

Define Political Theory.

Political theory is one of the most important branches of political science. It deals with the systematic study of political ideas, concepts, institutions, values and practices. It attempts to understand political life and also evaluates how political society ought to be organized. Political theory raises fundamental questions such as: What is the state? What is power? Why should people obey the state? What is justice? What is liberty? Are all people equal? What rights should individuals have? What makes a government legitimate? Thus, political theory is concerned with both the existing political order and the ideal political order.

The word "theory" means a systematic explanation or set of ideas used to understand a particular subject. Therefore, political theory means a systematic body of ideas concerning politics, government, state, power, authority, rights, liberty, equality, justice and democracy.

Political theory has two broad dimensions:

1. Descriptive/analytical dimension – It studies and explains political institutions, behaviour and concepts as they exist.
2. Normative dimension – It asks what political institutions and relationships should be like according to values such as justice, liberty and equality.

Definitions of Political Theory:

According to Andrew Heywood, "Political theory is concerned with the ideas and principles that shape our understanding of political life".

George H. Sabine viewed political theory as the study of the political ideas and doctrines developed by political thinkers concerning political life and institutions.

David Held associates political theory with the systematic study of political concepts, institutions and practices, together with their evaluation in terms of political values.

According to J. C. Johari, "Political theory is concerned with the systematic study of political ideas, values, institutions and processes".

Therefore, Political theory is the systematic study and critical evaluation of political ideas, institutions, values and practices.

Nature of Political Theory:

The nature of political theory can be understood through the following points:

1. Philosophical in nature: Political theory has a strong connection with political philosophy. It deals with fundamental questions concerning justice, liberty, equality, rights, authority and the good society.
2. Normative in nature: Political theory is concerned with questions of "what ought to be." It evaluates political institutions according to values and principles.
3. Analytical in nature: Political theory carefully examines the meaning of political concepts such as power, authority, liberty, equality, justice and sovereignty.

4. **Critical in nature:** It critically examines existing political systems and institutions. It asks whether governments and political arrangements are legitimate, democratic and just.
5. **Value-oriented:** Political theory is closely connected with values such as freedom, equality, justice, democracy, human dignity and rights.
6. **Historical in nature:** Political theory has developed through the ideas of thinkers from different periods. The ideas of Plato and Aristotle belong to ancient political thought, while Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Marx, Mill, Gandhi and Rawls represent later developments.
7. **Dynamic in nature:** Political theory is not static. It changes with changes in society and politics. Contemporary political theory includes issues such as feminism, multiculturalism, environmentalism, identity, globalization and human rights.
8. **Interdisciplinary:** Political theory is related to several other disciplines, including philosophy, history, sociology, economics, law and political science.

Scope of Political Theory:

The scope of political theory is very broad and comprehensive. It is not limited to the study of the state and government. It covers power, authority, liberty, equality, justice, rights, democracy, political institutions, political ideologies, citizenship and contemporary political issues.

1. **Study of the State:** The state is one of the major subjects of political theory. It studies the origin, nature, purpose, functions and changing role of the state. It also examines the relationship between the state and the individual.
2. **Government and Forms of Government:** Political theory studies different forms of government such as democracy, monarchy, dictatorship and other systems of rule. It examines their nature, merits, limitations and suitability.
3. **Study of Power:** Power is a central concept of political theory. It examines who possesses power, how power is exercised, how power is distributed and how it influences individuals and society.
4. **Authority and Legitimacy:** Political theory studies authority and legitimacy. It asks why governments have the right to rule and why citizens should obey political authority.
5. **Liberty:** Liberty is an important subject of political theory. It examines the meaning, types and importance of individual freedom and the legitimate limits that may be placed upon it.
6. **Equality:** Political theory deals with different forms of equality, such as: Political equality, Social equality, Economic equality, Equality of opportunity, Gender equality. It also examines the causes of inequality and ways of promoting equality.
7. **Justice:** Justice is one of the central concerns of political theory. It examines how rights, opportunities, resources and benefits should be distributed fairly in society. It also deals with social, economic and political justice.
8. **Rights:** Political theory studies the nature, origin and importance of rights, including civil rights, political rights, fundamental rights and human rights.

9. **Democracy:** Political theory studies the meaning, principles and functioning of democracy. It includes popular sovereignty, representation, elections, political participation, accountability and freedom of expression.
10. **Citizenship:** It examines citizenship, the rights and duties of citizens, political participation and the responsibilities of citizens towards the state and society.
11. **Sovereignty:** Political theory studies the concept of sovereignty, its nature and importance. It examines where supreme political authority lies and how sovereignty operates within the state and in international relations.

Thus, the scope of political theory is very wide and comprehensive. It includes the study of the state, government, power, authority, sovereignty, liberty, equality, justice, rights, democracy, citizenship, political ideologies, political institutions and contemporary political issues.

Significance of Political Theory:

Political theory is significant for both academic understanding and practical political life.

1. Provides understanding of political concepts: It helps us understand concepts such as state, power, liberty, equality, justice, rights and democracy.
2. Develops political awareness: Political theory helps citizens understand how governments and political institutions function and how political power affects society.
3. Develops critical thinking: It encourages people to question existing political arrangements instead of accepting them without examination.
4. Provides standards for evaluation: Political theory gives us standards through which we can evaluate whether a political system is just, democratic, legitimate and fair.
5. Strengthens democracy: The principles of liberty, equality, participation, representation and rights provide an important foundation for democratic government.
6. Protects individual rights: Political theory explains why individuals should possess certain rights and freedoms and examines the relationship between individual freedom and state authority.
7. Helps address social injustice: It provides theoretical approaches to problems such as poverty, inequality, discrimination, exclusion and unequal distribution of resources.
8. Guides political institutions and policies: Political theory can provide principles for designing and evaluating laws, constitutions, institutions and public policies.
9. Connects political thought with political practice: It bridges the gap between political ideals and actual political life. Ideas such as equality and justice can be used to evaluate real political institutions.
10. Encourages responsible citizenship: A knowledge of political theory enables citizens to participate more thoughtfully in political discussion, elections and democratic decision-making.