The Arts and Science of politics

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Chapter 3: THE ARTS AND SCIENCE OF POLITICS.

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Introduction

The immediate urge in any person wishing to study a particular discipline is to know what that discipline is all about. In many areas of knowledge, it is not difficult to give a precise definition of what practitioners in the fields do. However, it is extremely difficult to give an accurate characterization of the nature of politics. This is because there is little agreement amongst the practitioners as to what politics is all about.

It is also true that men have always concerned themselves with issues that are political in nature. For these issues are parts of their interest in the large questions of the place of man in the universe and the relationship that exists between politics and science among other questions or issues.

In this chapter, we shall attempt to distinguish between the arts and science of politics and discuss the role of politics in the superstructure of human society.

Political Science: A Definition

Political science can be defined as the science of politics or the scientific study of politics. A sound understanding of political science will require a comprehensive definition of the concept 'politics' and 'science'.

Politics

Different scholars define politics in various ways. From all these definition, three major perspectives from which politics has been viewed can be discerned. The first of these comes from Greece. The term politics is derived from a Greek word 'polis' meaning city-state. To the Greeks life in the state in all
its forms was political. According to Aristotle, the great Greek philosopher, a political man is one who can realize his potentialities by living in the 'polis'—city-state. Polis was a well-organized, stable and self-sufficient community. To the Greek, political life was the polis way of life. In other words, politics was the study of the nature of good life as was revealed in the small community. The Greek definition of politics was moralistic and all-inclusive i.e. it covered all types of activities-social, economic, religious, cultural etc. A second approach to the study of politics is the traditional or state approach. This approach is noted both for its focus on formal institutions of the state and for its definition of politics as the study of these institutions. The third is the most dominant and prevailing, which is referred to as the power approach. This approach emphasized the point that politics is concerned with the acquisition of power—survival of the fittest—making no room for morals or ethics. It must be noted, however, that there is no consensus of opinion regarding what power is.

Because of these conceptual differences, writers of this persuasion have different meaning of politics. Lasswell (1970:7) for instance defined it as the study of power relationships when he speaks of politics as "who gets what?, when? and how?" For Curtis (1960), politics is an organized conflict about the use of political power. Easton (1965) defined it as the authoritative allocation of values for a society.

Lasswell and Kaplan (1960) define it as the sharing and shaping of power. In his classical definition, Wrights (1955) defines politics as the act of influencing, manipulating or controlling major groups in the society, so as to advance the purpose of some opposition against others. We note that Wrights' definition is applicable in both international and domestic realms. While Merkl (1970:5) sees politics as "at its best, a noble guest for good order and justice. And at its worst, a selfish grab of power, glories and riches." Hence politics denotes all the activities and process within the public or
political system. On the other hand, van Dyke sees politics "as a struggle among actors pursuing, conflicting, desires on public issues that may result in authoritative allocation of values." (Baradat, 1979:10) The raw material for any economy is money, and that of politics is power. Even though, economic production is achieved but it is the authority that determines power. Thus, Morgenthau (1973) defined politics as the struggle for power in that in both religion and family there is politics, the negotiations between groups for goals' attainment is political.

Politics also exists in crime syndicates considering the approaches to the study of political science. Politics can be used to refer to all that has to do with the forces, institutions and organizational forms in any society that are organized as having the most inclusive and final authority existing in that society for the establishment and maintenance of order, the effectuation of other joint purposes of its members and the reconciliation of differences.

The Scope of Politics

Politics can be considered as either an occupation or a study.

(i) In practice: it involves the skills, insight and astuteness of a leader or other official involved in politics as a career. In addition people take part in politics through voluntary work on behalf of, say, a political party or pressure group.

(ii) Academic study—it can be considered as a social science and party as an art. Skill in one of these aspects does not necessary mean success in the other. Many able politicians are unable to explain certainly why or how they do what they do.

Many in academia, who are skilled in research and analysis of the mechanics of the political system, would be a failure if they held political office. Sometimes, however, a person can combine both skills. Sir Winston Churchill was skilled in both
political analysis and writing and in the practice of politics. Equally, late president Woodrow Wilson of United States was skilful in both areas.

The Nature of Politics

Any extensive use of the power, rule or authority within society has been considered the concern of politics. The following areas can be considered relevant aspect of politics:

(i) Struggle for power: political power is the capacity to influence behavior by the threat of some form of sanction. Competition may take place.

(ii) Between individual to determine who will exercise leadership in the group.

(iii) Between group to decide which values, aims and policies will have precedence in government.

(iv) Determination of the ground rules whereby conflicts within the state are resolved and government is chosen.

(v) Government involvement: one approach is to regard something as “political” when the government is involved through its decisions, policies, supply of funds, etc.

In this sense, a “political” question will vary from time to time. Religion may be a political matter if the government enforces certain beliefs or make others illegal.

Various issues are “political” in the sense defined above; for instance, housing, education, urban planning, health, immigration and race relations are studied not only by political scientists but also by scholars in the relevant fields concerned.

(vi) Micro Politics: Politics is not only concerned with the macro-considerations, aggregates such as the state or the party system. Some political scientists describe and analysis the political behavior of individuals or small groups or the politics of organizations such as a business, trade union or charity.
(vii) Resources allocation: politics has been defined as being concerned with the authoritative allocation of resources within society. Groups struggle to decide how the benefits and rewards of society will be distributed. Anthony Downs has seen the political process as one of exchange, of the vote being a type of money exchanged for benefits received people pursue their interest and try to optimize their welfare.

(viii) The study of the efforts directed, to wards, achieving a better or ideal political system. Politics is concerned in part with ethical questions or moral issues. Some of the basic aims of politics such as survival or betterment of living conditions are a precondition for the achievement of a superior purpose or an improvement in the quality of life. A society’s choice of collective ideals, the degree to which it realizes them and the amount of freedom, which exists, can judge it.

What Is Science?

One way of viewing science is to see it as a body of knowledge such as in chemistry or physics. Another approach is to see science as a set of principles, which tells us how to obtain these facts. It is with this second view that we are concerned. But nevertheless, science can be said to refer to systematic knowledge based on experience, observation and experimentation.

Assumption of Science

The scientist’s basic assumption is that nothing just happens—in other words every event has a cause. This is known as the principle of determinism or causality. As a result of this, any scientist is keen on identifying these causal relationships between the cause and the effect. All scientific knowledge is based on facts that have been observed, hence they are empirical knowledge.
Scientific knowledge is a statement of fact as opposed to value statement or judgment, which cannot be disproved. Any scientific statement is therefore subject to continuous testing. In every inquiry, the scientist employs various methods, which include observation of what can be observed; description of what has been observed; measurement and classification of what is observed. Starting with the principle of determinism, the scientist attempts to establish relationships. If successful, he makes a generalization. Further systematization by way of testing leads him to the formulation of theories and discovery of laws. The scientist then employs his laws and theories to explain events and situations, which have occurred and to predict those that are likely to occur. Science is not truth. An essential attribute of science is its ability to be disproved—it must be falsifiable.

Political science may then be broadly defined as the systematic study of governmental institutions and the political process. Political Science studies the political behavior of man, groups and society. And of course, it is also interested in the factors and conditions affecting political events, politicians and other institutions. Political science can thus be defined also as the process of making government policies and the making of decision by public means. Finally, political science therefore is a discipline within the social science. It deals with politics, the political behavior of individuals groups, societies and the facts and conditions affecting politicians, political events and institutions. It deals with quite a lot of phenomenon varying from political theories, Public Administration, public law, International Relation, state and local politics to comparative politics. Political science equally involves the systematic analysis and study of politics in the political realm.

Obstacles to a Complete Science of Politics

A major argument against a complete science of politics has to do with complexity of political phenomena and human
reaction. This is because the subject matter of politics are human beings which are difficult to predict.

Individuals can change from time to time. As a result of this, political phenomenon is constantly changing. In other words, human situation is enormously more complex and contains more elements of uncertainty than the physical science. Another problem is the inadequacy of quantitative measurement. This is to say that not all political behavior and actions can be quantified.

A fundamental argument against the scientific study of politics has to do with question of values. It has been argued that political scientists are human beings and there is the tendency of judgment being biased since they study societies, which they are part of. In this case the personal bias of the political scientists could color their individual assessment and judgment on political phenomena. Because the political scientist is inseparable from his subject matter, he cannot look at it from outside. He sees what is happening through the spectacles of his own particular environment. Finally, political science has not the axiomatic quality of mathematics. In its equations the variables are human beings whose uniqueness prevent their reduction to a common law in the scientific sense.

**Relationship between Political Science and other Social Sciences Disciplines**

A clear understanding of political science and indeed the politics of any given political system, requires an incursion into disciplines other than political science. This is because there are linkages between other aspects of human endeavor and the political process.

**Politics and Economics:**

Some writers on politics and society have argued that it is economics that determine politics. A prominent exponent of this point of view is the German philosopher, Karl Marx. Marx argues that economic factors including basic resources,
production techniques and distribution, shape the political institutions and determine the boundaries within which state and man must operate.

There is a counter viewpoint, which argues that it's political power, which shapes and determines uses to which economic resources are to be put. There is a third point of view that strikes a balance between the two opposing views. It asserts that both politics and economics are interdependent and never independent. Which determines the other is debatable. One thing is clear, an understanding of the one requires an understanding of the other.

Politics and Psychology:
The study of psychology deals with general human behavior, and political science deals with the political aspect of that behavior. Psychology is therefore of great relevance to the study of political science with regard to the understanding of human behavior. It is for this reason that the political science has always depended on psychology for the proper analysis of the socialization process, opinion formation and opinion change. The knowledge of psychology can be employed to better understand the behavior of individuals under circumstances such as questioning in courts of law and choice of courses of action during policy formulation. Psychology tools and terminology have been extensively used in political science to construct personality theories. The study of social psychology has assisted the political scientist in better understanding voting behaviors. It has also been useful in analyzing relationship between formal and informal organizations.

Politics and Sociology:
Sociology is the study of the structure and the functioning of the human society, politics has to do with the interactions between individuals and groups in the political process.
Sociology has a lot of light to shed on the understanding of these interactions and group processes. It is for this reason that the group theory and other relevant sociological concepts have been adopted and applied in political science analyses. Such concepts include society, group, association, status etc. Society refers to a sizeable group of people associated together more or less permanently, characterized by ordered relations mutually recognized by its members and constituting norms of conduct for them. Group is an aggregate of people held together by mutual recognition by one or more common interests or common purpose. When such a group puts up an organizational structure for the attainment of set goals, it transforms into an association. Status involves the making of an individual or group according to an accepted hierarchy.

**Politics and Geography:**
Conservatives, Fascist, Liberal and Marxist-non of them denied the fact that politics is dependent upon geography. While conservative ideologies tend to exaggerate its influence newer ideologies tend to minimize it. Geography is the science of earth surface, physical feature and decisions, climate, product and population etc. Nature has a direct influence on social and political life, the influence of climate on human organism and on the agricultural potential of a state, the role of rivers and seas as a mean of transportation and communication. Natural resources like oil, tin etc. play important role in determining the wealth of societies. Thus, Geography is a great relevance to the study of political science with regard to the idea that politics is based on earth and that “the politics of state is in their geography” climate may hamper or favor social or political development. The scramble for raw material and natural resources things—provided by geography for the maintenance of mans physical existence—explains many wars, alliances and international intrigue.

Mountains, valleys, rivers and oceans have served as natural boundaries to demarcate states from one another or to
demarcate administrative divisions within states. The existence of natural obstacle to invasion like mountains, rivers have helped to protect many societies from conquerors. Rivers, plains and sea etc. has served as means of communication. The influence of those in politics is undeniable—apart from transporting goods and services, it has served as invasion route, penetration routes for political doctrine and most of all, as a means of expanding contact between people and political power and between the governors and the governed.

Conclusion

In the view of the presentation above, it could be seen that the major essence of politics is power and it is the method or strategy adopted to acquire that power and actually use it to control, influence or guide and direct the mind of the other man. It comprises procedures, processes and activities applied or utilized not only to acquire and exercise that power but also to continue to keep and use it to rule, influence or dominate over man and materials in the environment.

Politics, therefore, is a method of decision-making and the generation, resolution and management of conflict in human society. It is in light of these that Umoh (1996:1-2) sees politics as a two-edged sword: "it can preserve and it can also destroy." This perhaps informed Plato’s stipulation of maturity in age and experience as a pre-condition for the study of politics.
References


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