

Importance of political theory



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POLITICAL THEORY

Political Theory is generating an endless debate about its comprehensive definition; there are several views by theorists in understanding the nature of the discipline. There is need to clarify the meaning of key political ideas such as freedom, equality, justice etc. in a systematic manner. There is need to examine the arguments put forward by various political think-tanks in the justification of these concepts. In examining arguments, there is also need to reflect upon our modern political experiences and spot out trends and expectation for the future.

Political Theory “ is the combination of two words, ‘ politics’ and ‘ theory’ . The word ‘ Politics’, here stands for an identification of that which is to be “ theorized” or “ understood,” while ‘ Theory’ comes from a Greek word called “ theorema” which means what emerges from “ theorizing.” ‘ Theoros’ which means an intelligent observer, one who looks at what is going on, asking questions about it and tries to understand it. (LSE 1/1/54. Autograph).” John Plamenatz described political theory as the ‘ systematic thinking about the purposes of government’ (Plamenatz, 1960: 37) and I think this definition is just as apt today as it was then. Political theory is, however, usually regarded as a distinctive approach to the subject, even though, particularly in the USA, it is seen as a subfield of political science involves the analytical study of ideas and doctrines that have been central to political thought (Heywood, A. 2004). Political theory According to Farrell C. (2004), Political theory is thus a normative discipline; it is primarily concerned with how things ought to be as opposed to how things actually are.

Leftwich (1994), points out that one of the main contribution of political philosophy to our understanding of politics, is the potential for developing consistency and clarity of thought and judgment and that this process of clarification is not about analytical or explanatory activity: it is also about listening. According to Leftwich politics is about conflict and its resolution, and resolving conflicts of interest occurs in all societies at all levels.

Philosophical questions such as the nature of truth, will, determinism, etc. play a crucial role in argumentation, but we prefer the term “ theory” because it seems less daunting and abstract; however we don’t see any substantive difference between theory and philosophy (Hoffman, etal, 2009). Political theory is not a question of whether political animals follow theory, but a question of which theory or concept is supported when they present policies and undertake actions (Hoffman, etal, 2009). Theory and concept are tools used interchangeably for political analysis with which we think, criticize, argue, explain and analyze to guide and inform political action. To argue that something is true is not to cast out all doubt, if something is true this does not also mean that it is not also false. It simply means that on balance one proposition is truer or less false than the other. To argue otherwise is to assume that a phenomenon has to be one thing or another; philosophers call this dualistic approach (Hoffman, etal, 2009)”.

Theorists are not only important to politicians: our notions of common sense and human nature are heavily infused with the views of thinkers we may never have heard of, for instance, Ben Barber tells us in his website that he was an informal advisor to President Bill Clinton between 1994 and 1999 because of his ability to bridge the “ world of theory and practice.” I can

contest as to whether the political leaders, acts according to the right political concepts, but it is irrefutable that their dealings are connected to theory. In relationship to what Hoffman says, to point out that “ democracy” is good is both true or false, because even the true democrats would acknowledge some shortcomings of democracy and even the aggressive critics would agree that it has some positive component.

According to Friedman, this vital freedom is found only in free market capitalist economies, in which ‘ freedom’ in effect means the absence of government interference’. According to Mills (1859), “ if all of mankind minus one, were of one opinion, and only one other person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would no more be justified in silencing that person, than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind.” Thomas Hobbes for instance, described freedom as the ‘ silence of the laws’. John Locke suggested that law does not restrict liberty as much as defend or enlarge it. Therefore I can argue that while I agree that individuals should be forced to be free on the other hand unconstrained freedom or liberty could amount to the infringement of other people’s rights. For example, people should be forced or encouraged to express their freedom of expression or movement or demonstration while taking into consideration the rights of others without infringing their rights.

The idea of equality is perhaps the defining feature of modern political thought (Heywood, A. 2004). The most noticeable, and perhaps most imperative, manifestation of formal equality is the principle of legal equality, or ‘ equality before the law’. In constructing his theory of ‘ justice as fairness,’ Rawls appeals to the idea of the social contract. Cohen, portrayed

legal equality as 'market' or 'bourgeois' equality, and argued that it operates as little more than a facade, serving to disguise the reality of exploitation and economic inequality. In constructing his theory of 'justice as fairness,' Rawls appeals to the idea of the social contract. A liberalist view, every person is blessed with reason or will, which hinges on individual rights, beliefs of rationality and self-interested. In true sense, however, equality does not mean the same treatment in as much as there can be no likeness of treatment as long as people differ in want, capacity and need etc.

As Walzer argued, different principles of justice may therefore be appropriate in different spheres of life. Rawls's theory of the difference principle does permit inequality it does so only when such inequalities benefit everyone, especially the least advantaged. Dworkin's principle, (2000) of equal concern requires us to compensate those who have handicaps and little native (or non-marketable) talents, there is a difference between someone who is less advantaged as a result of circumstances beyond their control (for example, being born with a severe handicap) and someone who is less advantaged as a result of their own choice (for example, choosing to live off welfare payments instead of working). For instance, when the government distributes fertilizer-subsidy or food items to the disadvantaged- I slightly agree with Rawls difference principle on one hand I do not agree on the other, especially the identification of the least advantaged. It is a little bit tricky for someone to qualify as a genuine needy person because it could encourage laziness to those who pretend to be the poorest. It is better for anybody to sweat in order to get something rather than getting anything on silver tray.

History is evidently important, as part of exploration into modern challenges. My view, ' political theory,' is the ability to inquire into the political activity by using analytical tools such as concept, model and theory to dissect by believing the answers to the questions examined to have an important impact of what goes on in the real world. It is important for political academics to develop the critical skills necessary to explore new experience and new knowledge through the analysis of political ideas and their relationship to political practice. This experience in-turn informs the future. I can argue that academic political theory should ascertain to enhance the quality of public political debate.

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