another Desert Bluffs. Without their constant surveillance of words, thoughts, and facial expressions, how would we know that we shouldn't mention the dog park? And, lest we forget, their enthusiastic encouragement of vigilante justice helps keep the enforcement budget low, so your tax dollars can be invested in invaluable public works, such as the Night Vale harbor and waterfront recreation area, or the Night Vale stadium.

ALL HAIL THE GLOW CLOUD

Chapter 1 Introducing the Ancient Debate: The Ideal versus the Real



AF archive/Alamy Stock Photo

Politics can be defined in many ways. I suspect that I will probably mention a few of those definitions along the way—this is a textbook, after all—but when it comes to developing an understanding of the fundamentals of politics, those details aren’t all that important. No matter whether we talk about politics in terms of power, money, processes, or 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. It’s even in popular music because “You Can’t Always Get What You Want.”‡1

The clash between the real and the ideal is a common theme in film and fiction, and it even became part of a comic book franchise. The 2011 reboot of Batman was a classic clash

between ideals and reality, and that isn't just because DC sucks and Marvel rules.² The reboot was clearly driven by the realities of a publishing genre that had changed drastically over the previous seven decades. Batman and the other superheroes had stalled both creatively and in terms of sales, and they needed drastic changes if they were going to continue as commercial products. That reality did not sit well with many longtime fans. It ignited a geekstorm of controversy—some of the dedicated even called it a geekageddon. Many of these fans idealized all the classical comic elements that put Batman out of sync with the more modern, flashier, and more extravagant graphic novels that have risen to lead the genre. Others complained that the oversexualization inherent in the idealization of the female figures in the reboots was harmful to women who had to deal with the reality of femininity in a media-saturated world. Others argued that DC should have shut the characters down rather than pander to economic realities. A common theme in all the debates and discussions was the question of what should be—the ideals—versus what reality would allow or enable.

* Totally stole that from Disney's *Beauty and the Beast* (directed by Gary Trousdale and Kirk Wise, 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.

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 a page and pay attention to that part where I said there is a theme for this book, then get all annoyed when you realize I mention it again in the paragraph right after this call-out element.
- 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.
- Learn to nod sagely when you pretend that you understand what is and is not political science.

In films and literature, this conflict 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 younger, more naive idealist? In the original *Star Wars*,³ which for some unfathomable reason is episode 4, 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 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, who returns to help save the day.* In Brian De Palma's *The Untouchables*,⁴ 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."

* If you haven't seen the movie that is really the first *Star Wars* (despite being episode 4), don't fret. It is exactly the same as *The Force Awakens*. 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? (*The Force Awakens*, directed by J. J. Abrams, Lucasfilm Ltd., 2015).

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*,⁵ 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*⁶ and *Twilight*⁷ and all those other rip-offs of *Romeo and Juliet*⁸ 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*.*

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 this book, but the extensive history of that struggle is just as significant. In a world of rapid technological and social change, it can often seem as if everything is new or unprecedented. However, the novelty is often more illusion than reality. In some cases, we have seen it before, and in other cases, the changes we notice are more incremental than we realize. 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. There are some aspects of the political impact of today's media saturation that are unprecedented, but many of today's concerns were explored in *Max Headroom*, back in the 1980s.⁹ 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

television, radio, moving pictures, the telegraph, the rotary press, movable type, and even written language itself.

And that is my excuse for putting a lot of old stuff in here.

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

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, Spiderman, Batman, 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).¹⁰ 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 focus 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 radio station. 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.

The clash between the ideal and the real is more than just the theme for this textbook. It *is* the theme for this textbook. I did mention that somewhere didn't I? I'm sure I did. If I didn't, I meant to. Anyway, it makes a good theme because some people would even go so far as to say that politics is the clash between ideals and reality. I wouldn't, but some people would—not smart people, or important people, or anyone like that, but some people.

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*.¹¹ 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 also 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 don't 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 established in the next section. 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

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 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.¹² 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.

^{*} 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.

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, 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 Selena Gomez, 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 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.

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 his trial over his own 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 I 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*.¹³ In theory, they 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. Memories of previous narrative iterations begin bleeding through, and as they filter into what the hosts "know," it alters how they perceive the world around them. As a result, the same information produces different understandings of reality. In other words, truth and meaning are dependent upon the foundation of knowledge that is in their heads.

* 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 D—on the first exam.

In the case of *Westworld*, the retained fragments of memories enable the hosts to learn in unexpected ways, but it works the other way as well. 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 box. When you can see that the world is flat, the idea of sailing around the globe is impossible to imagine and difficult to accept, even when the evidence 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, 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 2016 U.S. election, politics is also 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 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.

* 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.

We Call the Old Stuff “Classics”

Dollhouse

In Joss Whedon’s TV series *Dollhouse*,¹⁴ 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 begin to remember and how what persists in their heads complicates what is 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.¹⁵ 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.

If we were to conceptualize the essence of politics as the attempt by some to influence the actions or choices of others, 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 muddled 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: Is the U.S. 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 the 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 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.

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

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, antitax arguments espoused by the tea party, 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. 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 security of the seats you hold. 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 and win more districts but by smaller margins. You have more representatives in the representative institution than your share of the vote, but each of your individual elected representatives is 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. The United States is currently at or near the point of snapback, and states such as North Carolina, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Virginia are 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 you could get that backlash as soon as 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.

Question III: Is the Affordable Care Act Socialist?

The obvious answer is yes, but the actual answer is that the law popularly (or disparagingly) known as 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 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.

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 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, or the motivational speaker who lives in a van down by the river.* Our backgrounds and personalities shape our understandings of politics, sometimes to the point of determining what we can or cannot believe. 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, because 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.

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

† Again, legally binding.

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 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. 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.

* 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.

Second, by living through the characters in novels, 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*¹⁶ shows us how government can be used to control every aspect of people's personal lives. 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 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 show us, fictional characters can be portrayed as far more calculating than any human being could possibly be.¹⁷ 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.

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

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*¹⁸—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.