

Dear Professor Bahry:

We have already made clear our views about the damage we believe will be done to political theory and political science and the rich relationship between them if the Penn State Political Science Department eliminates political theory as a subfield in the department. Those of us who sign this letter wish in addition to make a corollary point about certain consequences that we believe will inevitably be occasioned by the Penn State decision, if that decision is ratified and put into practice.

Because we, the signatories below, believe that graduate political science programs need to value and incorporate political theory into their mandatory curricula in order adequately to prepare students as scholars and teachers of political science—whatever the subfield—we will not in good conscience be able to recommend to our qualified undergraduates that they do graduate work at Penn State, if Penn State eliminates political theory as a subfield. For we believe, whatever their political science subfields, our students will do better in graduate political science programs where they will also get some degree of fundamental training in political theory, and where there is no bias against doing critical historical, analytic, and normative work as one element in becoming a competent social scientist.

For similar reasons, we will not be able in good faith to recommend Ph.D.s from Penn State to our colleagues for future positions in our departments—again, whatever the subfield, Since we believe that it is essential to the well-trained political scientist and teacher, whether in American, Comparative, IR, or Public Law, that they have a training that includes an underpinning in political theory and critical thinking, we will urge our colleagues to choose candidates who have such a broad and deep training. Although we obviously cannot and do not speak for our departments, but only for ourselves, as members of departments that respect political theory and integrate it into our teaching and training programs, we have reason to believe our voices will be heard.

We of course recognize the right of every college and university, and of every department of political science, to set their own program parameters. However, the choice to eliminate political theory from a training program has consequences for the academy far beyond Penn State—in terms of both recruiting students from and placing them in other departments and universities, including our own. Consequently, as Penn State exercises its autonomy in defining political theory out of the discipline, we will exercise our autonomy in making choices in our own programs to defend the integrity of political theory in the discipline and its centrality to our scholarly and pedagogical work.

We hope then that in reaching your decision you will take into account not just theoretical arguments about the nature of the social sciences and abstract views about the interface of theory and political science, but will consider the real consequences for your students—those you aspire to recruit, and those you will want to place—of unhooking training in political science from its moorings in political theory.

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(Signed by Ben Barber and sixty others.)