

Introduction to Political Theory
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Lecture – 01
Introduction

Hello and welcome friends. I welcome you all to this course on Introduction to Political Theory. Today, we are going to discuss the general outline of introduction theory, its methods and approaches, and what are the key features of political theory. We will have one more lecture on the introduction to political theory. It is a part of the introduction to the course. Here, we are going to focus more about the ideology and theory, the debate between the two and then, we will conclude the next lecture.

Today in this lecture, we will discuss a general outline of political theory, its method, approaches, key features and why do we need political theory. We will discuss about these in this lecture. Now, as you know political theory is a discipline immersed in a context, when there was a demand or a requirement to not just explain, or describe what is happening but also, to move away from more philosophical or normative concerns.

In political theory, we will come to this point throughout this course, when we will discuss many concepts, ideas, terms which are essentially, contested. That means, there are many interpretations of such terms and concepts. So, when we will discuss those terms and concepts, we will come again to this question of normative versus descriptive distinction in political theory. One of the approaches in political theory is not just to explain, but also, to provide the possible answer to some of the contemporary challenges and predicaments of social and political life. So, in the realm of normative, philosophical concerns on the one hand, but also, in the real political problem or challenges on the other.

In that sense, the understanding of political theory is very essential and it develops to understand or explain the social reality, and to provide tools to collectively, think or arrive at a solution which would be a way forward from conflicting relationship or conflicting relation in the realm of politics.

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Political Theory: An Introduction

- Political theory as a discipline is an endeavor to theorize, critique and also provide solutions to the normative, practical challenges/predicaments and organization of the political action in the past and also in the present that we inhabit.
- It is intimately connected with the matters related to political. In terms of traditions, methods and approaches it varies but its major concerns are nature of state and politics in any society, questions of freedom, equality and justice, democracy, secularism and religious way of life, rights, obligation, and public good.
- It is interdisciplinary in nature and there is no one dominant or exclusive method of analysis in political theory. It is both a normative and explanatory in nature. Political theorists, although accused of normative thinking with little or no relevance in the practical lives of the individuals and society, do engage with the practical challenges and provide tools and resources for not only explaining the various predicaments and challenges of social and political life but also for forming better judgements about the same.

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Let's start with the introduction of it. Political theory as a discipline is an endeavor to theorize, critique and also, to provide solutions to the normative, practical challenges predicaments and organization of political action in the past and present that we inhabit.

So, the task of political theory as a discipline is to theorize. That means, to make sense of, to explain, to interpret the social events or the social and political issues or challenges and not just to provide the theory of it. But also, it enables us to critique some of the social status or status quo and it provides alternatives which should be more just, desirable so that we make our life more human. Besides, theorizing the social, political event, the task of political theory is also, to provide critique.

For example, we can think of Marxism or Feminism as a critique to the existing status quo in the society or polity, to make it more egalitarian, inclusive and just. Thus, the theory provide not just a kind of theorization, interpretation or explanation, but also, a critique to the social, political status quo and the alternative for a better future, an egalitarian and a just society. So, the inner or inherent tension in political theory is the normative concern on the one hand, and the practical challenges and predicaments on the other.

Thus, in any society, whether it is in the past or future, the political theorist tries to provide a kind of theory or explanation, or critique to the normative as well as to the political challenges that is normative would be like what ought to do? What should be

done? And, what ought to be done? And, the practical real concern is about what is the challenge? What is the actual reality?

Political theorists tend to travel in both these practical concerns on the one hand and the normative, moral, political judgments on the other. It tries to provide the better solution for such normative, practical challenges and predicaments. Now, political theory is also intimately, connected with the matters related to the political. That is, the political in political theory deals with the matter that is related to political. And, political in itself is very challenging, complex and multi-layered phenomena. It transcends the limits of time and space. So, it cannot be just, when we talk about political. We cannot reduce the political merely, to the state or to its institutions, administration or constitution.

The sphere of politics transcend different space and time, and we are all in a way shaped by the political development or political challenges, or political discourses, that is happening all around us. Whether we like it or not, political is something, which we are all engaged consciously, or unconsciously. We all participate in it. There is no way, we can remain indifferent to the issue of the political. So, in the words of one of the greatest political theorists, Aristotle, that man is *zoon politikan* (Refer Time: 07:54). That means, man is by nature a political animal. Thus, the question of the political and the matters related to the political is something, which theory deals with.

We have to make a distinction between theory and thought, and theory and philosophy. All these disciplines like political theory, political thought, and political philosophy deals with political or with politics, but their approaches, engagement with the political is different. Here, the political theory tries to as I was saying in the beginning, not just help us in explaining or interpreting the political event, or theorizing any event or any reality, but also, it provides the critique and possible alternatives to make the world more just, egalitarian and so on and so forth.

I will come to this question of political again, when we will discuss political theory and political ideology as well as in the later part of this lecture. But here, we need to understand the expansion or the vastness of this term, and also, the complexities that is involved herewith. It cut across both the private life of the individual and citizen and the public life of the nation and the state, and in both the realms, especially, when we take the example of feminism, we understand the family too as the realm of politics.

Patriarchy, gender etc. How it is consolidated in the realm of family, in the society and also reflected in the state and so on.

Thus, the political in that sense, cut across the boundary of private and public, national and international, state and institutions on the one hand, and society, culture etc. on the other. Political theory as a discipline deals with the issue of politics and that is why, political theory is a multiple, multi-layered engagement with the issue of politics and it is very difficult and challenging to reduce it to any one set of core ideas or beliefs or approaches and methods in political theory that we will discuss.

However, in terms of traditions, methods and approaches it varies. As I was saying, that the subject of study in political theory is matters, that is, related to politics which is itself a very dynamic, complex and multi-layered phenomenon which cut across different spheres of our individual and collective existence. Now, when political theory engaged with this vast sphere of individual and collective life, it necessarily, requires and it is the characteristic of political theory, that in terms of its tradition, method and approaches, it varies. But its major concerns are some of the followings like the nature of state and politics in any society.

So, it deals with the question of state, its nature, secular state or a theocratic state, moral state. What are its features? That is a democratic state and so on and so forth. The question of freedom, equality and justice are some of the terms, we are going to discuss in this course and we will come to it in the next lecture. I will give you the brief outline of this course as well after discussing the relationship between theory and ideology. Some of the major concerns, despite of its varieties of approaches, concerns and methods, traditions and political theories are nature of a state, and politics in any society in the sense of freedom, equality and justice, the idea of democracy, secularism and religious way of life, rights, obligation, and public good etc.

There can be as many subjects, as it is related or those subjects are related to the question of or phenomenon or political. And a political is a bit complex, in-determinant or dynamic phenomenon. And, as I was explaining that it cut across various disciplines or various boundaries. Therefore, political theory deals with all those subjects, that is, related to or connected to this phenomenon called the political. It is interdisciplinary in nature and there is no one dominant or exclusive method of analysis in political theory.

There is no one singular, dominant and exclusive method, and approaches in political theory. So, you have a kind of inter-disciplinarity in the very nature of political theory. It is both normative and explanatory in nature, as I was saying, that it deals with the normative question of ought to and what we should be doing, how we are ought to behave in our interpersonal relationships and also, in our relationship with the state and its institutions. So, it deals with the normative concerns and normative questions, and that is not exactly about how we are actually governing or behaving in our interpersonal relationships, or in our relationship with the state. But, how we are ought to behave in our interpersonal relationships or in our relationship with the state or society, or community. It is both normative and explanatory in nature. Political theory, although, accused of normative thinking with little or no relevance to the practical lives of the individual and society, it does engage with the practical challenges and provide tools, resources for not only explaining the various predicaments and challenges of social and political life, but also, for forming better judgments about the same.

Now, let me explain this point, that is, there is a criticism leveled against the political theorists or those who are engaged with political theory. The criticism is that they are excessively, obsessed with the normative concern which has very little or no relevance in the practical life of individuals and society. So, why should we bother about what ought to be done and what we should do. We are bothered about the practical problems. Here, we also need to recall, political science is about the art of possible and it is a pragmatic science where we deal with the achievable that is pragmatically, possible.

Whereas in philosophy or in political theory, especially, in its normative obsession, there was an era and a charge was leveled against the political theorists, that they were excessively, obsessed with the normative concerns and questions which had very little or no relevance in the actual, pragmatic, practical life of individuals and society. So, why we should study political theory? But contrary to that I will argue on it, as we proceed in this course. We will come to know that political theory is not just about normative concern or a normative question.

But, it also, deals with the pragmatic questions, issues and it provides not just solutions to those pragmatic issues or pragmatic concerns, but also, it enable us to develop sound judgment about some of the major contentious issues in the politics and society.

For example, whether there should be ban on burkha or whether some temples should be open for the women. How can we make this society more just? Should we justify, affirmative action or reservation to make the society more egalitarian?

These are some of the contentious issues before any society or a polity. Now, as an individual to develop our own judgements on these issues, we not just require the contemporary, opinionated kind of understanding of these issues, but to understand the larger and deeper, inherent, and normative concerns associated with these issues. For example, whether the temple should be open for the women or not cannot be explained, through the perspective given by ritualistic or any kind of traditionalist argument, where they believe, it is the practice that women should not enter the temple.

But, if we believe that there should be gender justice or women's equality and empowerment, and women do have the right to and not just a kind of charity, or we enabling or empowering them, but as an individual in a secular state that recognizes individuals with certain fundamental rights, then women do have the right to enter into the temple. So, through this example, I am trying to make it clear that political theory enables us to not just make sense of the political challenges and the political predicaments, but also, it develops a more sound judgement about the contentious issues.

Most of the issues related to political are always by nature contentious. And, they are to avoid normative concerns and normative issues. They are simply not a desirable way to make society more egalitarian, equal, just, and accommodative, and prosperous. One of the central issue in political theory is to govern the collective life or public life or the common life of a community in a given territory.

Now, in political theory, there is a shift from a kind of territorially, traditionally or culturally defined notion of political theories, say, western political theory, or Indian political theory to a kind of global discipline of political theory. So, political theory in a way help in the reassertion of the validity of normative concerns, normative questions in the contentious relationships or discourses about the matters which are related to the political. Therefore, our understanding or engagement with political theory will help us to solve these problems amicably, through debates and discussions, but also, it enable us to have better judgements about some of these issues.

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- Broadly speaking political theory can be understood in its relation to – academic disciplines like political science, history of political thought, and philosophy; real, practical world; and finally between the 'canonical' political theory and contemporary developments in the subject such as feminism, critical theory, cultural studies, media studies, environmental studies and so on. So its icons are from Plato, Aristotle, to Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau to contemporary theorists like Hannah Arendt, John Rawls, Michel Foucault, Jurgen Habermas and so on.
- It is challenging to identify the core or fundamentals of political theory. It has come a long way from its excessive obsession with the normative questions to engage with empirical questions and predicaments. Liberal, critical, and post-structuralist theorists have all responded to the new challenges and developments in the social and political landscape and there is a move beyond the singularity and unitary to more pluralistic, diverse and agonistic conceptions of state and politics.

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Broadly speaking, political theory can be understood in relation to at least three things. One is the academic discipline like political science, history, political thought, or philosophy on the one hand. So, we have a kind of academic discipline like political science, history, or political thought, and philosophy. Political theorists intimately, connects with these disciplines and derive a number of terminologies, concepts, ideas, methods and approaches from these disciplines. The second is the real, practical world. And all the political theorists have to engage with the real and the practical world too.

They cannot engage with the issues related to political by merely, contemplating or speculating about it. They need to engage with the real, practical world that surround them and makes the theory more relevant. So, the other relation of political theory besides, academic discipline of political science and history of political thought and philosophy is to connect with the real, practical world. And finally, the most recent and contemporary development in political theory is to make a connection between the canonical, political theories on the one hand. The term canonical political theory, I will explain in a moment. On the other hand, the contemporary developments in the subject are feminism, critical theory, cultural studies, media studies, and environmental studies, etc.

In political theory, as I was explaining that the political is by nature a dynamic phenomenon or it is a multi-layered, complex phenomenon. And it needs to be

understood that there will be varieties of methods and approaches. There cannot be one singular, dominant, or hegemonic and universally, accepted method or approach in political theory. So, within political theory, we have different traditions and these traditions are also, guided by ideology. There is a kind of connection with theory to ideology which we will discuss in the next lecture.

Relatively, political theory as a discipline, also, has some kind of established canonical texts or theories and also, then it is the new development. Now, the task of political theory in the contemporary time is to make a connection or a relationship between the canonical political theory which starts from Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau on the one hand, along with the newer developments, that is happening in the political theory, such as feminism, critical theory, cultural studies, media studies, and environmental studies. Now, that gives us a sense of its major icons. From Plato and Aristotle in the classical period to Machiavelli, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and to more contemporary theorists like Hannah Arendt, John Rawls, Michel Foucault and Habermas etc.

Thus, political theory is in that sense, an evolutionary discipline and it has its own dynamics as it study a phenomenon which is equally dynamic and ever changing. Now to make sense of or to theorize that ever changing phenomenon, political theory also, evolves and acquires new tools and approaches to interpret, critique, and provide alternatives to some of the practical, political challenges. It becomes very challenging to identify the core or fundamentals of political theory.

So what is the basic or core political theory? What is the essential or political theory's most challenging task? It has come a long way from its excessive obsession with the normative questions to engage with empirical questions and predicaments, as I was explaining before. No longer, political theory, as we see in philosophy to a great extent deals with it. Also, there is a new development in it but political theory, no longer engages only with the normative concern, approach of a contemplative or a speculative thinker or a theorist.

It has come a long way from that kind of obsession to make it a more pragmatic, practical discipline, by engaging with the empirical questions and predicaments a society or a community is facing and the theorizing it. However, there is no complete disowning

of the normative concerns of political theory, too. It is the very basis of any kind of possible interpretation. So, we cannot simply do away with the normative issues or concerns, while explaining or critiquing existing social, political status quo.

Now, that gives us a sense of the relevance of normative concerns or questions. At the same time, it is the responsibility of the theorists to engage with the real, practical predicaments. And, there is that shift in the political theory, as I was saying from its canonical existence to more contemporary approaches in political theory like new studies as I was explaining about critical theory, feminism, cultural studies, environmental studies and so on. Thus, liberal, critical, and post-structuralist theorists have all responded to the new challenges and developments in social and political landscape. There is a move beyond the singularity and unitary, that is, we are all understood as individual carrying certain rights within a singular, defined national territory and to a more pluralistic, diverse and agnostic conception of state and politics.

This is something, which political theories and political theorists tries to engage with, that is from a more singularity or a unitary kind of approach, to recognizing and accepting a more pluralistic, diverse, and agnostic conception of state and politics in any society. Both the liberal, critical and also, the post-structuralist theorists are responding to some of these new challenges and developments in the political arena. So, this move is from a singular, unitary approach to a more pluralistic or an agnostic conception of a state and politics.

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- This, many may see as a failure and want to revisit the timeless classics or to reassert the value of philosophy; whereas many see it as desirable and necessary development. It reflects the dynamic and ever-changing nature of the political. However, the major challenge before contemporary political theorist is to move beyond the normative and help explain the realities in a particular context but it must also transcend that context and maintain a degree of generality.

Three Kinds of Political Theory

Explanatory

- Political theory is explanatory in nature. It emphasis on how there can be different explanations of a particular reality. For example, Marxism says that a particular kind of social relations of production leads to development of productive forces. It explains the rise of capitalism in relation to capital and labour force in a free market economy. However, this rise of capitalism is explained differently by Weber who believed that capitalism emerged because of the changes in the cultural domain which was the result of transformations in the religion of some societies. For example, for Weber, the protestant ethic emphasized on worldly asceticism and disciplined work which was necessary for the accumulation of capital and efficient labour force that was conducive for rise to capitalism.

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Many may see this as a kind of failure of political theory. They did not want to revisit the timeless classics, such as Plato or Aristotle, or Hobbes and Locke to reassert the value of philosophy, whereas, many see it as a desirable and necessary development. There is also this debate that political theory failed to properly or adequately, explain the real, contentious social and political life. And, the reason for that is, we are fragmented in many case studies or contextual studies. It is hard to generalize for a large society or statement which will enable us to explain other society.

Thus, one of the defining features of political theory, if we make a distinction between Indian politics and political theory, or American politics or British politics, the task of political theory is to give us concepts and tools through which we can explain not just a particular society like Indian or British, but also, it is equally applicable in explaining or interpreting politics in other societies. The concepts of democracy, secularism, freedom, equality and justice are something, which we can use to explain the politics in many societies and across the societies as well.

Thus, it transcends the limits of the context and territory in search of that kind of generalized, comprehensive statement and theory. Many scholars have argued that we need to revisit and reassert the value of philosophy or history of political thought to make the political theory a grand, global subject or a discipline. However, many others see these developments from singularity or unitary to a more plural, agnostic conception of a

state and politics is not just desirable, but also, a necessary development to make sense of the real, practical world.

This shift or evolution, or move from a singular, unitary to a more plural and diverse approach to politics and society, reflects the dynamic and ever changing nature of the political. Political is not something, rigid or aesthetic, it keeps changing the landscape. And therefore, the political theorists should approach new methods, new approaches to interpret such changes or dynamism. However, there is also, contentious interpretation of the role of political theory and its approaches as seen in contemporary times.

However, besides, the major challenge before the contemporary political theorist is to move beyond the normative and help to explain the realities in a particular context. But it must also transcend that context and maintain a degree of generality that defines the theory from same thought or Indian politics, or politics in any other society. The challenge for any contemporary political theorist is thus, to move away from the normative concern to a discipline, which helps explain the context, and also, it must transcend that context and maintain a degree of generality, which can be used to explain other societies and politics in other communities or state, or society.

Broadly speaking, if we look at the kinds of theory, we can figure out three kinds of political theory. One is explanatory. So, political theory is explanatory in nature, it emphasizes on how there can be different explanations of a particular reality, or particular event, or particular phenomenon, or a social and political issue. Here, we can take the example of the rise of capitalism and its explanation from different theorists within the discipline of political theory.

Like Marxism on the one hand, says that the particular kind of social relations of production leads to development of productive forces. And, it explains the rise of capitalism in relation to capital and labour forces in a free market economy. So, that is one kind of explanation to the rise and growth of capitalism in modern world. However, this same phenomenon, the rise of capitalism is explained differently by Max Weber who believed that capitalism emerged because of the changes in the cultural domain, which was the result of transformations in the religion of some societies, especially, the Christian society.

For Weber, the protestant ethics within Christianity emphasized on the worldly criticism and disciplined work, necessary for the accumulation of capital and efficient labour force that was conducive for the rise of capitalism. So, political theory is a discipline which is explanatory in nature. It explains the social and political phenomenon. And, that explanation can be different as we have seen through the examples of Marxism and Max Weberian explanation of the rise of capitalism in the modern world.

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Normative

- Political theory is broadly normative in nature. It deals with the questions which is normative in nature. For example: how a society and politics ought to be rather than how a society and politics actually is. Although, it does not disregard the importance of emotions, rhetoric, and use of power in decision making processes, yet it emphasizes on the logical as well as normative arguments to arrive at a good solutions to the problems of political organizations and practices.

Contemplative

- Political theory is contemplative in nature. It is an intensely contemplative enquiry into the common or general conditions of human-beings over a period of time and political theorists make such enquiries at different and specific stages of human lives to understand their various issues and problems. This was particularly, the stand of ancient political thinkers who wanted to know about the prevalent conditions of human lives in ancient times. Hanna Arendt, too, believed that political theory cannot be concentrated or reduced only to the explanatory and normative understandings of it, but also, political theory, needs to have a contemplative aspect or an contemplative understanding as well to know the world in which we human beings live in and to know the conditions and overall directions of human lives much better.

The second kind of theory is or can be understood as a normative political theory which deals with the normative questions or normative concerns, as we have been discussing. It engages with the questions like how a society and politics ought to be governed, or ought to be ruled, what ought to be the rule on which a society can be governed. So, largely, it deals with the questions, which is normative in nature rather than something, which is actual or real. For example, it deals with the question of how a society ought to be and not how a society or politics is actually, governed or really governed in any given point of time.

Although, it does not disregard the importance of emotions, rhetoric and use of power in decision-making processes, yet it emphasizes on the logical as well as the normative arguments to arrive at a good solution to the problem of political organization and practices. Thus, the political organizations and the practices in any society lead to some kind of tensions, conflicts, contestations among different groups. In that kind of

conflicts, tensions and contestations, how we should resolve those? That we can do by participating in the political process, political organizations and political parties. Some of these parties represent certain ideologies and we should take our position on that.

In this process and political organizations, there is the role of emotions, rhetoric and also the power. But political theory also, emphasize on the logical as well as the normative arguments, to provide solutions to some of these conflicts and tensions in any society. So, the normative and the logical part of political theory enable us to make a society better than it is to achieve the possible. And not just then merely, interpret or explain the society and its polity, but also, help in its transformation, to make it more just, inclusive, and egalitarian. And some of the political developments, if we see, for example the Ambedkarites movement, or feminist movement, or environmental movement, or groups and associations fighting for environmental justice and so on. They are not just trying to explain the actual functioning of the polity in our society, but also, they help us to transform the current state of our existence and our society.

It is both explanatory and transformative in nature because of its normative and logical basis. Now, the third kind of political theory can be understood as a kind of contemplative exercise, where it is contemplative in the sense of reflective and speculative in the nature. And, that contemplation and reflection gives us deeper meaning to any social reality, which is not naturally, available to a participant or even to the observer of politics.

It is an expertise of the theorist or political students engaged in the discipline of political theory to go beyond the happenings to decipher, reflect on the deeper underlying structures that governs the politics or political processes in any society. And, that requires a degree of reflection and contemplation as well.

Therefore, political theory has a nature, an element of contemplation and speculation. So, political theory is contemplative in nature. It is an intensely, contemplative exercise into the common or general conditions of human-beings over a period of time and political theorists make such inquiries at different and specific stages of human lives to understand their various issues and problems. This was particularly, the stand of ancient political thinkers who wanted to know about the prevalent conditions of human lives in their times. Hannah Arendt in contemporary times, also, believed that political theory

cannot be concentrated or reduced only to explanatory or normative understanding of it. But also, it needs to have a contemplative aspect or contemplative understanding to know the world in which we human beings live in and to know the conditions and overall direction of human lives much better.

Thus, to understand the underlying structures that govern the political processes, political developments, political organizations in a society or polity, we need to include the contemplative or the speculative aspects of political theory as well beyond the normative and explanatory nature of it.

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History of Political Theory

- In order to understand the emergence and development of political theory we need to revisit the debates between logical positivism and philosophy. Logical positivism believed in empirical science and undervalued the focus on metaphysical contemplative thinking. It influenced political science to do away with traditional questions of political philosophy and make efforts to establish rather a science of politics and to make enquiries that provide truths about the real world in a scientific and empirical manner.
- Political theory is an enterprise in that direction. It is also intimately connected with the history of political thought and thinking. And in that way, the thinkers, texts, and terms or concepts that we often discuss in the political theory are by and large derived from the relatively well established traditions of political thought and philosophy. According to John Dunn, in order to understand the history of political theory we need to understand the following questions: What are the subject matters of the history of political theory? What are the methods of analysis or approaches to study that period of history? How can one understand the significance of that history intellectually?

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If you look at now, the history of political theory, in order to understand the emergence and development of political theory, we need to revisit this debate in early decades of twentieth century between the logical positivism and philosophy. Philosophy is a kind of discipline which deals with the question of how to lead a good life and political scientist will tell you to create a good polity. So, good life is possible only in a good polity and how to create a good polity, maintains a good polity is a collective exercise. And how to do that deals with the question of state and citizens participation in the politics.

So, those are some of the questions and concerns for the political philosophers. Now, logical positivism challenged or criticized such kind of engagement with the question that is related to what ought to be, rather than what actually is? Logical positivism believed in the empirical science and undervalued the focus on the metaphysical

contemplative thinking as it was being exercised among the political philosophers or the thinkers and theorists as well.

Logical positivism influenced political science to do away with the traditional questions of political philosophy and made efforts to establish rather a 'science' of politics. It inquires to provide truths about the real world, as it exists in a scientific and empirical manner. So, the origin of political theorists can also be traced in this logical positivism and philosophy debate in early decades of 20th century, which influenced greatly the political scientists and the behaviorisms, post-behaviorism, structuralism, and post-structuralism, throughout the 20th century. It was the outcome of such debates to make the political inquiry more scientific, objective, value free or non free.

So, a political theory is a discipline different from political philosophy or political thought which makes use of some concepts and terms to explain the political functioning, the political process and organizations in society in a more empirical, objective and scientific manner away from the metaphysical, contemplative exercise of the previous times. Political theory is an exercise or enterprise in that direction. It is also intimately, connected with the history of political thought and thinking. And, there was a kind of overlap or borrowing from the traditions of political philosophy and political thought, when this discipline of political theory was evolving.

In that sense, it is very intimately connected with the discipline of political thought and thinking. In that way, the thinkers, texts, terms or concepts that we often discuss in political theory and we will see this, when we will move on to discuss different concepts, deal with many thinkers, texts and these texts and thinkers are part of the larger history of political thought and political thinking. A number of texts and terms or concepts that we often discuss in political theory are by and large, derived from the relatively, well established traditions of political thought and philosophy.

According to John Dunn, in order to understand the history of political theory, we need to understand the three following questions. One, what is the subject matter of the history of political theory? What are the methods of analysis or approaches to study that period of history? And, how can one understand the significance of the history intellectually? Now, these three questions, we will discuss, one by one is about the subject matter,

second is about the method and approaches and third is about the intellectual significance of the history of political thought.

John Dunn is someone who believed in the role of history of political thought and doing political theory by engaging with the political thinkers of the past, to make sense of or better explain and provide alternative to some of the contemporary challenges and predicaments.

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Subject-matter

- The core subject-matters of political theory are relatively established canon of works known as the classical texts written by political thinkers and philosophers like Plato and Aristotle in the 5th & 4th century BC, Cicero in the 1st century BC, Augustine and Aquinas in the middle ages, Machiavelli of Italian city republics, Bodin, Grotius, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Montesquieu, Hume, Adam Smith, Bentham, John Stuart Mill, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Lenin and so on. These canon of works emphasized on the period of history and its significance and not on the causal explanations through which that particular history has come into existence.

Methods of analysis

- There are numerous methods and approaches to the study the history of political theory. Quentin Skinner draws attention to the validity of the historical character of the texts. He focused on the purpose of the author behind writing any text. The texts are the intellectual products of the authors. Skinner emphasized that historical character, author's intention, and context of texts are fundamental in the understanding of any text. C. B Macpherson give less importance to the historical character of the text and instead he focused on the historical context in which a text is written. This context, according to him, inspires the authors to think and write the text in a way that s/he does. In other words he give more attention to social-political-economic contexts of the author. In contrast, the third approach focus on historical characters of the texts with massive indifference and they want to read and interpret the text in the light of contemporary developments and requirements. Still other is the growth of conceptual/intellectual history and move beyond the West to make it truly a global discipline.

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So, if we discuss, the subject matter that we find, the core subject matters of political theory are relatively, well established canon of works. These relatively, well established canons of works are some of the terms, concepts, and some thinkers which we will discuss.

We vary, we may differ with their interpretations or there are varieties of interpretations on the meaning or the interpretations of these texts. However, there is a kind of consensus, relatively, common acceptance of some texts as starting from Plato to John Rawls. The most recent example in 20th century is Michel Foucault or Hannah Arendt. There is a kind of well-established tradition of works or thinkers that we will deal with, when we will discuss political theory. So, from Plato and Aristotle in the 5th and 4th century BC, to Cicero in the 1st century BC Rome, to Augustine and Aquinas in the middle ages, to Machiavelli of Italian city republics, to Bodin, Grotius, Hobbes, Locke

Rousseau, Montesquieu, Hume, Adam Smith, Bentham, John Stuart Mill, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Lenin.

These are some of the well-established canonical works in political theory. And, they do not share many of their assumptions or approaches to politics, or the solution or alternative that they provide. But, in their discussion in the discipline of political theory, these are works or thinkers which we will come to discuss again and again, as we will discuss some of the themes. We will discuss these in this course as relatively, well established canonical works in the discipline of political theory. And, these canonical works emphasized on the period of history and its significance, and not on the causal explanation through which the particular history came into existence.

Thus, the history is very significant in terms of understanding the political theory and its role in explaining, interpreting or providing alternatives to the contemporary challenges. Now, if you look at the methods of analysis in political theory, there are numerous methods, and approaches to the study of history of political theory. We can discuss some of them like Quentin Skinner who drew attention to the validity of historical character of the text. He focused on the purpose of author and his intentions behind writing any text. So, the text, in Skinner's kind of engagement with the history of political theory is the intellectual product of the author. However, he emphasized that the historical character, author's intention, and the context of the texts were fundamental in understanding any text.

Thus, the historical context, characters and the author's intentions are valuable sources to understand the text or any historical classical text. Contrary to this approach to the history of political theory, we have thinkers like C.B Macpherson, who gave less importance to the historical character of the text and instead, he focused more on the historical context in which a text was written. That means, according to thinkers like C.B Macpherson, the context played a greater role in determining the intention, the approaches, the articulation of the author. So, more than the historical character and author's intentions, they focused more on the historical contexts in which that text was written.

In other words, he gave more attention to the social, political, and economic contexts of the author. For example, Hobbes, when he was writing the Leviathan, more than the text

and his intentions, the prevailing situation of England of that time was the better guide to understand that text and to understand the individualism that Hobbes was talking about which Macpherson defined as possessive individualism. In contrast to these two approaches to the history of political theory, we have a third approach which focuses on the historical characters of the text with massive indifference, that means, they gave very less value to the historical characters or the contexts of these texts. And, they are more open, flexible and accommodative to interpret these texts in the light of contemporary requirements or challenges.

So, other than these three approaches, the increasing growth of conceptual or intellectual historians uses certain terms or ideas to understand, examine, and explore the historical political process in any society, in a particular temporality. So, that is the major development in contemporary political theory, and also, a move beyond the excessive reliance on the western thinkers, to include Indian, Chinese, African, or Arab thinkers in order to make this discipline or political theory a global discipline.

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Significance

- The significance of this history is that not only it helps us understand these thinkers and their influence in the past but also how it could be relevant for making sense of and interpreting our present.

Key Features of Political Theory

- The political theory is in a sense combination of philosophical analysis of principles and empirical understanding of political processes and Structures. It is both normative as well as descriptive.
- It is also intrinsically hermeneutic and critical enterprise.
- It emphasis is on a rational argument. That means the conclusion of any argument is based on reasons. However, this is not to say that philosophers completely ignore emotions, instincts etc in their theoretical enquiries. It aspires to find the truth and objectivity through the use of reason. It focuses on the assumptions and presuppositions of our beliefs, actions and practices before arriving at any reasonable or rational argument.
- It cannot be merely speculative and it must also transcend empirical world. The lived experiences of people studied by social scientists should be considered and not to be ignored.

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Now, if we come to the third question to understand the history of political theory, it refers to understand the significance of history. The significance of history is not only to help us understand these thinkers and their influences in the past, but also, how it could be relevant for making sense of interpreting them in our present. These thinkers

especially, according to John Dunn are relevant in explaining our modern contemporary challenges and predicaments, perhaps when they were writing.

Thus, these canonical texts or thinkers are perhaps a better guide to make sense of our contemporary challenges and predicaments. And their lies the significance of reading Plato after they have written 2000 years or someone who wrote in medieval times are still relevant like Machiavelli, Aquinas etc. Their significance lies in the fact that they are relevant in explaining our contemporary times as well.

If we look at the key features of political theory, we find that the political theory is a combination of philosophical analysis of principles and empirical understandings of political processes and structures. On the one hand, it deals with the normative questions and concerns, but also, it engages with the empirical understanding of political processes and structures in any society. So, no longer, political theory is merely, a contemplative exercise. It deals with the actual, real problem in any society. But while doing so, it uses the normative philosophical framework to engage with them. In that sense, it is both a normative and a descriptive one.

It is also intrinsically, a hermeneutic and critical enterprise. Political theory is a hermeneutic exercise. Hermeneutics is a science of interpretation. And political theory constantly, tries to interpret or explain the social and political phenomenon, the challenges, contentious issues of our politics and society. It does so continuously, without reflecting and interpreting them. One cannot arrive at any theory or any judgment. Thus, the hermeneutic part of political theory is very intensive and it is the very basis.

It is thus, intrinsically, connected to the hermetic exercise on the one hand, and the critical enterprise on the other hand. The critical enterprise comes from its ability to not just understand and make sense of the present or the contemporary, or the real or the actual, but also, it provide alternatives or challenges to some of the oppressive processes or practices in our contemporary times. And, that is how, society moves from one stage to the next, from a more oppressive society, to a more open or free and a prosperous just society.

Political theorists plays a very crucial role in making any society from being an authoritarian, absolutist monarchy, to a modern, free, open, democratic societies that we

live in. That does not mean we are not facing many challenges, but these challenges and to make sense of those challenges and provide alternatives to those challenges requires a kind of critical engagement with some of these political theorists. We will come to discuss it, when we will discuss (Refer Time: 55:59) many other critical theorists on some of the questions like public sphere, civil society, etc.

Political theory, emphasized on a rational argument, that means, the conclusion of any argument is based on reason. However, this is not to say that philosophers completely ignore emotions, instincts, and rhetoric in their theoretical inquiries. As, I have already discussed, that they do take into account these emotions, rhetoric, and intuitions, but they also move beyond the assumptions based on them in order to understand any event or phenomenon logically, in a rational manner.

Thus, it is prior to find the truth objectively through the use of reason or logic, and it then focuses on assumptions and presumptions of our beliefs, actions and practices before arriving at any reasonable or rational argument. So, the argumentation of political theory is developed by also, taking into account the beliefs, practices or actions of any individual or collective subjects, but it at the same time, examines the assumptions and pre-assumptions of such practices and actions to develop an argument which can help us to understand not just the society in which a political theorist is engaged with, but also, to explain other societies. That gives a degree of generality to political theory.

Finally, it cannot be merely, speculative. It must not transcend the empirical world. The lived experience of people as studied by social scientists should be considered and not to be ignored. So, they are also, part of the society and his surrounding does influence their engagement, reflection, argumentations and so on. Political theorists cannot isolate or keep himself or herself aloof from his/her society and other societies to develop any theory.

Thus, they need to take into account the social, political realities and these social, political reality keeps on changing. And therefore, the discipline of political theory keeps on changing and as I was saying, the contemporary challenge is to reconcile between the canonical established traditions of political theory on the one hand, and the newer developments in the discipline of political theory in terms of media studies, critical

studies, feminism or environmental studies on the other. It is the result of this continuous engagement with the newer or ever changing reality in social and political life.

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Why do we need political theory?

- The world of political is indeterminate, complex and layered. It is partly cooperative, and partly conflictual. Political theory help us understand and explain it.
- Concepts and terms in political theory are essentially contested. Political theory explains us how a concept is related to and different from other concepts.
- Political theory is necessary to understand and analyze various national, global issues and events.
- It makes efficient use of case studies and examples to explain the political realities of past and contemporary times.
- It prioritizes reason which develops human mind and it encourages us to think and make rational arguments.
- It help us understand not only the complexities of the politics but also provide the resource for making a sound judgement on any contentious social and political issue.

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Finally, this point, I will again discuss it in our next lecture. That is about why do we need a political theory? First, the world of political is indeterminate, complex and layered. So, there are multiple layers in the political world, political structures and the processes. It is partly cooperative too. So, in the political world, we cooperate to maintain some order, harmony, and peace to bring about prosperity. But this structure and processes is also, partly conflictual in nature. Political theory, help us understand and explain the partly cooperative, partially conflictual nature of political arena which is indeterminate, ever changing, complex and multi-layered. And therefore, to understand or interpret it, we need political theory.

Second, concepts and terms in political theory are essentially contested concepts. So, as we will discuss in this course, some of the theories like democracy, freedom, equality, justice, there are multiple interpretations and often contradictory interpretations of these terms. Now, how to make sense of these terms which is essentially contested. So, in the name of national security, freedom, nationalism, we will see two parties and sets of actors often coming to a very different and altogether opposite interpretations of the political events or political participation.

Thus, political theory, explain us how a concept is related to the different, and also how it is different from other concepts. Like when we discuss, concepts like freedom, equality and justice, how these concepts are interconnected, and also different from each other. Similarly, how each of these concepts are also, essentially contested in a sense of their multiple theorizations or interpretations, which we will discuss. Political theory enables us to understand these multiple interpretations or essentially contested nature of these concepts that help us also to understand the partly cooperative or conflictual arena of the political.

Political theory is necessary, to understand and analyze various national, global issues and events, it makes efficient use of case studies and examples to explain the political realities of past and contemporary times. So, through case study, to contextual studies, to historicizing one's enquiry, it tries to explain or interpret the social and political events in the past or in the present in any given society. Finally, it prioritized the reason which develops human mind and it encourages us to think and make rational arguments. It also, helps us understand not only the complexities of the politics, but also, provide the resources for making a sound judgment on any contentious, social and political issue.

So, the major contribution of political theory is to provide us the tool to not just provide a critique to the status quo, but also, it enable us to have a better or sound judgment on any matter, that is related to politics which is essentially, contested or contentious. Political theory, help us in making sound judgment about any contentious issue of society and politics.

This is all for today's lecture. In the next lecture, we are going to discuss the relationship between political theory and political ideology, and why there are so many differences of approaches, methods and traditions within the discipline of political theory. And finally, we will again revisit this question of political theory and why do we need it? I will give you a brief outline of the syllabus of this course and also, we are going to discuss some of the themes that are part of our syllabus.

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5. Rajeev Bhargav and Ashok Acharya (eds.), *Political Theory: An Introduction*, Delhi: Pearson Longman, 2008.
6. John Dunn, *The History of Political Theory and other Essays*. United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
7. Gerald F. Gaus and Chandran Kukathas (eds.), *Handbook of Political Theory*, London: Sage Publications, 2004.

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For this lecture today, you can refer to some of these books like John Hoffman and Paul Graham's, *Introduction to Political Theory*. John S. Dryzek, Honig and Phillips's edited *The Oxford Handbook of Political Theory*. And also, Catriona McKinnon's, *Issues in Political Theory*, then Norman P. Barry's, *An Introduction to Modern Political Theory*. Rajeev Bhargav and Ashok Acharya's book *Political Theory: An Introduction* is also very helpful to understand some of the themes and also, what we have discussed today, and many other topics in our syllabus. And then, John Dunn's, *The History of Political Theory and other Essays*, and Gerald Gaus and Chandran Kukatha's *Handbook of Political Theory*. These are some of the texts which you can refer to for the topics, which I have covered in this lecture.

Thank you for listening. Thanks.