


Introduction to Political Theory



WHAT IS POLITICAL THEORY?

1. Some believe politics can be studied without theory...can it?
 2. Hoffman and Graham suggest *philosophy* and *theory* are synonymous...
 3. However, theory and *ideology* are not...
 4. Political theory is an *abstraction*...
 5. But how does one arrive at a theory?
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WHAT IS POLITICAL THEORY?

1. Concept

**a universal
descriptive word.
It refers to a
characteristic
belonging to a
class, not an
individual**



WHAT IS POLITICAL THEORY?

2. Generalization

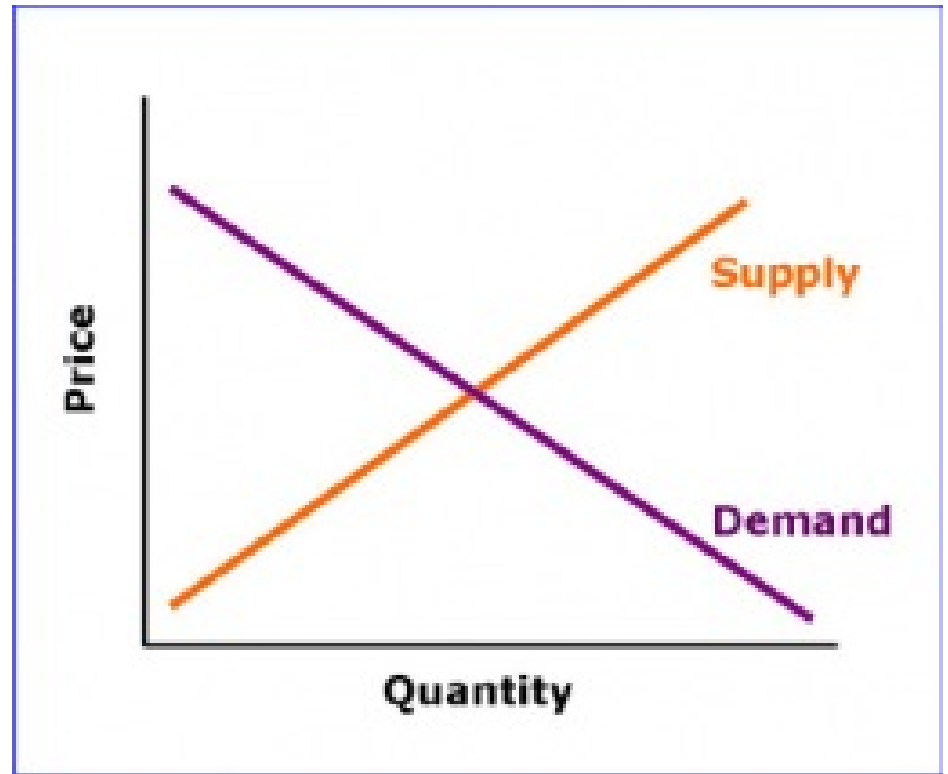
a statement that states a relationship between two or more concepts.



WHAT IS POLITICAL THEORY?

3. Law

generalization
that has been
tested and
confirmed.

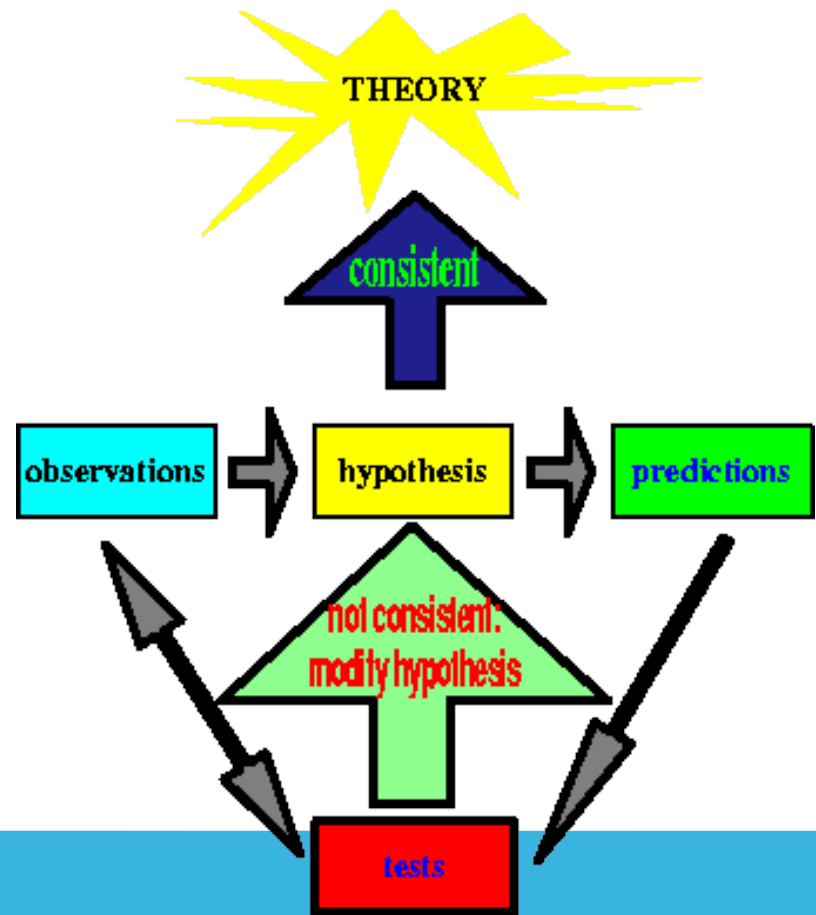


because circular reasoning works

WHAT IS POLITICAL THEORY?


4. Theory

a set of generalizations that are related.



WHAT IS POLITICAL THEORY?

**Next, we should
examine two types
of philosophical
approaches...**



WHAT IS POLITICAL THEORY?



1. **Empirical Approach** – rests on observations relative to nature that can be verified with data, proof, and evidence (DPE). “What is ...”

Example: “The Executive Branch has become bigger and more powerful than it was originally...”

WHAT IS POLITICAL THEORY?

2. Normative Approach – evaluates rather than merely explains. It labels things good or bad. “What ought to be...”

Example: “The American president has become too powerful for the nation’s own good...”



WHAT IS POLITICAL THEORY?

The Contestability Thesis

1. **Hoffman and Graham** – all theories and concepts are contestable, meaning all theories can be challenged or at least open to challenge.
2. All political concepts are inherently contestable, but does that mean we have no way of knowing what is true and what is false?
3. Can something be true and false (meaning that *on balance* one proposition is more true or less false than another)?
4. Philosophical 'dualism' assumes unless something is always true, it is absolutely false.
5. So, to say 'Barack Obama was a good president' is both true and false.

WHAT IS POLITICAL THEORY?

In **Hoffman and Graham's** view, the contestability thesis “must be able to address not merely the controversial character of political concepts, but how and why we can prefer some definitions in relations to others. Otherwise, the thesis becomes bogged down in a relativism that merely notes disagreements, but has no way to defend preferences.”

WHAT IS POWER?



Two wings

of the same bird...

Vote all you want, the flight plan doesn't change.

Deesillustration.com

WHAT IS POWER?

Hoffman and Graham point out [rightly], that concepts of the state, freedom, equality, justice, democracy, citizenship, and punishment, are all connected to the concept of *power*. They ask:

1. Do ordinary people have power?
2. Do politicians have too much?
3. Do people avoid voting (especially in the U.S.) because they feel they have no power?

WHAT IS POWER?



Why do we have wars?

Because we are ruled by an elite group of pycsopaths who own the banks that control the governments and media. They fund both sides of war for profit and they manufacture the consent of the public through the propaganda of the media.

WHAT IS POWER?

However, they also point out that “the question of power inevitably merges into the question of *authority*.” This leads to questions such as:

1. Is might right?

2. Are those who have power entitled to exercise it?

3. Is power the same as, or different from, authority?

WHAT IS POWER?

Max Weber – “the state as an institution claiming a monopoly on legitimate force”

Hoffman / Graham – power requires compliance, authority does not...

Can “force” be legitimate (meaning authorized and limited and in whose eyes)?

Liberals (**Lord Macaulay**): democracy allows poor to plunder the rich.

Marxists: the right to vote does not give people power to influence events and distribute resources.

WHAT IS POWER?

Power implies

Constraint

Force

Subordination

Dependence

Authority implies

Consent

Morality

Will

Autonomy



WHAT IS POWER?

Negative and Positive Power

Power is *negative* when you do things you would not otherwise do (power over...)

Power is *positive* when you feel empowered, or are able to develop yourself or your community (power to...)



WHAT IS POWER?

**Three-dimensional
power and the
problem of power
and authority**

(from Lukes, *Power: A Radical View*, 2005)

WHAT IS POWER?

1st dimension: ordinary decision-making

**2nd dimension: certain issues excluded;
people's needs not met**

**3rd dimension: expressing preferences
at variance with their interests, aka
“false consciousness”**



WHAT IS POWER?

Hoffman and Graham argue that *power* and *authority* share an “indissoluble link” in the concept of ***constraint***.

“Constraint is unavoidable since no agent can exist except through a structure, which are both natural (gravity) and social (family, society).”

“All relationships involve constraints (power) and entitlements (authority).”

WHAT IS POWER?



FEUDALISM THEN & NOW



Medieval Feudalism

Corporate Feudalism

By Rank

% of Population (Est.)

By Rank

Monarchs

(Kings, Queens, Emperors...)



.00001



Central Bankers

(Federal Reserve, Bank of Japan, ECB...)

Landed Gentry

(Dukes, Earls, Barons...)



.0001



Big Bankers

(JP Morgan, Goldman Sachs, Lloyd's...)

Clergy

(Archbishops, Priests...)



.35



Corporate Elite

(Fortune 500, Multinationals...)

Royal Ministers

(Chancellors, Constables, Sheriffs...)



.2



Elected Officials

(Presidents, MPs, Representatives...)

Merchants

(Traders, Explorers, East India Co...)



.2



Top Bureaucrats

(Commissioners, Secretaries, Judges...)

Vassals

(Tenant Farmers, Military Officers...)



.75



Top Professionals

(Doctors, Entertainers, Clergy...)

Everyone Else

(Peasants, Laborers, Conscripts...)



98.5



Everyone Else

(Workers, Students, Soldiers...)

You Are Here*

WHAT IS POWER?

For **Hoffman and Graham**:

“Power is not merely a crucial but central concept in politics. It underpins...other ideas [i.e. the state, freedom, equality, justice, democracy, citizenship, and punishment] and hence deserves a separate treatment of its own.....”

WHAT IS POWER?

A final word before we move on.

This class focuses primarily on *political* power and theories that accompany it. It is not a class on economics.

However, you should know from the start that I personally do not believe in separating the two – the political and the economic. For me, all discussions of power involve the study of *political economy*. Therefore, a discussion of *capitalism* will permeate all of our discussions. You will notice too, that while your textbook authors, **Hoffman and Graham**, do not have a separate chapter in the book on capitalism, they make frequent references to the capitalist economic system.

WHAT IS POWER?

**And now, a short
video on power...**

