

POLITICAL THEORY


- MEANINGS
- DIFFERENCE OF POLITICAL THEORY FROM OTHER FIELD OF STUDY IN POLITICAL SCIENCE
- NATURE
- SCOPE
- SIGNIFICANCE

Political Theory

- Let's first look into these two terms, 'Political' and 'Theory'
- The terms 'polity', 'politics' and 'political' are derived from the Greek words 'polis' which denotes ancient Greek 'city-state'
- the term 'theory' originates from the word 'theoria' (Greek) which implies the study of phenomena.
- 'theory' refers to 'a systematic knowledge'
- 'political' refers to 'matters of public concern'.


Definitions of Political Theory

- **David Held** > *'a network of concepts and generalizations about political life involving ideas, assumptions and statements about the nature, purpose and key features of government, state and society, and about the political capabilities of human beings'*
- **Andrew Hacker** > *'a combination of a disinterested search for the principles of good state and good society on the one hand, and a disinterested search for knowledge of political and social reality on the other'*
- **George Catlin** > *'political theory includes political science and political philosophy. While science refers to the phenomena of control in many forms over all the process of whole social field, it is concerned with means; political philosophy is concerned with the end or final value'*

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- political theory is ‘a sub-field of political science
 - It includes:
 - i) political philosophy—a moral theory of politics and a historical study of political ideas
 - ii) a scientific criterion
 - iii) a linguistic analysis of political ideas
 - iv) the discovery and systematic development of generalizations about political behaviour

Summing up

- we can sum up that political theory is concerned with the study of the phenomena of the state both in philosophical as well as empirical terms.
- It not only involves explanation, description and prescription regarding the state and political institutions but also evaluation of their moral philosophical purpose. It is not only concerned with what the state is but also what it ought to be.

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- According to **Weinstein**, political theory can be viewed as an **activity** which involves **posing questions**, **developing responses** to those questions and **creating imaginative perspectives** on the public life of human beings.
 - It has been probing into **questions like: nature and purpose of the state; why one should prefer a kind of state than the other; what the political organization aims at; by what criteria its ends, its methods and its achievements should be judged; what is the relation between state and the individual.**
 - Political theory has been engaged in these age old questions from Plato onwards because it is concerned with the fate of man which depends upon his ability to create a kind of political community in which rulers and ruled are united in the pursuit of common good.
 - **It is not necessary that political theory can provide answers to all questions but it can at least tell us how one should go about the solution.**

POLITICAL THEORY VRS POLITICAL THOUGHT

Political Theory

- the systematic speculation of a particular writer who talks specifically about the phenomena of the state
- based on certain hypothesis which may or may not be valid and may be open to criticism
- Theory provides a model of explanation of political reality
- political theory is based on certain discipline-be it philosophy, history, economics or sociology.
- the task of theory is not only to explain the political reality but also to change it (or to resist change)
- political theory can be conservative, critical or revolutionary

Political Thought

- thought comprising of theories and values of all those persons or a section of the community who think and write on the day-do-day activities, policies and decisions of the state, and which has a bearing on our present living
- These persons can be philosophers, writers, journalists, poets, political commentators etc.
- Political thought has no 'fixed' form and can be in the form of treatise, speeches, political commentaries etc.
- It is 'time bound' since the policies and programmes of the governments change from time to time.
- we have Greek thought or Roman thought of ancient period or the political thought of the medieval ages.

POLITICAL THEORY VRS POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Political Theory

- a political theorist may not necessarily be a political philosopher (eg. David Easton).
- Though theory deals with the same issues as political philosophy, it can explain them both from philosophical as well as empirical points of view
- political theory can be both normative and empirical
- yet if political theory is separated from political philosophy, its meaning will appear distorted and it will prove barren and irrelevant.
- Theory must be supplemented by philosophy.

Political philosophy

- Philosophy is called 'science of wisdom'(all-inclusive)
- wisdom about this world, man or God.
- When this wisdom is applied to the study of political phenomena or the state, it is called political philosophy.
- it belongs to the category of normative political theory.
- t is concerned with not only explaining what 'is' but also what 'ought' to be.
- It is not concerned with contemporary issues but with certain universal issues in the political life of man such as nature and purpose of the political organisation, basis of political authority, nature of rights, liberty, equality, justice etc.
- a political philosopher is a political theorist
- political philosophy is abstract or speculative.
- Philosophical explanations are theories too, but they are nonscientific(Arnold Bretch)

POLITICAL THEORY VRS POLITICAL SCIENCE

Political Theory

- > It was made one of the subfields of Political Science
- > It is not only concerned about the behavioural study of the political phenomena from empirical point of view but also prescribing the goals which states, governments, societies and citizens ought to pursue.
- > It also aims to generalize about the right conduct in the political life and about the legitimate use of power. Thus political theory is neither pure thought, nor philosophy, nor science.

Political Science

- > It is much more comprehensive
- > It refers to the study of politics by the use of scientific methods
- > It is concerned with describing and explaining the realities of political behaviour, generalizations about man and political institutions on empirical evidence, and the role of power in the society.

Nature of political theory

- Is an intellectual and moral creation of man.
 - >it is the speculation of a single individual who is attempting to offer us a theoretical explanation of the political reality i.e. the phenomena of the state.
 - >Every theory is an explanation, built upon certain hypothesis which may be valid (or not) and which are always open to criticism.
 - >political theory is a number of attempts made by thinkers from Plato onwards to unravel the mysteries of man's political life.
 - >Political theory is largely an attempt to seek the truth as the thinker sees it and it is usually expressed through a treatise such as Plato's Republic, Aristotle's Politics, Hobbes' Leviathan, or Rawls' A Theory of Justice.

Contd... Nature of Political Theory

- political theory contains an explanation of man, society and history.

>It probes the nature of man and society

>how a society is made up and how it works

>what are the important elements

>what are the sources of conflict in the society and how they can be resolved.

Contd... Nature of Political Theory

- political theory is discipline based.

>It means that though the phenomena which the theorist seeks to explain remains the same i.e. the state, the writer may be a philosopher, historian, economist, theologian or a sociologist.

>Thus we are confronted by a variety of political theories, each distinguished by a discipline on which it is based.

Contd... Nature of Political Theory

- it not only comprehends and explains the social and political reality but is also actively engaged in hastening the process of history.

>it not only tries to understand and explain political reality but also to device ways and means to change the society.

>not merely one of description of what it is but also a prescription of what ought to be(Laski).

>it recommends agencies of action as well as means of reform, revolution or conservation. It contains programmes that embody both ends and means.

>it plays a double role: to understand society and to suggest how to remove the imperfections.

Contd... Nature of Political Theory

- political theory also includes political ideology.

> Ideology - 'a system of beliefs, values and ideals by which people allow themselves to be governed'.

> e.g. liberalism, Marxism, socialism etc.

> All political theories from Plato to date reflect a distinct ideology of the writer.

> Political theory in the form of political ideology includes a system of political values, institutions and practices which a society has adopted as its ideal.

e.g. all political theories adopted by Western Europe and America have been dominated by liberalism and the theories accepted by China and erstwhile USSR were influenced by a particular brand of Marxism.

Significance of Political Theory

- The significance of political theory can be derived from the purpose it serves or supposed to serve and the task performed by it.
- To understand the political reality and, if necessary, to change it.
- In providing the moral criteria that ought to be used to judge the ethical worth of a political state and to propose alternative political arrangements and practices likely to meet the moral standards.
- The importance of political theory lies in providing
 - i) a description of the political phenomena
 - ii) a non-scientific (based upon philosophy or religion) or a scientific (based upon empirical studies) explanation,
 - iii) proposals for the selection of political goals and political action,
 - iv) moral judgement. Examples of such a political theory can be found in Plato's Republic, or Rawls' A Theory of Justice or Nozic's Anarchy, State and Utopia.

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- Politics is an activity engaged with the management of the collective affairs of society. Its significance lies in evolving various doctrines and approaches regarding the nature and purpose of the state, the bases of political authority, vision of an ideal state, best form of government, relations between the state and the individual and basic issues such as rights, liberty, equality, property, justice etc.
- To explain the inter-relation between one concept and another such as the relationship between liberty and equality, equality and property, justice and property.

Contd.....


- To study and analyse more profoundly than others, the immediate and potential problems of political life of the society and to supply the practical politician with an alternative course of action, the consequences of which have been fully thought of.
- According to David Held, the task of political theorist is really demanding because in the absence of systematic study, there is a danger that politics will be left to the ignorant and self-seeking people who only want to pursue it as 'power.


Contd....

- It provides systematic thinking about the nature and purpose of state and government.
- It helps us to establish a correlation between ideals and the socio-political phenomena.
- It makes the individual aware of his rights and duties in the society.
- It helps us to understand the nature of the socio-economic system and its problems like poverty, violence, corruption, ethnicity etc.
- political theory helps us to evolve ways and means to change society either through reform or revolution.
- When political theory performs its function well, it is one of the most important weapons of struggle for the advancement of humanity.
- To imbue people with correct theories may make them choose their goals and means correctly so as to avoid the roads that end in disappointment.

Scope of study of Political Theory

- Political theory is a branch of political science which is defined as a science of the state.
- The earlier explanation on the scope of study of political theory includes a study of the evolution, nature, composition, necessity and purpose of the government apparatus and also an understanding of the human perception and nature and its relationship with the larger community.
- Political theory concerned with the study of power and influence. According to David Easton, political theory is related to the authoritative allocation of values in a community.

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- According to the modern view of the behaviouralists or the realists is that, there is a shift in the focus of political theory from the abstract items to the political reality. So it study human behavior which has an influence on the elections process in a democratic system and political events.
 - Therefore, political theory reflects upon political phenomena, processes and institution and on actual political behavior by subjecting it to political order, which is a part of a larger and a more fundamental question, namely the ideal form of life that a human being ought to lead within a community.
 - Political theory involve in the study of political activities which engage the attention and energy of the people. This involved contesting elections, propagating political ideologies, manning of political offices, etc.

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- The scope of study of political theory also involved the study of conflicts. In the struggle for power, it is likely that one tries to eliminate the other and conflicts do arise in the process. Conflict is genuine and which is capable of being resolved through consensus.
 - Political theory not only study but also devices ways and means to solve these conflicts and problems confronted by the society.
 - Political theory as a sub-field of political science is a useful source of conceptual frameworks, operational concepts and logical relationship employed by political scientists for better understanding of the political system and political activities.
 - It is this quest for developing analytical methods and testable hypothesis and its applicability that had broadened the scope of political theory.
 - Political theory attempts to explain the attitudes and action arising from ordinary political life and to generalize about them in a particular context. Thus political theory is concerned about with the relationship between concept and circumstances.