

What is Politics?

According to Aristotle the father of Political Science “Politics legislates as to what we are to do and what we are to restrain from doing.” Politics is the only science or social activity, which aims at the good of all other sciences or activities destroying none, cultivating all, politics then is civilizing. Politics is concerned with conflicts and disagreements, if these are not present in some measure the situation is not political and any action taken will not be political.

The origin of politics lies in social diversity and the immutability of human wishes. Politics is both identical and ideological and is a basic human activity. It is very much a matter of interest. Politics is inseparable from government and it does not carry value with it.

A concept is a general idea about something, usually expressed in a single word or a short phrase¹. Concepts, along with models and theories are tools of political analysis. In the words of Heywood, “Concepts are the "tools" with which we think, criticize, argue, explain, and analyze. Political concepts are nothing less than building-blocks of political understanding: the political world means what our concepts tell us it means². The liberal and Marxian approach to politics are two extremely contradictory views on the role of state in ensuring the welfare of the individual as well as the role of individual as an agent of change in society. The succeeding paragraphs will deal with these two concepts and their major arguments concerning the issues of politics.

Liberal Approach

If the freedom of the individual is taken along a continuum then at one end would appear defenders of absolute freedom of the individual without any state intervention whereas at the other end would appear defenders of state authority at the expense of individual freedom. The former is liberalism whereas the latter is totalitarianism. The emergence of modern liberal state witnessed the growth of liberal tradition in Political Science which takes a positive view of human nature.

¹ Key concepts in Politics, GVPT 100, September 12, 2007, URL: http://www.bsos.umd.edu/gvpt/oorhan/Lecture%203_Key%20Concepts%20in%20Politics.pdf

² Heywood, Andrew (2000), “Key Concepts in Politics”, Palgrave Macmillan

The concept of liberalism is an old one. It could be traced to the thoughts of Socrates who died to protect his freedom of thought and expression to those of Lincoln and Gandhi. John Locke, who is considered the first liberal thinker of the 17th Century, saw a great potential for human progress in modern civil society and capitalists economy which guaranteed individual liberty. The liberals hold the belief that modern liberal state is based on a political and economic system which will bring ‘the greatest happiness of the greatest number’. The liberals argue that the process of modernization unleashed by the scientific revolution led to improved technologies which in turn made it possible to devise more efficient ways of producing goods and mastering nature. This was reinforced by the liberal intellectual revolution, which had great faith in human reason and rationality³. Thus one could say that liberals take a more optimistic view of world politics, state relation and the concept of ‘perpetual peace’.

The term liberalism refers to the freedom of the individual in all walks of life so that he may develop his worth and dignity in the possible way. It has the following three implications:

- In the social sphere liberalism means secularism; meaning freedom from the shackles of religion. It refers to the freedom of the individual to demolish or eradicate institutions that have lost their utility.

- in the economic realm it means freedom to individual in production of goods, exchange of commodity and its distribution, sale of property, freedom to practice any trade, profession or business. In the economic realm liberalism has two strands: positive and negative. Negative liberalism demands complete freedom to individual in economic field without any state intervention; positive liberalism on the other hand demand state restrictions of individual freedom in public interest. It thus appears that positive liberalism is close to the concept of democratic socialism.

³ Aaditya (), “What is the Liberal Approach to the Study of International Relations”, URL: <http://www.publishyourarticles.net/knowledge-hub/political-science/what-is-the-liberal-approach-to-the-study-of-international-relations.html>

- in the political field liberalism stands for separation of power, checks and balances, freedom of individual to participate in politics, periodical election, accountability of ruler to the ruled, independence of bureaucracy and judiciary, protection of the interest of the minority and the like.

- in the international relations, the basic assumption underlying the liberal approach is the concept of anarchy and rationality. Anarchy refers to an international system without a world government with legitimate use of force which leaves each state in a 'self help' situation. The state as a rational actor, forced by anarchy, makes cost-benefit analysis for the most effective realisation of their stated goals. According to Kegley & Wittkopf (2006: 28), liberalism is "a paradigm predicated on the hope that the application of reason and universal ethics to international relations can lead to a more orderly, just, and cooperative world, and that international anarchy and war can be policed by institutional reforms that empower international organizations and laws".

Classical and Modern Liberalism

The distinction between old, classic or negative liberalism and the modern or positive liberalism is that of the degree of freedom enjoyed by the individual. Negative liberalism lays emphasis on the dignity and worth of the individual to be realised by giving him maximum freedom and least state intervention. Negative liberalism is based on the principle of laissez-faire which demands minimum state intervention in the affairs of the individual by the state.

However there was a change in the concept of liberty in the 1860's when Mill revised his view on liberty of the individual. He now advocated control and regulation of private property on the principle of economic rent and even went to the extent of sanctioning public ownership and control of the resources of the country. T H Green justified state intervention to eradicate at least three gigantic social evils: ignorance, intemperance and pauperism. Laski and England and Mac Iver in United States similarly sought state intervention for rendering useful social services. In short positive liberalism believes in government action to achieve equal opportunity and

equality for all. Liberal approach lays emphasis on the duty of the government to alleviate social ills and to protect civil liberties and individual and human rights.

Criticism

There are certain limitations in implementing the provisions of liberalism and its implications can't be put to precise definitions. First criticism is that the term is very loose and amorphous. Authors from Lock to Lasswell could be placed under the category of liberals. Anyone who shows commitment to the preservation of the dignity and worth of the individual by giving precedence to individual liberty over state authority can be termed as a liberal philosopher. Second criticism is that liberalism is taken to be the philosophy of bourgeoisie despite the fact that it seeks to restrict the individual freedom in the interest of the community. This is due to the reason that liberalism doesn't advocate stringent restrictions on individual freedom as done by the socialists.