

2025 Edition

Political Science & Int. Relations [PSIR] Notes

for

UPSC-CSE Mains & State PSCs

Paper 1 Section A Political Theory

Part 1

Topics: 1,3,4,5,6,7,8



SAMPLE

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1] POLITICAL THEORY: MEANING AND APPROACHES

1] KEY TERMS

- A] POLITICAL THEORY
- B] POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY
- C] POLITICAL SCIENCE
- D] POLITICAL IDEOLOGY

2] INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL SCIENCE

3] APPROACHES IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

- A] TRADITIONAL APPROACHES
- B] MODERN APPROACHES
- C] CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES

4] DEBATE ON NATURE OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

1] Key Terms

A] Political Theory

A 'theory' in general is proposed to explain certain phenomena or to provide some solution. Different theories may be proposed to explain why things happen the way they do. And a theory may be a single idea or collection of ideas.

However, political theory should not be treated as a mere extension of this general term. In our discipline, political theory suggests a particular approach to the subject. Political theory emphasizes the analytical study of ideas central to political thought. It tries to analyse the meaning of fundamental terms such as liberty, justice, state etc. and to understand the questions like – why should one obey the state? how rewards should be distributed? etc. Thus, political theory naturally focuses on the study of ideas proposed by various classical scholars on these questions.

B] Political Philosophy

This term is closest to political theory. However, along with critical evaluation of the political beliefs, political philosophy is more concerned about clarifying and refining the concepts employed in political science. Thus, as Andre Heywood explains, 'despite the best efforts of political philosophers to remain impartial and objective, they are inevitably concerned with justifying certain political viewpoints at the expense of others and with upholding a particular understanding of a concept rather than alternative ones'.

C] Political Science

Science refers to the systematic study of a subject at hand. Simply put, political science is a broad term used to denote the study of political ideas, theories, philosophies, ideologies etc. The discipline which deals with political life and associated ideas.

However, a narrow interpretation of 'political science' is also possible. Science denotes hypotheses, experimentation, verification, evidence etc. By these, it claims to produce knowledge that is objective, universal and reliable. 'Political science' thus refers to the 20th-century movement which sought to convert political science into a 'pure science'. Led by David Easton, the experiment ultimately failed, and over a period of time, the term political science came to describe the entire discipline of the subject as discussed in the above para.

D] Political Ideology

Ideology is quite distinct from all the above terms. It denotes a set of ideas, a world view or a holistic system of thought. A grand theory whose purpose is often the mobilization of voters. An ideology is always associated with its proponents. As Karl Mannheim suggests, every ideology represents the interest of a particular class, e.g. liberalism, Marxism etc.

2] Introduction to Political Science

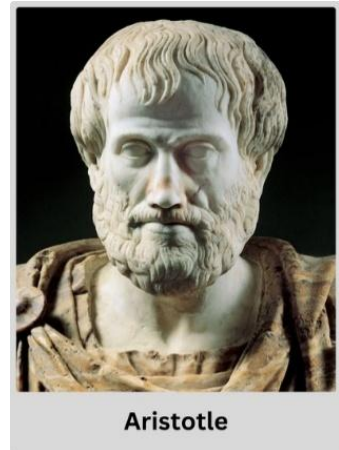
Political science is one of the oldest discipline. It has its roots in ancient Greece and it started as a branch of philosophy. **Aristotle is considered as father of political science.** He called political science as a master science. It denotes the inter-disciplinary nature of political science and it is a science to be learned by the masters.

Masters are those who have to deal with the decision making in the state. Thus the study of state, constitution became the core concern of political science. **According to Garner, political science begins and ends with the state.**

If we look at the **evolution of the discipline**, it was dominated by philosophy in ancient times. It was overshadowed by religion /scriptures in medieval times. And it was Machiavelli who established the autonomy of politics from ethics and religion, and the autonomous status of the discipline was recognized.

Till 2nd WW, Political science primarily developed in Europe. After 2nd WW, it shifted to USA. In Europe, there has been greater emphasis on philosophy. In USA, there has been more emphasis on science/scientific research. Till 2nd WW, we call the state of discipline as traditional political science. It focused on the study of states and constitutions. The field was dominated by philosophical methods, historical and empirical methods. In the field of comparative politics, study of constitutions was prominent hence Semén's legal institutional method played role.

After 2nd WW, political science developed in USA under guidance of APSA (American Political Science Association). This has led to the development of behavioural method. Behaviouralist focus on 1) The



study of human behaviour rather than institutions. 2) Scientific methods rather than philosophical, legal or historical methods.

Behavioural methods were later on modified into post-behavioural approach. In American universities, post behavioural approach is the primary approach for research in political science. There is also a revival of philosophy in Europe, which has given rise to new approaches like post modernism, feminism, critical theory.

Political science is a vibrant discipline with expanding frontiers. New areas of research are emerging ranging from family to environment. At times discipline became too expanded that there was a fear of discipline losing its identity. Hence scholars like Theda Skocpol calls for '*bringing the state back in*'. A call to make 'state' a core area of research.

Political science as a discipline has greatest utility amongst social sciences. And it needs to be actively promoted in universities by funding agencies.

3] Approaches in Political Science

A] Traditional Approaches

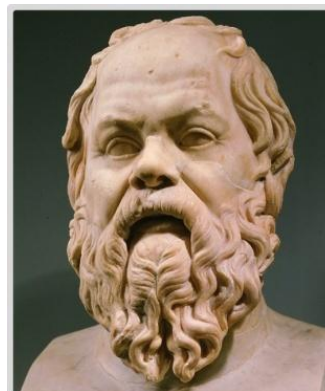
1] Philosophical Approach

Socrates is known as father of philosophy. He has given the 'theory of knowledge'. According to him, the real knowledge is the knowledge of ideas. And the mode of learning this knowledge is logic. Socrates prescribed dialectics. Why this knowledge is superior? Physical world is a world of change. Hence, there cannot be a permanent knowledge. Whereas the world of idea is a world of permanence. Hence this knowledge is of permanent nature, subject to the condition, it is a product of logical reasoning.

Plato

Plato is called as father of political philosophy. He has suggested that it is not enough to understand the features of existing states, it is more important to understand the 'idea of state'. The purpose of existence of the state.

When we understand the idea, we can mould the existing states which are bound to be imperfect towards perfection. Thus besides the advantage of getting the foundational or permanent knowledge, philosophy can help in making our lives better. Plato emphasised that the knowledge of philosopher is not just for his betterment but for the betterment of the society. Thus philosophy has a huge utility for making our lives better.



Socrates



Plato

Philosophical approach is the oldest approach present in political science. Political science started as a sub discipline of philosophy. Classical scholars dealt with philosophical issues or normative issues like justice, equality, rights, liberties.

Philosophical approach remained dominant approach till second world war. Major development happened in western Europe. Philosophical approach came under criticism by behaviouralists. Behaviouralists wanted to make political science 'pure science'. Hence, they rejected the study of normative issues. They advocated the study of facts. **Lord Bryce held that “we need facts, facts and facts.”**

Philosophical theories were criticised as 'armchair theories'. They do not constitute verifiable and thus are not reliable source of knowledge. They also are inherently biased and divorced from the reality. However scholars like John Rawls, Leo Strauss, Isaiah Berlin, Dante Germino believe that the philosophical approach is most suitable for the discipline of political science.

2] Historical Approach

It is also among the oldest approaches. It is considered as the simplest and the common-sense based approach for understanding politics and building theories. History is closely connected with politics. The relationship between the two disciplines is explained by the scholars as – ***if history is a root, politics is a shoot. History is past politics; politics is present history.*** It is to be noted that traditional international politics has been studied as 'diplomatic history'. It was Machiavelli who strongly advocated the study of history to understand politics. According to him, history – rather than philosophy – is a better guide for the prince.

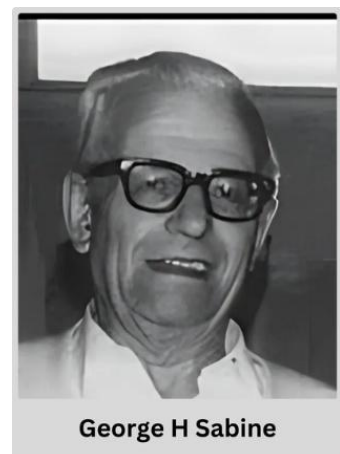
In modern times, scholars like Laski and Sabine have preferred historical approach. According to Laski, *“Every thinker is a child of his times”*. He also writes that *“no political idea is ever intelligible, save in the context of time.”*

According to Sabine, “political ideas are themselves the products of the crisis phases of history.”

Historical approach is the most common sense based approach. It serves the requirement of a sound approach. : 3 requirements – Factual, Causal, Evaluative.

Though historical approach has found huge favour, yet it suffers from following challenges:

1. History is too vast; it is challenging task to find out relevant data.
2. All that is in history may not be relevant and there are many concepts in political science like philosopher king, communism, which were never present in history yet important for the student of political science.

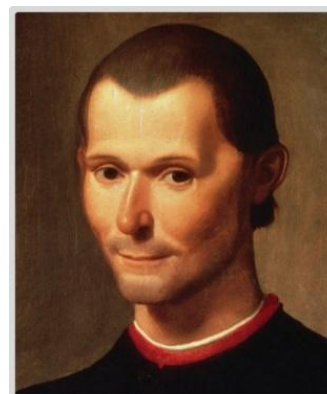


3. History in itself is a highly politicised discipline. Edward Said's *ORIENTALISM* show that the history writing has been a political project.
4. Political scholars may not use history in a scientific manner. Machiavelli himself has done the selective use of history. He used only those examples which served his political purpose.
5. There are examples of political scholars making politics out of history. Karl Popper criticized Hegel and Karl Marx for committing the guilt of historicism. Which means ideological use of history. e.g. When Marx explains history as a product of class struggle, his purpose is political.
6. John Plamanetz has criticized, making political ideas dependent on history. He suggests that political ideas should be understood on the basis of logic.

3] Empirical Approach

Empirical approach is based on observation. We can observe the physical facts and human behaviour. We cannot observe ideas. **Machiavelli** proposed empirical approach along with historical approach. He warns prince against living in the world of ideas whereas he suggests prince to look at the things as they are.

If Plato recommends philosophy, Machiavelli recommends observation, Aristotle is the connecting link. Aristotle's theory of forms emphasizes on the interdependence between idea and matter, the world of being and becoming. In order to understand empirical approach, we need to compare it with philosophical approach.

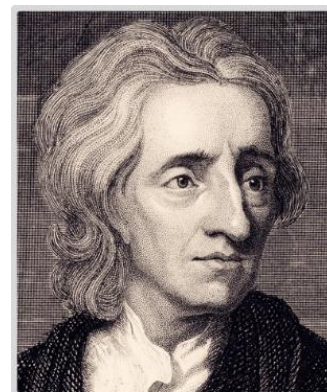


Machiavelli

Empirical Approach	Normative / Philosophical Approach
Study of facts	Study of Ideas
Observation	Method - logic
Descriptive (It describes what reality is)	Prescriptive or Normative (It tells what 'Should be')
Criteria is true and false	The criteria is right and wrong
Status quoist	Change oriented

Empirical approach can also be differentiated from scientific approach. Empirical approach is just observation. It does not become scientific on its own. Scientific approach is rigorous. It includes observation, verification, measurement, free from biasness.

John Locke is a supporter of empiricism over Socrates theory of knowledge. Locke rejects the view that the knowledge is imprinted on the human soul. According to Locke, experience is the source of knowledge. According to him, mind is *tabula rasa* (clean slate). It means human mind is clean slate. Observation and experience imprint knowledge.



John Locke

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Conclusion: Politics is too complex, choice of approach will depend on the objective of research. Single approach is never sufficient. Different approaches need to be used in combination.

4] Legal Institutional approach

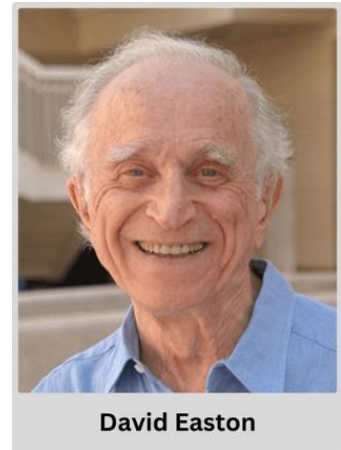
This approach is covered in detail in Paper 2, comparative politics.

B] Modern Approaches

1] Behaviouralism

It means scientific approaches. In political science we can even use the term behavioural approaches. What is behavioural approach? Behavioural approach in political science started after 1st WW but it became prominent after 2nd WW. It was strongly promoted by American political science association. The core idea was, to make political science pure science.

It denotes a complete change. i.e. Change in the entire epistemology and even the ontology of discipline. When we change the method, it obviously changes the scope and the nature. Thus behaviouralism is often called as 'revolution'. Though some scholars prefer to call it movement. Charles Merriam is called as father of behaviouralism.



How behaviouralism emerged?

We've to look into the historical circumstances besides intellectual proposals. After 2nd WW, academic conferences used to take place under United Nations. The scholars of different discipline used to be invited to give ideas on reconstruction and development. In these conferences, political scholars were not invited. It was believed that they have nothing relevant to offer. Political science had become almost a dead discipline.

1. Political scholars were not dealing with the contemporary issues, they were dealing with the study of centuries old ideas. Historicist like Sabine, Dunning were busy in writing the history of western philosophy from Plato to Marx.
2. Whereas other social science disciplines like sociology have long back incorporated scientific methods / positivism. Political science remained far from adopting scientific methods for research. Thus political theories were 'armchair theories' with little practical relevance.
3. Intellectual Factors: Scholars of Chicago school of political science like Charles Merriam, Catlin were advocating for the behavioural, systematic and value free analysis. Understanding processes rather than institutions. Considering the state of discipline, attempt was made to revive, to regain the credibility for the discipline by incorporating scientific methods.

Features of Behavioural approach

David Easton has given eight features of behavioural approach in his address to American Political Science Association. His purpose was to make political science, 'science'. It means to develop the laws in political science just like the laws existing in natural sciences. By observing the phenomenon.

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Phenomenon should have regularity. And thus developing the explanation, verification, experimentation. Scientific laws are free from biasness.

Eight features given by David Easton

1. **Regularities:** Observe regularities in human behaviour. Traditionalists argument – Traditionalist believe that regularities are not possible in human behaviour. Why? There is no guarantee that the same person will behave in a similar manner under similar conditions twice.
2. **Systematization:** Scientific research is systematic. Hence political research should also be systematic. There should be relation between the objective of the research and collection of data.
Traditionalists view – According to traditionalists, social sciences are analytical in nature, hence we cannot be very particular with respect to systematization.
3. **Techniques:** Behaviouralists suggest the adoption of mathematical, statistical techniques.
Traditionalists view – There are very limited areas of research where we can adopt quantitative techniques. For the sake of technique, there is no point compromising with the subject matter.
4. **Measurement:** Just like scientific results are expressed in quantitative terms for the purpose of precision, political research should also be represented in the form of quantitative data for precision. Traditionalists believe that such approach will limit the scope of the subject as there are very few areas where measurement is possible like electoral behaviour.
5. **Verification:** Like scientific theories, pol science theories should also be verifiable, so that a reliable knowledge is developed. Traditionalists continue to believe that verifiability is not possible in all cases. e.g. We have to understand the idea of communism which can be understood, explained only by logical analysis.
6. **Integration:** Integration means inter-disciplinary approach. Political science has always been inter-disciplinary. The only difference is that traditionalists looked for data in disciplines like philosophy, history and law. On the other hand, behaviouralists suggest to borrow from sociology, psychology and natural science disciplines. They even warn against bringing the discipline near to philosophy, history and law.
7. **Value Neutrality:** Like scientific research is value neutral, political scholars should also not prescribe value preferences. Traditionalists like Leo Strauss is very critical of rejecting the values. According to him, *“when we ignore values, it is like not making any difference in pure water and dirty water.”*
8. **Pure Science:** When we will adopt above parameters, political science will become pure science.

Achievements of Behaviouralists

Political science was in the state of decline, behaviouralists could arrest the decline. Behavioralists made significant contribution in the field of the analysis of electoral behaviour. The analysis of electoral behaviour has been helpful for political parties in formulation of their strategies and programs.

Behavioural research helped us in understanding the difference between theory and practice. e.g. The elitist and pluralists investigated the reality of the democracy in western countries, reality of socialism in communist countries.

One of the major area where behaviour research proved most useful was the study of the political systems in developing areas. There is a difference in the constitution and actual practice. There is a difference in the text and context. Hence traditional approach like legal institutional proved inadequate and politics of these countries require field studies. Thus comparative politics became the major area for behavioural research.

2] Post Behaviouralism

Post behavioralism emerged out of dis-satisfaction from some aspects of behavioralism. In the history of the evolution of the discipline of political science, we see the two stages of decline.

1st Decline: Before 2nd WW. In this case the responsibility was on traditionalists primarily historicists. This decline was addressed by behaviouralists.

2nd Decline: The second decline happened because of behaviouralists. What were the indications of decline? 1950s and 60s are the phases of lot of activism in USA. There have been various types of protests like civil rights movements, women movements, environmental and peace movements... How to address these crises was a big challenge. When policymakers had to look towards political scholars, it was again found that they had nothing to offer. Behavioralists were busy in making political science, pure science. It resulted in compromise with a) Scope of the subject. b) Relevance of the subject.

They over-emphasized on the scientific techniques. In political science there are very limited areas where scientific technique can be used. David Easton, who gave the principles of behavioralism himself acknowledged that *“Political scholars sitting in ivory towers, perfecting their techniques have ignored the purpose for which the technique is used.”*

It is true that behaviouralists had produced rich literature on election studies but such studies are not sufficient. Political scholars cannot ignore the normative issues like justice, rights, liberties etc. Thus scholars like Alfred Cobban blamed positivists and empiricists. Dante Germino blamed ‘ideological reductionists’ responsible for the decline of the discipline.

Features of post behavioralism

David Easton gave one more lecture to American political science association. This lecture is titled as ‘Credo of Relevance’. David Eastern called for ‘Creative theory’. The two parameters of the creative theory are 1) Action & 2) Relevance. It means whatever research person is choosing, it should be relevant, action oriented for the benefit of society. Thus he acknowledged the decline of the discipline because of behaviouralists. Easton clarified that technique is important but the purpose for which the technique is to be used is more important.

Easton clarified that it is not rejection of behaviouralism rather it is taking behaviouralism forward. We can say that traditionalism is thesis, behaviouralism is antithesis while post behaviouralism is synthesis. The assumptions, methodologies, approaches remain same like that of behaviouralists. Visit <https://politicsforindia.com> for latest PSIR current affairs