

Meaning of political theory

Political theory helps in the control of social life. The knowledge of political science enables us to secure development of society from our human resources.

Political theory also guides us to find remedies of political instability and various types of social crisis. Political theory helps in social criticism and reconstruction.

Various political paradigms given by political philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, St.

Augustine, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Hegel, Marx, Mill and Macpherson

give us ample insights into the possible ills of social life and their remedies. We can

draw our own scheme of social reconstruction on the basis of these insights. The

political theory also helps in the clarification of concepts. The tradition of political

theory encourages a dignified debate between upholders of different points of view.

It thereby encourages mutual respect and toleration.

Political philosophy provides general answers to general questions. It explains

concepts and theories, such as justice and right as well as the distinction between

them. It also provides answers to questions relating to the larger issues of politics.

Political philosophy is a part of normative political theory, for its attempt to establish

the inter-relationships between the concepts. According to Subrata Mukherjee and

Sushila Ramaswamy, who co-authored A History of Political Thought: Plato to

Marx (2007), it would not be wrong to say that every political philosopher is a

theorist, though every political theorist is not a political philosopher.

Broadly speaking, political theory consists of political science and political philosophy. These two branches of political theory taken together perform three functions which are recognized as the functions of political theory: (a) description, (b) criticism and (c) reconstruction. Political science mainly relies on empirical method, that is, the knowledge based on our practical experience which is supposed to be most reliable. Hence, it specializes in description. Political philosophy being concerned with value-judgment specializes in 'criticism' and 'reconstruction'.

According to George H. Sabine who authored, *What is Political Theory?* (1939), every political theory could be scrutinized from two points of view: as social philosophy and as ideology. As ideology, theories were psychological phenomena, precluding truth or falsity. Theories were beliefs, 'events in peoples mind and factors in their conduct', irrespective of their validity or verifiability. Theories played an influential role in history, and therefore the task of a historian was to ascertain the extent to which the theories help in shaping the course of history. A theory had to be examined for its meaning, rather than for its impact on human actions. Viewed in this perspective, a theory comprised two kind of propositions: factual and moral. Sabine focused on factual rather than moral statements, for the latter precluded

description of truth or falsity. He says the moral element characterized political

theory which was why it was primarily a moral enterprise.

But it should be kept in mind that there is no tension between political theory

and political science as they differ in terms of their boundaries and jurisdiction but

not in their aim. Political theory supplies idea, concepts and theories for purpose of

analysis, descriptions, explanation and criticism, which in turn are incorporated in

political science. Political theory helps in explaining the history of political thought,

use of technique of analysis, conceptual clarification and formal model building, and

thereby can be termed as theoretical political science. In a nutshell, it can be said

that political theory is theoretical, scientific as well as philosophical and at the same

time dynamic with a clear objective of attaining a better social order. It is a unique

synthesis of the elements of 'theory', 'science', 'philosophy', 'ideology' and 'thought'.