CLASS #1: EXPLANATION, THEORY, AND SCIENCE

I. Introduction to Politics
   A. Politics – a dictionary definition
      1. The art or science of government
      2. Concerned with winning and holding control over a government
      3. Competition for power and leadership (as in a government)
      4. The total complex of relations between people living in society
   B. Basic Ingredients
      1. There are people who make choices (chooser)
      2. There are situations within which they make their choices (choice situation)
      3. We will assume that there are two basic choices
         a. Cooperate
         b. Defect
      4. Generally speaking politics involves cooperation
      5. Why would people defect
         a. Flaw in human nature
         b. Flaw in the choice situation
      6. Some choices create a dilemma when there is an incentive to defect without there being a flaw in human nature
         a. Incentive to defect when the other person cooperates
         b. Incentive to defect when the other person defects
   C. Causality
      1. Cause = something that brings about an effect or a result
      2. Assumptions concerning causality
         a. Nature is orderly
         b. All natural phenomena have natural causes
         c. We are able to discern the causes
      3. Cause and effect are necessary because explanation, prediction, and understanding are predicated on the premise that nature is orderly and hence “same cause, same effect”
   D. Looking for Patterns – Tragedy of the Commons
      1. Hardin’s parable involves a pasture "open to all."
         a. Imagine the grazing of animals on a common ground.
         b. Individuals are motivated to add to their flocks to increase personal wealth.
         c. Every animal added to the total degrades the commons a small amount. Although the degradation for each additional animal is small relative to the gain in wealth for the owner, if all owners follow this pattern the commons will ultimately be destroyed. And, being rational actors, each owner ads to their flock:
2. Therein is the tragedy.
   a. Each individual is locked into a system that compels him to increase his herd without limit - in a world that is limited.
   b. Ruin is the destination as each individual pursues their own interest in a society that believes in the freedom of the commons.

E. Understanding complexity
   1. World is made up of a large number of parts related in non-simple ways
   2. World is a system (set of components and interactions)
   3. Complexity is woven out of simplicity
   4. Weaving takes place through evolution

F. Ockham’s Razor
   1. principle proposed by William of Ockham in the fourteenth century: "Pluralitas non est ponenda sine neceessitate", which translates as "entities should not be multiplied unnecessarily".
   2. In many cases this is interpreted as "keep it simple"

II. Historical Foundations of Science
A. Enlightenment
   1. There is a stable, coherent, knowable self. This self is conscious, rational, autonomous, and universal.
   2. This self knows itself and the world through reason, or rationality.
   3. The mode of knowing produced by the objective rational self is "science," which can provide universal truths about the world, regardless of the individual status of the knower.
   4. The knowledge produced by science is "truth."
   5. The knowledge/truth produced by science will always lead toward progress.
   6. Reason is the ultimate judge of what is true
   7. Science thus stands as the paradigm for any and all socially useful forms of knowledge.
   8. Science is neutral and objective
   9. Language must be rational also.

B. Consequences of the Enlightenment
   1. Weakening of traditional religious and subject relationships
   2. Rise of democracy – free flow of ideas
   3. Spread of capitalism
   4. Individuals are increasingly independent and autonomous
   5. Could no longer turn with secure confidence to the church, guild, or tribe for final and foundational meanings
6. The scientific method became the way to justify and legitimate one’s activities and life – science became privileged over other ways of knowing

III. History of Modern Political Science
A. Institutional Period (1860-1945)
   1. The onslaught of the industrial revolution, coupled with the advance of science and technology, stimulated a major alteration in the way we study social phenomena
   2. Eschew classical ethical philosophy
   3. Assume certain economic and democratic values were superior to others
   4. Given those values, what types of institutions would sustain them?
   5. Primarily descriptive
   6. The two world wars shattered the basic values

B. Behavioral Period (1945-)
   1. Scientific explanation and understanding
   2. Production of knowledge about the real world
   3. Quest for generality
   4. Ahistorical methodology
   5. Value free and objective

C. Post-Behavioral Period (1965-)
   1. There is a difference between the world as it is and the world we experience
   2. Is science value laden and political
   3. Power determines what is right

IV. Goals of a Behavioral Approach to Science of Politics
A. Understand
B. Theory-oriented, theory-directed
C. Use the Scientific Method
D. Ask Nature whether our theory corresponds to the facts

V. Narrow or Conventional Conception of the Scientific Method
A. Five Steps
   1. Observation
   2. Hypothesis
   3. Empirical Testing
   4. Law
   5. Theory
B. Process of repeating steps 1-3 until the hypothesis is accepted and transformed into a law
VI. **Wide Conception of Scientific Method**
   A. Diagram of the Research Process
   B. How does science interact with the real world?

VII. **Overview of the First Section of Course**
   A. What is politics – to understand and extricate ourselves from dilemmas through fostering mutual cooperation
   B. What is science?
   C. Theory
      1. Develop a model of the individual chooser?
      2. Identify important characteristics of the choice situation
      3. Build models of choice situations
   D. Explain individual choices in terms of the models
   E. Apply the models to the *Lord of the Flies* to see if the model corresponds to the facts
   F. Consider what constitutes an explanation