

Nature and Scope

The jurisdiction of political theory can be understood by identifying its nature and

concerns. Political theory is a very wide and comprehensive subject. There is no

agreement among the political scientists with regard to the scope of political theory.

A conference of political scientists, held under the auspices of the International

Political Science Association in Paris in the year 1948, demarcated the scope of

political theory into different areas, such as political institution, political dynamics

(parties, public-opinion, etc.) and international relations. But this demarcation of the

International Political Science Association rather delimits the scope of political theory

within the bounds of different areas. As the importance of political theory is increasing

day-by-day, its scope is also increasing and becoming wide. Despite this difficulty,

you may make an attempt to define the scope of political theory as follows.

A Study of the State and Government

Political theory primarily studies the problems of the state and the government. The

state is defined as a group of people organized for law within a definite territory. The

state possesses four characteristics, viz., population, territory, government and

sovereignty. Government is an agent of the state. Political theory studies the activities

of the state and explains the aims and objectives of the state and the government.

If we carefully study political theory, we come to know that despite the

differences found between the state and the government, the scope of one cannot be separated from that of the other. The state is the institution under which the government functions. The state is imaginary and it is the government that gives it a concrete shape. Therefore, one is the complement of the other. The existence of the state is not possible without the government. This is the reason why Laski, Garner, Gettell, Gilchrist and others have included the study of both the state and the government in the scope of political theory.

A Study of Political Science

Political science is a major branch of political theory. On the basis of the political ideas or thoughts of political thinkers, political science formulates definitions of concepts like democracy, liberty, equality, grounds of political obligations, etc.

A student of political theory must start his lessons with political science. Political

science explains the rudimentary concepts of political theory. It also includes the

study of political philosophy. Political speculations of political philosophers and some

ideologies such as individualism, anarchism, communism and so on are put together

in one volume which is given the title of 'political science'. Here, the underlying

assumption is that other parts of political theory on governmental organization, political

parties and pressure groups, international relations, etc., are distinct from political

theory. The danger of viewing political theory in such a way is that a special meaning

is being attached to the word 'theory' and this will rule out the possibility of the existence of any theory in other segments of political science. One should be cautious about it.

A Study of Political Institutions

The field of political theory is rather vast. It includes the study of political institutions.

This covers a study of constitutions and comparative government. It deals with the

nature of different political institutions including the government, explains their merits

and demerits, their structure and working, and arrives at different conclusions by

making a comparative study. Besides, the study of public administration and local

government may be included in this area. However, the study of public administration

has emerged as an independent subject in recent times.

A Study of Political Dynamics

The study of political dynamics became significant in the twentieth century.

It has

acquired more significance in the twenty-first century. It means the current forces

at work in government and politics. It covers a wide range and includes the study of

political parties, public opinion, pressure groups, lobbies, etc. A scientific study to the

working of these political dynamics helps to explain the political behaviour of

individuals and different groups.

A Study of Adjustment of the Individual with the State

The scope of political theory also includes a study of the nature of relationship

between the individual and the state. It examines how man should adjust himself with the society. Man is the root of politics. The process of adjustment of men with the society is an important aspect of political theory. The state guarantees certain rights and liberties to the citizens and at the same time imposes certain reasonable restrictions on them.