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Western Political Thought (From Plato To Marx)

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By: Dheeraj



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(From Plato to Marx)**

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QUESTION PAPER

June – 2023

(Solved)

WESTERN POLITICAL THOUGHT (FROM PLATO TO MARX)

M.P.S.E.-3

Time: 2 Hours]

[Maximum Marks: 50

Note: Answer any five questions. Attempt at least two questions from each section. All questions carry equal marks.

SECTION-I

Q. 1. Explain the relevance of the classical tradition in Western Political Thought.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-1, Page No. 5-8, 'Significance of Western Political Thought'.

Q. 2. Analyse on what grounds Aristotle criticizes Plato.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-3, Page No. 34, Q. No. 1.

Q. 3. Why is Niccolo Machiavelli regarded as the father of Modern Political Thought? Explain.

Ans. Machiavelli is the father of Modernity and Democracy and the creator of Secular Man par excellence. His deceptively simple book '*The Prince*', so often trivialized, marks the Copernican revolution in politics. In that sibylline work Machiavelli undertook the world-historical task of destroying nothing less than the two pillars of Western civilization, classical Greek philosophy and Christianity, whose ethics, whether derived from Nature or nature's God, derogate from the complete autonomy of human will and desire.

Though Machiavelli could be considered unreasonable and cold to the society and populace, he is also very patriotic, with a strong sense of the need to protect and better his country. He does differ from the other philosophers in his suggestion for rulers. The prince—a monarchy—is the real "ideal" ruler of his philosophy, as he challenges the other ideals, saying that they are unrealistic and unattainable, so not worth our time or effort to achieve. Machiavelli proposed a state ruled by a ruler who was ruthless and untempered in order to make the state happy. It is important, in order to do so, that a ruler is able to create laws and institutions that do not need to be altered. Sparta, he says, was able to maintain its self for eight-hundred years without

changing or facing any dangerous disorders. So he, obviously, would not favour a tempered ruler because his ruler is meant to abuse what he can while concealing his true nature to the people and portraying, instead, what they would consider an ideal ruler, in order to maintain power. His era needed a ruler that would challenge the corruption of the Church, unify his nation, and establish a strong power in Europe, by whatever means necessary, including those described as "Machiavellian." His philosophy, like that of the other philosophers, is a product of his times and of his environment. Though his views did not drastically alter any societies, in that they strived towards the type of ruler he suggested, he did portray a ruler that society now frowns upon and has allowed us to arrive at conclusions why this type of ruler would not survive, and we need a tempered ruler to rule a tempered state of tempered individuals.

Machiavelli uses this work to describe his intellectual justification for separating political conduct and personal morality. Though it is arguable whether or not this work was ever read by Lorenzo, as intended, it is known that Machiavelli never did return to political power. His work, *The Prince*, however, was published shortly after the his death. Though his ideas were certainly radical at the time, society now can see parallels between modern governments and Machiavelli's "ideal." Government officials, especially the American ones, can be compared to the "prince" in Machiavelli's work as presenting a desirable front to society, yet once they are behind the confines of their castle, or White House, they are free to exploit and abuse their powers as they think necessary, either for personal or national gain. It could be said, by any educated individual, that

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reading. The Prince has become a prerequisite to holding office. Machiavelli, slightly ahead of his times, describes a ruler who presents an appearance of greatness, composed of every awesome quality that would be desired in a ruler, yet where those of society can not see him he is to be evil, malicious, manipulative and dissembling. Though lacking moral integrity—as most politicians do—this proposed ruler has proven successful and Machiavelli’s “ideal” is as he wanted it—real.

Q. 4. Examine John Locke’s conception of the state of nature and natural rights.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-7, Page No. 76, ‘Introduction’ and Page No. 77, ‘The State of Nature and Natural Rights’.

Q. 5. Critically examine Rousseau’s conception of General Will.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-8, Page No. 85, ‘Theory of General Will’ and Page No. 86, ‘General Will as the Sovereign’.

SECTION-II

Q. 6. Describe Edmund Burke’s views on citizenship and democracy.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-9, Page No. 94, ‘Citizenship and Democracy’ and Page No. 97, Q. No. 2.

Q. 7. Assess Immanuel Kant’s view of Perpetual Peace.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-10, Page No. 106, ‘Perpetual Peace’.

Q. 8. Examine Alexis De Tocqeville’s views on democracy and the modern state.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-12, Page No. 127, Q. No. 1.

Q. 9. Discuss J.S. Mill’s views on Representative Democracy.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-13, Page No. 134, ‘Representative Government’.

Q. 10. Critically evaluate Karl Marx’s theory of class war.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-15, Page No. 156, ‘Theory of Class War’.



Sample Preview of The Chapter

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WESTERN POLITICAL THOUGHT

Significance of Western Political Thought



INTRODUCTION

Political thought is the general thought comprising of the theories and values of all those persons or a section of the community who think and write on the day to day activities, policies and decision of the state.

Political thought is the best term for encompassing all subject matter within the discipline for two reasons: (i) thought is a general term that can appropriately encompass the entire subject matter, and (ii) the use of political thought for the whole discipline makes political science and political philosophy as specific subcategories.

CHAPTER AT A GLANCE

WHAT IS POLITICAL THOUGHT?

Political philosophy is closely related to political thought. Political thought stands for the area of political philosophy concerned with the study of the ideas and philosophic systems of those thinkers held to be important, on grounds of their interests, influence, relevance, etc. in relation to the development of politics as a practice or a study. An account of the ideas of prominent political thinkers—past and present—about the problems of politics, particularly about the nature and purposes of state and government and the proposed measures for the achievement of those purposes. These ideas are generally presented in a chronological order indicating the historical and geographical setting where in these ideas were born. A comparative and critical

study of these ideas is also included in the study of political thought.

Distinction Between Political Thought, Political Theory and Political Philosophy

Political thought is often taken as an equivalent term to political philosophy, though in fact, it omits the study of philosophic problems in its concentration on thinkers and their ideas, or to political theory, though it has little interest in the development of empirical or analytical theories. Political thought includes the theories through which people attempt to explain each other's political behaviour, the values by which they judge it.

Political theory examines questions of this kind and systematically thinks about the values that inform political life-values such as freedom, equality and justice. It explains the meanings and significance of these and other related concepts. It clarifies the existing definitions of these concepts by focusing on some major political thinkers of the past and present. It also examines the extent to which freedom or equality are actually present in the institutions that we participate in everyday such as schools, shops, buses or trains or government offices. At an advanced level, it looks at whether existing definitions are adequate and how existing institutions (government, bureaucracy) and policy practices must be modified to become more democratic. The objective of political theory is to train citizens to think rationally about political questions and assess correctly the political events of our time. It must be clear that political theory is not a mere branch of political science as this

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would make political theory free from normative aspect. As we know interpretation of intentions and motives of the participants involves normative issues, hence political theory free of normative aspect would not be possible.

Political philosophy is the study of such topics as liberty, justice, property, rights, law, and the enforcement of a legal code by authority: what they are, why (or even if) they are needed, what makes a government legitimate, what rights and freedoms it should protect and why, what form it should take and why, what the law is, and what duties citizens owe to a legitimate government, if any, and when it may be legitimately overthrown—if ever. In a vernacular sense, the term “political philosophy” often refers to a general view, or specific ethic, political belief or attitude, about politics that does not necessarily belong to the technical discipline of philosophy.

Relationship Between Political Thought and Political Science

Political thought is the study of concepts such as liberty, justice, property, rights, law, and the enforcement of a legal code by authority: what they are, why (or even if) they are needed, what makes a government legitimate, what rights and freedoms it should protect and why, what form it should take and why, what the law is, and what duties citizens owe to a legitimate government, if any, and when it may be legitimately overthrown—if ever. In a vernacular sense, the term “political philosophy” often refers to a general view, or specific ethic, political belief or attitude, about politics that does not necessarily belong to the technical discipline of philosophy. Political philosophy can also be understood by analysing it through the perspectives of metaphysics, epistemology and axiology thereby unearthing the ultimate reality side, the knowledge or methodical side and the value aspects of politics. Three central concerns of political philosophy have been the political economy by which property rights are defined and access to capital is regulated, the demands of justice in distribution and punishment, and the rules of truth and evidence that determine judgments in the law.

Political science witnessed a major development when scholars started raising questions whether it was proper to study institutions simply as formal structures. Definition of political science that stops at analysing the ‘Institutions’ and ‘Structures’, the scholars argued do not tell us the entire story. Thus, the ‘process’ of working institutions, rather than their ‘structure: should be the proper focus of analysis.’

Framework of Political Thought

It is generally believed that political thought is the general thought comprising of theories and values of all those persons or a section of the community who think and write on the day-to-day activities, policies and decision of the state, and which has a bearing on our present living. Political thought converges with what is called ethics and moral philosophy, theology, the nature of man as political animal, role of politics in human well being, dignity of political activity. The variety of political thought is an exciting intellectual activity. A study of politics, in this field, assumes a speculative character, because the very word ‘philosophical’ refers to thought about thought; a philosophical analysis is an effort to clearly clarify thought about the nature of the subject and about ends and means of studying it.

While the study of politics is first found in ancient Greece and ancient India, political science is a late arrival in terms of social sciences. However, the discipline has a clear set of antecedents such as moral philosophy, political philosophy, political economy, history, and other fields concerned with normative determinations of what ought to be and with deducing the characteristics and functions of the ideal state. In each historic period and in almost every geographic area, we can find someone studying politics and increasing political understanding.

It is for this reason that thinkers and writers subscribing to the philosophical-ethical approach look like advising the rulers and the members of a political community to pursue certain higher ends.

Thus, great works of Plato, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Green etc. take the study of ‘Politics to a very high level of abstraction and also try to mix up the system of values with certain high norms of an ideal political system. Here normativism dominates and empiricism as contained in certain classics like those of Aristotle, Machiavelli, Bodin, Hobbes, Locke and Montesquieu looks like integrating the study of politics either with Ethics, or with History, or with Psychology, or with Law respectively just in an effort to present the picture of a best-ordered political community’.

WESTERN POLITICAL THOUGHT: NATURE AND CONTENT

The Western political thought, it is very difficult to generalize all the aspects of different thinkers. Western political thought is diverse in nature. The antecedents of Western politics trace their roots back even earlier than Plato and Aristotle, particularly in the works of

Homer, Hesiod, Thucydides, Xenophon, and Euripides. Later, Plato analyzed political systems and abstracted their analysis from more literary-and history-oriented studies and applied an approach we would understand as closer to philosophy. Similarly, Aristotle built upon Plato's analysis to include historical empirical evidence in his analysis.

By keeping the political thought of west at a broader level, of the opinion that the form of government doesn't only depend on a particular theory, there are some more factors which support the government, and the main factor of all is the choice of political system in accordance with the need of prevailing circumstances. Secondly, one thing that we found common in most of the political thoughts is 'education'. Education should not be limited to a particular group, but it should be for all. And in this context it is very necessary to educate the rulers, so that they can be best at their position. Special training programs should be designed for the rulers, and the evaluation (of rulers) process should be clear, and they should be accountable to general public for their deeds.

The meaningfulness of western political thought resides in the endeavour on the part of the political philosophers to characterize political issues and supply solutions, therefore facilitating political thought a precision and a prospect. Sheldon Wolin cites a point, saying "the designation of certain activities and arrangements as political, the characteristic way that we think about them, and the concepts we employ to communicate our observations and reactions....none of these are written in the nature of things but are the legacy accruing from the historical activity of political philosophers." He declares political issues; the power relations between government and subject, the nature of political authority, the problem generated by social conflicts, purposes and objectives of political activity, and the character and utility of political knowledge.

Western political thought is political theory extended over this history. It is the archive of the works of several political philosophers. They maintain to be delighting and educative due to their perpetual topics, valid understanding, subtle style and intense investigation. Sheldon Wolin while analyzing the importance of political thought says: "In teaching about the past theories, the theorist is engaged in the task of political imitation, that is of introducing new generations of the students to the complexities of politics and the efforts of the theorist to confront; its predicaments, of developing the capacity for decriminalizing judgement,

and of cultivating that sense of significance...which is vital to the scientific enquiry...but cannot be furnished by scientific methods, and of exploring the ways in which new theoretical vistas are opened." Dilthey writes: "In studying classics, we construct our life experience with the aid of experiences of the great thinkers. Communication with their experiences our own experience. After all, did not Karl Marx write: only music can awaken the musical sense in man."

Western Political Thought, Political Institutions and Political Procedures

Western political thought from the days of its primary stage dating from Greek methodology has been involved in varied diversities of concerns, and each political thinker has experimented them from their own point of view. Admittedly, the political philosophers have, often, differed on the solutions, but what is crucial is the prevalence of the issues which have seized their determinations. The vital issues connected with politics (i.e. the content of the western political tradition) have been the sources of anxiety of political theorists have endowed the political thought with a dimension but also cohesion of thought experimentations. The meaningfulness of western political thought resides in the endeavour on the part of the political philosophers to characterize political issues and supply solutions, therefore facilitating political thought a precision and a prospect.

Political institutions, however, can be understood only through a consideration of their historical setting, the way in which they developed and the extent to which they have fulfilled the purpose of their existence. Sheldon Wolin cites a point, saying "the designation of certain activities and arrangements as political, the characteristic way that we think about them, and the concepts we employ to communicate our observations and reactions....none of these are written in the nature of things but are the legacy accruing from the historical activity of political philosophers". He declares political issues; the power relations between government and subject, the nature of political authority, the problem generated by social conflicts, purposes and objectives of political activity, and the character and utility of political knowledge.

Greek and Roman philosophers, as well as government styles, clearly had a huge impact on the development of Western political thought. Greek philosophers, such as Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates, were the first to use their opinions on natural rights, and apply them to political thinking. They said that, naturally, all

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humans have the ability to use logic and reason and could use that to form fair, sensible laws. These ideas of natural rights and logical formulation of laws are seen in Western political thought today when laws are carefully written out by citizens and submitted for voting. Athenian and Roman government also contributed a lot to the development of Western political thought. Ideas in Athens such as separation of powers and juries have a great presence in Western political thinking in that they are believed to be some of the best ways to keep power in check, and fairly exercised. Ideas from Roman government have carried over to the modern West as well.

These include a written legal code, and a republican form of government, ideas which are now seen in the Constitution and Senate of the United States. Many ideas and ways of thinking from Greece and Rome have been pillars of Western political thought.

Western Political Thought, Political Idealism and Political Realism

Political realism and idealism as theories of practice and approach in dealing with global states are beginning to drive the justification behind the courses of action that players rely on to develop policy. With momentary abandonment from the political arena, the original philosophy of idealism was developed by the ancient Greek, Plato. It was he who conceptualized that “ideas are the only true reality, the only thing worth knowing.” The literal definition as provided by Merriam-Webster exposes idealism as a theory that reality is formed from that which is perceived. This reality develops itself from the conscious efforts of humanity. As a philosophy, idealism has since gained ground in curriculums that require academic thinking such as education, social sciences, psychology, and international relations. The theory of idealism, as provided by the literal definition, bodes well for continued gains, in some political landscapes, toward a recognizable and legitimate construct to an idealist approach toward policy-making. These landscapes might include requirements for humanitarian assistance or international interventions on issues of grave concern. One such issue would be the recent intervention with Iran and their aggressive pursuit toward a completely operational nuclear capability. In this case, the international community has perceived the reality that an Iranian nuclear player would be potentially destructive to the balance of power throughout the Middle-East. Consequently, as diplomacy fails, international sanctions are being

introduced with the intention of thwarting such Iranian developments.

Political realism, is a view of international politics that stresses its competitive and conflictual side. It is usually contrasted with idealism or liberalism, which tends to emphasize cooperation. Realists consider the principal actors in the international arena to be states, which are concerned with their own security, act in pursuit of their own national interests, and struggle for power. The negative side of the realists’ emphasis on power and self-interest is their skepticism regarding the relevance of ethical norms to relations among states. National politics is the realm of authority and law, whereas international politics, they sometimes claim, is a sphere without justice, characterized by active or potential conflict among states.

Specifically, “realists are often criticized for ignoring domestic politics.” One such example where this may be the case is the United States’ current actions on limiting its nuclear arsenal in conjunction with Russia’s reduction, while ignoring the increased capacities of India and China. “In realist terms, champions of the deal are inflating the value of nuclear weapons at a time when U.S. interests are best served by deflating it. By doing nothing to constrain India’s capacity and will to expand its nuclear arsenal and by hinting that a more robust Indian arsenal can help balance China’s power, the U.S. sends an inflationary signal to the global marketplace.”

In the evolution of both idealism and realism, there exists, respectively, a pendulum swing from idealism to socialism to idealism and realism to capitalism to realism. Contemporary international relations theory has successfully defined the political liberal versus conservative using nothing more than original thoughts as presented by the ancient Greeks. We are able to trace the political development of idealism and realism from Europe into the colonial United States where it became a “recurrent, contrapuntal theme of statesmen and politicians, commentators and theorists.” The will always be differences that exist between idealists and realist and the silent war on semantics and approaches to foreign policy will continue to wage on. However, there exists a necessity for a balance of power to exist between these two paradigms and one cannot do without the other. A justified approach to utopian type policy making would be an examination of issues from both the realist and idealist perspective.