
UNIT 1 DIFFERENT INTERPRETATIONS OF POLITICAL THEORY

*Different Interpretations of
Political Theory*

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Political theory, described as the invention of the Greeks, is a very wide and comprehensive subject. It is defined as an orientation that characterizes the thinking of a group or a nation. It basically studies the problems, activities, aims and objectives of the state and the government. It also explains the origin, nature, structure and functions of the state. A major branch of political theory is political science, which is a social science discipline concerned with the study of the state, government and politics. Defined by Aristotle as the study of the state, it extensively deals with the theory and practice of politics, and the analysis of political systems and political behaviour. Political science formulates the definitions and concepts of democracy, liberty, equality, etc. on the basis of political ideas or thoughts of political thinkers.

The field of political theory also includes the study of political institutions, the nature of relationship between the individual and the state, and international relations. The discipline of political theory is divided into three categories, namely orthodox

1.2 INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL THEORY

Political theory plays a vital role in explaining the history of political thought, use of technique of analysis, conceptual clarification and formal model building. It is scientific, philosophical and dynamic with a clear objective of achieving a better social order.

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1.2.1 Evolution of Political Theory

The English word ‘theory’ originates from the Greek word ‘theoria’, which suggests a well-focused mental look. It means ‘looking at’, ‘gazing at’, or ‘being aware of’. Political theory was initially formulated in Greece—the land of enlightenment and knowledge in ancient times. Emphasizing on the contribution of the Greeks to the realm of knowledge, it is often said that ‘excepting the blind forces of nature, nothing moves in this world which is not Greek in its origin’. While in the Eastern countries, political philosophy intermingled with religion and mythology, it were the Greeks who, for the first time, separated politics from the fetters of religion and superstition by giving it the character of an independent science. They differentiated politics from mythology, theology and ethics. For this reason, political theory is described as the invention of the Greeks.

Political theory is concerned with three types of statements—empirical statement, logical statement and evaluative statement. Its major characteristics are as follows:

- It is concerned with the field of politics only.
- Its methods include description, explanation and investigation.
- It aims at building a good state in a healthy society.
- It is descriptive and explanatory, and therefore attempts to explain, evaluate and predict political phenomena.

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. There are various political theories, such as orthodox political theory, liberal political theory and Marxist political theory. Political theory is also closely related to other social sciences.

Some writers treat the history of political ideas as a contribution to political education and attempt to trace the evolution of political science from the time of the Greeks. Others seek to discover the principles of political science that would provide knowledge of political phenomena and a basis for sound political decision. Frederick Pollock, a late nineteenth century writer, presented the history of political theory as the history of the science of politics. In his view, one of its principal functions was that of critical expositions. Its chief purpose was not to revive the corpus of past erudition but to make today’s life more vivid and to help us envisage its problems with a more accurate perspective.