

The Decline & the Revival of Political Theory

COURSE CODE : POLS5002

COURSE NAME : *Advances in Political Theory*

DR. NARENDRA KUMAR ARYA

**ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
MAHTAMA GANDHI CENTRAL
UNIVERSITY,
BIHAR**

The Decline of Political Theory

COURSE CODE : POLS4008
COURSE NAME : *THEORIES OF INTERNATIONAL
RELATIONS*

**DR. NARENDRA KUMAR
ARYA**

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
MAHTAMA GANDHI CENTRAL UNIVERSITY,
BIHAR

Conditions before 'Decline' ?

- David Easton writes, “Political theory today is interested primarily in the history of ideas”. Being inextricably associated with notions of value and general principles most of times crucial elements defining character of political theory before 1950s.
- Political theory before this time was primarily normative and philosophical with historical perspective.
- Lacked empirical and objective temperament essential to study political processes and events.



David Easton

(1917-2014)

Professor of Political
Science, University of
California, Irvine

He was past president of the American Political Science Association, died Saturday, July 19, 2014.

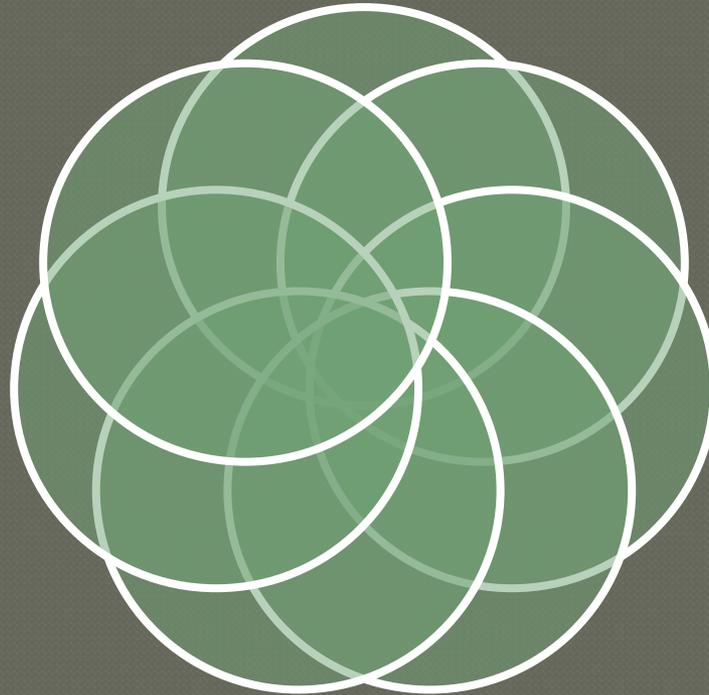
One of the most prominent and cited political scientists during the second half of the twentieth century, Easton was a very highly valued colleague. major theoretical works including *The Political System* (1953), *A Framework for Political Analysis* (1965) and *A Systems Analysis of Political Life* (1965). He lived a full life of 97 years.

◉ Normative or Prescriptive theory :

- ◉ *a priori* commitment to a certain principle or ideal like liberty or justice.
- ◉ Starts with some assumptions or postulates
- ◉ Most of the political thought for centuries since ancient civilizations to early years of 20th century was normative
- ◉ Political theory usually meant to be comprehensive and inclusive of a system

Easton characterized contemporary writers as:

Concentrated mainly in analyzing the meaning, logical consistency, and historical development of prevailing ideas.



Living parasitically on century-old ideas,

Loved and believed in speculation.

Remained unable to develop a new political synthesis.

EASTON PUT THEM INTO FOUR GROUPS

Institutionalists

Interactionists

Materialists

Value-writers.

Reasons for Decline

- Around 1950's and 1960's it was claimed by that 'political theory is in a state of decline'.
- The reasons being influence of as in next infograph:-

HISTORICAL APPROACH,

LOGICAL POSITIVISM

**EMPIRICISM IN SOCIAL
SCIENCES**

HYPER- FACTUALISM

MARXISM

**GROWTH OF CONSTITUTIONAL
LAW**

Cobban's views on Decline

- Cobban opined that political thinking itself has become directionless, and lacks purpose.
- In the past, all great thinkers were passionately worried about the fate of society, and seriously wanted to reform it through their creative ideas.
- They had full conviction in what they wrote or said.
- Now that passionate commitment has been substituted by the teaching of historical approach and the scientific attitude.
- However, blind adoption of scientific method, borrowed from natural sciences, resulted in the loss of criteria of judgement, and merely produced cold-blooded passionless scholars.

Views of Dante Germino

- ◉ Dante Germino discovers 'ideological reductionism' as the cause of decline of political theory.
- ◉ It reduced political theory to merely an ideology, such as, Marxism.
- ◉ The intellectual and political movements during the last one hundred and fifty years have contributed to its eclipse.
- ◉ Positivation of social science or a mad rat-race to become 'science' and political upheavals of democracy, nationalism, imperialism etc., have destroyed the environment necessary for the growth of political theory.

-
- Another cause according to Germino, separation of 'is' and 'ought' or 'fact' and 'value' or 'being (reality)' and 'meaning', brought about by Linguistic Philosophy and Logical Positivism.
- Max Weber attacked Marxism on this very difference between empirical knowledge and value judgments.

-
- ① Consensus of opinion regarding values and objectives of society in the West and success in achieving them in practice have also weakened the desire to have any new political theory. People have got everything.
 - ① Patridge observes, 'If classical political theory has died, perhaps it has been killed by the triumph of democracy'.

Decline and Revival –The Debate

- Still, there is another view that political theory even in the traditional sense was never dead and continuity can be traced out.
- Plamenatz, Weldon and others do not accept that it has even declined or dwindled.'
- It has merely changed its form.

- ① Even speculative theories, except spurious or Utopian ones, are important as they have effected thinking, events and happenings.
- ② Formerly, political theories were embedded in philosophy, ethics or religion.
- ③ Now, they are carving out their own fields, rather looking at the whole array of problems from their own perspective.

-
- ◉ Germino finds resurgence of traditional political theory, particularly, in the writings of Michael Oakeshott, Hannah Arendt, Bertrand de Jouvenal, Leo Strauss, Eric Voegelin and others.
 - ◉ Similarly, Isaiah Berun observes that without some general outlook or philosophy, there can be no human activity: political theory of some kind is never dead. It is flourishing in newer forms with newer engagements..

-
- ◉ **Communitarian political thinkers** such as, Alasdair MacIntyre, Michael Walzer, Charles Taylor, Benjamin Barber and Michael Sandel.
 - ◉ **Neo-Marxism** has appeared in form of postmodernism or critical theory. Originating from Frankfurt School (1923), it appears in the writings of Antonio Gramsci, George Lukacs, Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Louis Althusser, Eric Fromm, Jean-Paul Sartre, Che Guevara, Herbert Marcuse and Jurgen Habermas.

-
- ◉ Most of these political philosophers are rather concerned with **philosophical issues** than political crises and problems of today. One can regard their theories as **non-political, even anti-political.**
 - ◉ They appear to reject basic and applied aspects of modern political theory.

-
- **John Rawls** opined that both moral theory and natural science must begin with data.
 - The data for science are empirical observations and the data for ethical theory are moral judgments.
 - Moral Judgements are equally valid source of knowledge , arguments and analysis.
 - They cannot be set aside or ignored on the ground that it is not based on empiricism.

-
- ◎ **Political Science** today is a magnificent discipline of knowledge and its sources command a great treasure of theories, approaches, normative as well as empirical.
 - ◎ It is making endeavors to accommodate them all to be relevant, timeless and meaningful on a wide-ranging scale of spatio-temporal dimensions.

THANK YOU

YOUR COMMENTS AND INQUIRIES ARE WELCOMED.