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Different Interpretations of Political Theory

Merriam's Contribution

In the 1920s, Charles Merriam and many other writers came to reject the historical method. They saw political science moving into the new stage of empirical science. They welcomed the new emphasis on quantitative techniques and approaches. These had come to be closely identified with sociology and psychology. However, the rejection of the historical method did not amount to a rejection of the history of political theory as irrelevant to the discipline of political science. Like Dunning, Merriam too, in many respects, attempted to establish a close relationship between political ideas and their social ambience. Above all, the history of political theory, more or less, was treated as the history of political science.

Gettel's Contribution

In 1924, Raymond G. Gettel attempted to trace the development of political thought in relation to its historical, institutional and intellectual background. Gettel saw no conflict between the two beliefs that political ideas do not embody absolute and demonstrable truths, but are relative to historical circumstances, and that in both ideas and institutions, there was a movement towards democracy. He saw in the history of political theory a scope of practical application. However, he emphasized that it contributed to clarity and precision in political thought. Besides, he underlined its relevance to contemporary politics. He treated it as a basis for rational action in democratic society. He assumed that the theory of politics was the peculiar product of Western thought and that there existed not a single controversy of our day without a pedigree that did not stretch into the distant ages.

Mellwain's Contribution

Similar themes were evident in the work of C. H. Mellwain. He noted the close tie between political ideas and institutions. The history of political theory served to illumine the development of our ideas about the state and government. He also explained the growth of thought about the basic problems of political obligation.

Politics and Political Theory

Modern writers make a distinction between 'politics' and 'political theory'. Sir Frederick Pollock, for the first time, broke up the subject into two parts such as: (i) theoretical politics and (ii) practical or applied politics. The first portion covers the theory of the state and government, theory of legislation and theory of the state as an artificial person. The subject under the first category deals with the features of the state and the basic principles of the government, and do not study actual working of any particular government. The second part covers the study of the state and actual forms of government, working of government and administration, political actions and elections.

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Different Interpretations of Political Theory

Table 1.1 demonstrates the distinction between the types of political theory.

Table 1.1 Theoretical and Applied Formulations of Political Theory

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Theoretical Formulations of Political Theory	Applied Formulations of Political Theory
(a) It should deal with the theory of the state.	(a) It should deal with the actual forms of government.
(b) It should deal with the various theories of government.	(b) It should deal with the working of the government, administration, etc.
(c) It should deal with theory of legislation.	(c) It should deal with the actual law, their procedure and courts.
(d) It should deal with the theory of the state as an artificial person.	(d) It should deal with the state personified i.e., diplomatic relations during war, peace and other international dealings.

Though the terms theoretical and applied formulations of political theory are quite significant, yet a majority of the writers accept political theory as the appropriate title of the subject.

1.2.2 Meaning of Political Theory

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