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Exploring Politics: Normative and Empirical Perspectives

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Abstract
This paper takes a journey through the history of how we've studied politics, from big ideas like justice and power to practical observations of how politics work. It explores how political science has grown from just looking at governments to considering broader societal issues and human behavior. One big focus is on two different ways of looking at politics: normative and empirical. The normative side is about ethics and what should be right in politics, while the empirical side is more about observing and experimenting to see how things are. Even though these approaches used to be seen as separate, nowadays, there's a push to bring them together to get a fuller picture. There are ongoing debates about how much we should rely on observation versus sticking to our moral values when studying politics. This paper argues that we need to find a balance between the two, using both approaches to understand what's going on in the world of politics. Ultimately, the paper stresses that political science is always changing and adapting to new ideas and challenges. By looking at politics from different perspectives, we can better understand how societies work and who holds power within them.

Introduction

The historical route of political science is deeply rooted in ancient Greek political thought, where scholars, philosophers, and political scientists have critically analyzed various political issues, concluding, and provided recommendations based on their unique perspectives and studies. The diversity of approaches within political science is a central aspect of the subject, as individuals employ their standpoints and methodologies to analyze questions and data. The term "approach," as defined by Van Dyke, pertains to the criteria employed in selecting questions and data for political inquiry. Wasby's classification based on the fact-value problem divides approaches into normative and empirical categories. Another classification, based on the objective of studying political science, includes philosophical, ideological, institutional, and structural approaches. Modern political scientists have expanded this classification, introducing normative approaches with liberal biases and Marxist approaches. The latter half of the last century witnessed the rise of behaviouralists, led by David Easton, focusing on the political behavior of individuals, which later evolved into post-behavioralism. Additionally, feminist approaches have emerged, providing a unique perspective on political science.

The term "political science" often engenders confusion due to its ambiguous usage. At times, it is referred to as a singular concept, while in other instances, people discuss multiple "political sciences." Furthermore, the interchangeability of "social science" with "political science" complicates matters. Social science, in its broadest sense, encompasses all aspects of human relations in society, but there is a lack of consensus on whether it constitutes a singular discipline or a collection of specific social sciences. This ambiguity becomes apparent when attempting to classify political sciences, such as economic science, which is often considered one of the political sciences despite involving aspects beyond the state. To clarify the discourse, some scholars advocate for a single political science that studies the state and its various aspects. While subdivisions may exist to explore specific relations like international or national relations or specific state functions, it is crucial not to treat these subdivisions as entirely separate political sciences due to their interconnected nature. Political science, as a field of academic inquiry, is characterized by its systematic study and analysis of politics. It has been defined in various ways, including as the science of the state, emphasizing the examination of political entities like the state and its functions. Another perspective views it as the study of

the shaping and sharing of power, highlighting the intricate dynamics of power distribution and exercise within a society. A broader definition considers political science as the study of political life, acknowledging that politics extends beyond formal institutions and is an integral part of societal interactions. In conclusion, political science involves a comprehensive understanding of the complexities inherent in political systems and governance. Ongoing debates and evolving perspectives within the field underscore its continual growth and adaptation to changing societal dynamics.

Definition of Political Science

Political science, a discipline formed by the fusion of "political" and "science," serves as an intellectual realm looking into the changing aspects of power and authority. Its purview extends far beyond mere governance structures, encapsulating a comprehensive exploration of political institutions such as the State, Government, Judiciary, Parliament, Pressure groups, and Political Parties. The term "science," rooted in the Latin "Scientia" for knowledge acquired through systematic study, underscores the discipline's commitment to rigorous analysis. The essence of Political Science lies in systematically studying political institutions, human political behavior, systems, international relations, and power issues. Aristotle's profound observation, declaring "Man is by nature a political animal," highlights the inherent social nature of humans. It suggests that those unable to live in society are either like beasts or gods, emphasizing the crucial role of political interactions in human existence. Aristotle, often hailed as the father of political science, laid the groundwork for defining politics using scientific methods, initiating an ongoing evolution that mirrors the dynamic nature of political science itself.

1. Is Political Science a True Science?

The classification of Political Science as a true science is supported by three compelling reasons. Firstly, its systematic study involves researching into political institutions, human actions, and international relations, reflecting the scientific pursuit of knowledge. Secondly, Aristotle's application of scientific methods in defining politics establishes a foundation for considering Political Science as a legitimate scientific discipline. Thirdly, the discipline's continual evolution, adapting to societal complexities and changes in political thinking, reinforces its dynamic and scientific nature. As political thought advances, the definitions of political science multiply, reflecting the adaptability required to understand the ever-changing landscape of politics and society.

2. Evolution of Political Science
A. Continuous Evolution

The continuous evolution of Political Science poses various challenges in the realm of political life. As societal complexities grow, influencing political thought, the field adapts, resulting in many definitions. The dynamic nature of political science prompts ongoing exploration and redefinition, mirroring the shifting landscape of political thought and society. The challenges presented by this evolution underscore the discipline's resilience and its capacity to stay relevant in the face of changing political paradigms.

B. Traditional Political Science

In the days preceding the nineteenth century, traditional political scientists, such as Garner, conceptualized political science primarily in terms of the state, government, and political institutions. According to Garner, political science essentially commenced and concluded with the state, representing a branch of social science dedicated to uncovering principles related to the state's origins, structure, political institutions' nature and history, and overall progress and development of politics. The traditional perspective focused on understanding fundamental aspects within the context of historical roots, primarily concerned with the beginnings, nature, ideals, and goals of the state.

C. Different Thinkers' Views

Various thinkers have contributed diverse perspectives on political science. R.G. Gettel views it as a historical investigation, an analytical study, and a discussion of what the state should be. John Robert Seeley defines it as a crucial part of social science, dealing with the foundations of the state and government principles. Paul Janet broadens the scope, stating that political science covers the origin, development, purpose, and all problems related to states. Garies focuses on political science's concern with the state and its necessary conditions for development. Lord Acton emphasize its significance in dealing with the state and establishing principles for effective governance. In simpler terms, political science is a multifaceted discipline involving history, analysis, ethics, foundations, and development, offering a comprehensive understanding of the state and its functioning.

3. Contemporary Perspective of Political Science
A. International Impact

In the contemporary context, the complex web of international events significantly impacts both individual and national lives, necessitating that state activities be attuned to the currents of global events and customs. This perspective emphasizes the evolving nature of political science and its imperative to adapt to the interconnectedness of the modern world.

B. Modern Political Science

The modern perspective of political science emerged in the early twentieth century, advocating for an expanded focus beyond the conventional state and government-centric view. Scholars like George Catlin, Charles Marriam, Almond, Powell, and David Easton contributed to this transformation, emphasizing a broader spectrum that includes the social and political relations of socialized individuals, the dynamics between the state and its citizens, interactions between social institutions and individuals, and the complex interplay among different states. This modern viewpoint positions political science not only as a study of the traditional facets of the state but as a discipline that encompasses individual political behavior, political power, society, political culture, political socialization, international laws, international relations, political systems, political processes, and various political groups.

C. Diverse Definitions in the Modern Outlook

Within this modern framework, political science is described by various authors in diverse terms. Harold Lasswell sees it as the study of influence and the influential; Laski defines political science as concerned with the life of individuals in an organized state; David Easton characterizes it as the authoritative allocation of values, moving beyond a mere discussion of state institutions to explore political systems or processes; and Max Weber defines politics as the struggle for

power or the influencing of those in power. This modern view of political science encapsulates a comprehensive understanding of the complicated dynamics within societies and on the global stage.

Normative approach

The field of political science is characterized by two intellectual paradigms: the positive and the normative approach. The positive approach, rooted in neopositivism and logical empiricism, contends that political theory should exclusively describe what is, devoid of normative prescriptions. On the other hand, the normative approach, entwined with values, focuses on discerning what ought to be in political systems. The historical evolution of the fact-value dichotomy, particularly prominent since the behavioralist movement in the 1950s, reveals a division between empirical research in political science and normative theorizing, with limited interaction between the two. Normative political theory, tracing its origins to Ancient Greece, has traditionally explored questions about the common good, political authority, rights, and obligations, with notable shifts in influence over the twentieth century. Recent decades have witnessed a growing discomfort with the strict separation of descriptive and evaluative aspects, challenging the traditional dichotomy. Applied normative theory emerged in the 1990s, seeking to bridge the gap between descriptive and prescriptive by examining real institutional arrangements and incorporating contextual variation. Charles Taylor's critique further contests the notion of value-neutral political science, asserting the inherent connection between facts and values in political analysis. Despite calls for a unified approach, social scientists continue to grapple with the interplay of descriptive and evaluative elements, indicating the persistent influence of the fact-value dichotomy. The integrated future of political science involves moving beyond dichotomies, recognizing the normative character of both subject and method, and embracing a more holistic understanding that acknowledges the inseparability of facts and values in political analysis. Normative political theory, tracing its roots back to the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle, serves as a unifying framework for ethics and politics. It perceives these two domains as inherently interdependent, with normative principles guiding the ethical dimensions of political action. In its early stages, political theorizing, exemplified by figures like Jean Bodin, seamlessly integrated both descriptive and prescriptive elements. This fusion contributed to a teleological understanding of politics that centered on the well-being of the community. Before the formalization of political science, normative theories predominantly provided foundational principles for governing systems, offering guidance on the ideal structures for societal organization.

The historical evolution of normative political theory is marked by the influential contributions of early thinkers such as Jean Bodin. During his service to the French monarchy, Bodin developed the concept of sovereignty, a normative theory that became a cornerstone for political order. This era witnessed the integration of descriptive and prescriptive aspects, laying the groundwork for a comprehensive understanding of politics. These normative theories acted as guiding principles for governance, reflecting the prevailing cultural and political currents of their time. The transition from normative theories to the formalization of political science marked a significant shift in the study of politics. Before the establishment of political science as a distinct discipline, normative theories played a crucial role in shaping the foundational principles of political order. These principles provided a normative framework for governing systems, addressing questions of how societies should ideally organize themselves and operate. Challenging the notion that political theorizing aims to address timeless questions, Quentin Skinner presents a perspective that views political theorizing as a form of political activity. According to Skinner, political theorists engage with cultural elements to support their positions in ongoing debates. Understanding an author's ideas, therefore, requires grasping the normative vocabulary of their era. Skinner advocates for a contextual and historical study of political thought, asserting that ideologies act as discourses of legitimation. His work, "Foundations of Modern Political Thought," examines into the historical development of the sovereign state concept and the idea of natural rights. Political theories, shaped by the cultural and political currents of their time, serve as the base of political thought. Normative theories, in particular, capture the prevailing norms and values, offering insights into the ideals that societies strive to achieve. The cultural context in which these theories emerge is critical for understanding their development and impact, as political thought is intricately intertwined with the broader cultural and historical backdrop.

Distinguishing between positive and normative theories in political philosophy is crucial for understanding their respective roles. Positive theories explain how society operates without incorporating values, while normative theories provide a value-based perspective on how society should be organized. Descriptive theories identify existing standards, while normative theories propose ideals for a community. Normative theory, therefore, deals with guiding principles or norms that prescribe desirable behavior or reasons for actions within the social and political context. Normative political theory serves multiple roles, acting as both prescriptive and descriptive. In its prescriptive form, it guides individuals on what actions should be taken and justifies institutional structures against certain standards. In its descriptive form, normative theory analyses the actual circumstances surrounding norms, exploring their existence, functioning, and evolution. This versatility allows normative theory to address specific practices related to norms and to critically examine and evaluate social and political realities. In the 20th century, normative political theories exhibited common features that distinguish them from other approaches. There was a notable return to classical political philosophy, an increased interest in the history of political ideas, and a preference for clear ontological foundations. These characteristics shaped the landscape of normative political theory during this period, influencing the direction of political thought and inquiry.

Normative political theory plays a dual role, encompassing both prescriptive and descriptive dimensions. In its prescriptive capacity, it provides guidance on what actions should be considered normatively desirable. Simultaneously, in its descriptive form, normative theory analyzes the actual circumstances surrounding norms, shedding light on their existence, functioning, and evolution. This dual role enables a comprehensive understanding of the normative dimensions inherent in political thought. The ethical dimension of normative political theory is integral to understanding the normative vocabulary guiding political actions. It accommodates the fact-value distinction, recognizing that the political world involves both facts and values. To make sense of social and political facts, normative theory relies on meaningful statements about what contributes to human

flourishing and well-being. This ethical dimension underlines the role of normative theory in positively evaluating the significance of a valuable political order while also critically examining injustices and contradictions within social structures. Normative political theory finds practical application in the conceptualization and justification of human rights. Human rights, now surrounded in most state constitutions and international relations, exemplify the normative principles guiding a decent political community. The protection of basic human rights, as outlined in the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights, reflects a minimal standard influenced by normative theories. The concept of natural human rights, originating from seventeenth and eighteenth-century political philosophers, significantly influenced foundational documents like the American Declaration of Independence and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen.

In conclusion, normative political theory emerges as a changing aspect in the fields of ethics and politics. Its historical roots, shaped by influential thinkers like Plato, Aristotle, Jean Bodin, and Quentin Skinner, provide a rich tapestry of ideas. From guiding principles for governing systems to the application of normative theories in contemporary issues such as human rights, normative political theory remains a crucial compass for understanding and evaluating political phenomena. The ongoing debate about the relationship between empirical research and normative theory emphasizes the evolving nature of the field and its significance in addressing complex political challenges. Normative political theory not only prescribes what ought to be but also serves as a critical tool for questioning existing norms, exploring philosophical foundations, and bridging the gap between politics and ethics.

Empirical Approach

Empirical Political Theory (EPT) plays a pivotal role in the study of political science, providing a systematic approach to understanding political phenomena. This explores the empirical approach within EPT, emphasizing its key characteristics, methodologies, and debates surrounding its application in political science. EPT, grounded in deductive logic, employs a scientific method involving theory development and implementation. The deductive approach utilizes axioms as premises for arguments and theorems as conclusions derived from these axioms, forming a one-way causal direction. Hypothetico-deductivist (HD) logic is central to EPT, emphasizing the empirical verification of hypothesized causal relationships and aligning it with the scientific study of politics. Empirical research in political science involves real-world observations, experiments, and logical reasoning, guided by criteria like verifiability, falsifiability, objectivity, and logical coherence. EPT employs this approach by testing hypotheses through real-world research and translating abstract concepts into measurable variables. The debate between qualitative and quantitative traditions persists, with EPT being associated more with a quantitative approach due to its reliance on mathematical language and numerical data. The debate on the role of empirical testing in political science introduces the concept of Formal Models (FM). While proponents argue that models contribute to forming hypotheses, critics, such as Clarke and Primo, contend that models can directly explain facts through assumptions, minimizing the need for extensive hypothesis testing. This disagreement focuses on the ongoing tension between a model-centric approach and the emphasis on

hypothesis testing and theory falsification in the empirical approach. The empirical theory extends beyond theoretical propositions to encompass a methodological aspect. Using institutionalism as an example, it highlights the dynamic nature of institutions in governing relationships with rules and patterns. The analysis of trade evolution from barter to global institutions, as demonstrated by North, exemplifies how institutions contribute to both stability and change. New institutionalism, with its historical, rational choice, and sociological branches, explores these dynamics, incorporating calculative and cultural approaches. Empirical political science focuses on understanding the real-world aspects of politics, providing explanations and predictions based on evidence. Unlike normative political science, which deals with what should be, empirical political science operates under the assumption that verifiable facts exist. Researchers work with actual, verifiable information to describe political phenomena, distinguish patterns from unique occurrences, and make evidence-based explanations and predictions. Empirical political science faces challenges related to human tendencies, such as motivated reasoning, where individuals selectively accept information that aligns with their beliefs. This tendency can influence debates on contentious issues, and empirical political scientists need to navigate uncertainties and disagreements about facts. The distinction between empirical findings and normative judgments is essential, as empirical analysis focuses on predicting behavior rather than prescribing what should occur. Empirical political science, while capable of predicting behavior, refrains from making normative judgments. The distinction lies in the observation of facts and the derivation of generalizations from empirical findings. For instance, the observation that older adults tend to vote more frequently than younger adults is a generalization, but it does not prescribe or imply that they should have more influence. Normative questions fall within the realm of normative political science, emphasizing the difference between empirical understanding and prescriptive recommendations. In conclusion, the nature of Empirical Political Theory, explores its deductive logic, empirical methodologies, and the ongoing debates surrounding its application. The methodological aspect, exemplified by institutionalism, showcases the dynamic nature of institutions. Challenges related to human tendencies and the distinction between predictive analysis and normative judgments show the complexity and significance of the empirical approach in enhancing our understanding of real-world political phenomena.

Debate on Empirical Research and Normative Theory

The intersection between empirical research and normative theory in political science sparks ongoing debate. Traditionally, scholars often viewed theorists and empiricists as distinct entities, with each engaging in either normative or empirical studies. However, recent discussions challenge this dichotomy, prompting consideration of potential synergies between the two. Central to this debate is the question of whether normative principles, particularly those concerning justice, should also be grounded in practical considerations. John Gerring and Joshua Yesnowitz advocate for the integration of empirical study with normative import in social sciences. They argue that empirical research within the social sciences lacks meaningfulness without incorporating normative considerations. This perspective emphasizes the symbiotic relationship between understanding human behavior through empirical study and grounding political

commitments in moral values. John Rawls introduces the notion of a "realistic utopia" to emphasize the necessity for normative political theory to address both idealistic aspirations and practical considerations. However, critics caution against an overemphasis on empirical elements within normative political philosophy, expressing concerns that it might compromise the inherently normative nature of the field. Justine Weinberg's perspective highlights the dual allegiance of political philosophy, serving both "knowledge and action." While political philosophy is expected to reveal truths about justice, rights, and authority, it is equally tasked with guiding action in promoting desirable societal standards. This dual role becomes a subject of debate, with critics like John Gray advocating for the treatment of ethics as an empirical field without a priori truths. Gerald Cohen raises questions about the practicality of normative theories, especially those asserting that principles must be grounded in empirical facts. He challenges constructivist accounts, arguing for the existence of "fact-insensitive normative principles" that may lack empirical grounding. Critics express concerns about the potential non-arbitrary nature of such foundational principles. Normative political theory often involves justifying principles deductively from higher-level, self-evident norms. Critics of foundationalism question the non-arbitrary nature of such principles, raising concerns about their validity. John Stewart Mill's response introduces the idea that questions related to ultimate ends may not be amenable to direct proof, as certain considerations are treated as self-evident by the intellect. The challenge within normative political theory lies in finding a delicate balance between normative ideals and practical considerations. While some theorists question the practicality of normative theories, others argue that a fruitful dialogue between normative theory and empirical research can enhance the overall understanding of politics. This interaction allows normative theory to guide empirical research, while empirical research provides valuable insights that can positively impact normative theory. Contrary to earlier views suggesting a separation between political theory and science, contemporary approaches recognize the value of both normative and empirical dimensions. Political theories can benefit significantly from empirical research exploring real-world political functions. Conversely, empirical research seeks guidance and justification from normative theory, acknowledging the interdependence of the two approaches. The study of multiculturalism serves as a prime example of the dynamic interaction between normative and empirical approaches. Normative theories, such as those proposed by Charles Taylor and Will Kymlicka, influence policies and concurrently inform empirical research on multiculturalism. This symbiotic relationship is deemed crucial for a comprehensive understanding of political phenomena in diverse and multicultural societies. Participatory democratic theory, asserting the value of active civic participation in a democratic system, not only provides theoretical principles but also guides empirical research to understand the conditions facilitating citizen participation. This approach underscores the practical applications of political philosophy principles, extending beyond theoretical frameworks to inform the institutional structuring of opportunities for citizen participation. It is essential to acknowledge that not all normative theories in political philosophy or international relations are geared toward practical goals. Normative theories may have limitations in providing concrete, testable solutions in controlled environments. Despite these

limitations, normative theory maintains its value by offering guidance, justification, and evaluation. The ongoing dialogue between normative and empirical dimensions enriches our understanding of political phenomena and informs both theoretical frameworks and practical applications, recognizing the challenges posed by non-ideal structures hindering the implementation of ideals in the real world.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the evolution of political science from its traditional roots to the contemporary perspective highlights its adaptive nature. The multifaceted discipline not only explores the historical and foundational aspects of the state but also investigates the complex changing aspects of society, individual behavior, and global interactions. Political science, as a true science, continues to evolve, providing valuable insights into the ever-changing landscape of politics and governance. Understanding its evolution is paramount to grasping its significance in comprehending the complexities of modern society.

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