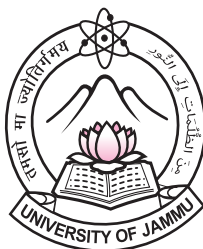


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**SELF LEARNING MATERIAL**  
**OF**  
**M. A. POLITICAL SCIENCE**

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**SEMESTER –I**

**COURSE NO. POL-101**

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**WESTERN POLITICAL THOUGHT**

**DR. V. V. NAGENDRA RAO**  
***COURSE CO-ORDINATOR***

**DR. MAMTA SHARMA**  
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# WESTERN POLITICAL THOUGHT

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COURSE NO. : POL-101

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# MA POLITICAL SCIENCE, SEMESTER I

## WESTERN POLITICAL THOUGHT

### INTRODUCTION

Dear Learners, Western political thought, which is rooted in Greek methodologies, has addressed a diverse array of issues, with each political thinker contributing their own perspective. Despite frequent disagreements on solutions, the enduring nature of the core issues has remained central to their inquiries.

Throughout different historical periods, various political issues have taken precedence. Classical political thought primarily focused on defining the ideal political order, addressing fundamental questions such as the nature and purpose of the state, the basis of political authority, political obligation, and political disobedience. This era was concerned with envisioning the ideal state and what it ought to be.

The Renaissance period, with its social and political developments, paved the way for Enlightenment thinking, the rise of the modern nation-state, and the Industrial Revolution. These transformative changes introduced new societal, economic, and political dynamics, shifting modern political thought towards individualism and the centrality of individual liberty.

Studying classical political thought offers insights into our own lives through the reflections of prominent thinkers. As Karl Marx observed, “Only music can awaken the musical sense in man,” emphasizing the importance of deep reflection.

Political philosophy did not commence with Plato, nor was his writing of *The Republic* a spontaneous endeavor. Similarly, ancient thinkers did not start their political reflections from scratch, nor did they initially focus solely on politics.

Political thought, or philosophy, can be defined as the philosophical examination of how to best organize our collective lives—encompassing political institutions, social practices, economic systems, and family structures. Political philosophers seek to establish fundamental principles to justify specific forms of government, assert inalienable rights, or determine the fair distribution of societal resources. This often involves analyzing and interpreting concepts such as freedom, justice, authority, and democracy, and applying these concepts critically to existing social and political institutions. Some philosophers aim to justify existing societal arrangements, while others envision ideal states or social worlds vastly different from current realities.

In this course, you will delve into the ideas and philosophies of significant political thinkers, from ancient Greek Sophists to twentieth-century figures like Mao Tse Tung. The course is structured into four units: the first covering classical thinkers from the ancient period, the second addressing early modern thinkers from the medieval and post-Renaissance periods, the third examining modern thinkers from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and the fourth introducing socialist thinkers.

**Nagendra Rao**

**Programme Coordinator**

**M.A Political Science under Non-CBCS  
Semester-1**

**Session December 2025, 2026 & 2027**

**Course Code: POL-101**

**Title – Western Political Thought**

**Credits: 6 (Six)**

**Max. Marks: 100**

**Internal Assessment: 30**

**Time: 3 Hours**

**Semester Exam: 70**

**Objectives of the Course:** This core course aims to impart knowledge to the learners in the Political Philosophies of various Western political thinkers, which constitute the foundations of the discipline of Political Science. It will introduce and familiarize the learners to the ideas, concepts, principles and theories given by various thinkers about the state, citizens, political obligation and art of state-craft. This course is designed to enable the learners to understand that how these ideas, institutions and principles kept on evolving in the writings of various thinkers through the various phases and stages of human civilization. The major objective of this course is to educate the learners that political ideas, institutions and structures described, celebrated and criticized in the writings of political thinkers are not static and abstract rather they were conceived in the light of the continuous process of social, economic and political churning of human society.

**Learning Outcomes:** Major learning outcome of this course will be to develop the foundation of learners in the subject matter of the discipline of political science. It enables the learners to understand, comprehend, contextualize and reflect upon the political developments, issues and phenomena taking place in contemporary times. The methods and tools deployed by the political thinkers in their writings will equip the learners to approach political events and phenomena by placing them in their proper contexts.

**Contents of Course**

**Unit-I: Classical Thinkers**

- 1.1 Origin of Western Political Thought, Nature and Significance
- 1.2 Plato: Idealism and its Critique
- 1.3 Aristotle: Metaphysical and Scientific Assessment
- 1.4 Augustine: Doctrine of Sin and Salvation, Church and State

**Unit-II: Major Modern Thinkers**

- 2.1 Machiavelli: State, State Craft, and Public Morality
- 2.2 Hobbes: Theory of Knowledge, State, Individualism and Absolutism
- 2.3 Locke: Theory of Knowledge and State, Natural Rights and Liberalism
- 2.4 Rousseau: Popular Sovereignty, Civil Society, and Idealism and Romanticism

**Unit-III: Major Contemporary Thinkers**

- 3.1 Hegel: Idealism, Historicism, Civil Society and State
- 3.2 Bentham: Theory of State and Government; Law and Ethics
- 3.3 J.S.Mill: Liberty, Women's Equality and Representative Government

### 3.4 T. H. Green: Positive Liberty, Political Obligation and British Idealism

#### Unit-IV: Socialist Thinkers

##### 4.1 Karl Marx: Historical Materialism, Surplus Value and Alienation

##### 4.2 Lenin: Imperialism, Party, State and Revolution

##### 4.3 Luxemburg: Critique of Revisionism, Party and Socialist Society

##### 4.4 Mao: Peasantry, Theory of Contradictions, Revolutionary Strategy

#### Note for Paper Setter

- The Question Paper shall be divided into two sections. The first section will carry eight short questions of which students will be required to attempt six questions. The upper word limit for the answer of each question will be 500 words. Each question carries 5 marks.
- The second section shall comprise eight questions of which students have to attempt four questions on the basis of 'WITHIN UNIT' choice. The upper word limit for the answer to each question will be 1000 words. Each question will carry 10 marks.

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## **1.1 ORIGIN OF WESTERN POLITICAL THOUGHT, NATURE AND SIGNIFICANCE**

**- Dr. Rajnish Saryal**

### **STRUCTURE**

#### **1.1.0 Objectives**

##### **1.1.1 Introduction**

##### **1.1.2 Meaning and Nature of Political Thought**

##### **1.1.3 Significance of Political Thought**

##### **1.1.4 Emergence of Western Political Thought: The Sophists**

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##### **1.1.6 Socrates and Sophists**

##### **1.1.7 Central Ideas of Socrates**

##### **1.1.8 Socrates Refutation of Sophists' Ideas**

##### **1.1.9 Let Us Sum Up**

##### **1.1.10 Key Words**

##### **1.1.11 Further Readings**

##### **1.1.12 Exercises**

#### **1.1.0 OBJECTIVES**

Dear Learner, this lesson introduces you to the historical beginning of Western Political Thought in the Greek period. It provides you with the epistemological (conceptual and philosophical) foundations of the subject matter of Western Political Thought. After going through this lesson, you will be able to:

- know the emergence of Western Political Thought;
- understand the meaning, nature, and significance of Western Political Thought;
- the importance of Sophists in developing political thought and some of the common features held by Sophists;
- Socrates' contribution to Political Thought and his central ideas; and
- Socrates' refutation of Sophists' ideas.

#### **1.1.1 INTRODUCTION**

Humans have two unique characteristics: rationality and an ability to speculate. As such he has shown a tendency to understand himself and the institutions in which he is living. He has devoted himself to understanding the physical, biological as well as social institutions around him. In this speculation the state, its nature, purpose, functions, organization, etc. have occupied a prominent position. This speculation about the various problems concerned with the state is generally designated as political thought. Political thought is the ideas of the thinkers about the state, its organs, and its utility. According to C.L. Wayper, its concern

is with nothing less than “the moral phenomena of human behaviour in society.” It seeks not so much an explanation of the existence of the state as a justification of its continuance. What is the state and why one must submit it? What are the proper limits of its authority and which I cannot dispense to be made compatible with the liberty without which I am less than a man? These are the questions that political thought trying to address. It systematically reflects on systems, processes and practices of political life. According to Doyle three main features are involved in the study of political thought: “the nature and functions of man; his relation to the rest of the universe which involves a consideration of the meaning of life as a whole; emerging from the interaction of these two problems of the relation of man to his fellow man. The latter is the main concern of the political theory in the narrowest sense and involves a discussion on the nature, purpose and functions of the state.”

The observations of distinguished thinkers and political philosophers regarding the political aspect of our social life largely constitute political thought. It attempts to throw light on the characteristics of social thought that is human nature, human dilemmas, their ingenuity and various ways to human emancipation and progress. In addition, it focuses on the use of ‘power’ for the realization of a vision of an ideal social order in actual practice. Thus, Political thought comes very close to political philosophy. Initially, political thought as an academic aspect stands to signify political philosophy. The study of the history of political thought, for example, generally focuses on classic texts of political philosophy. According to a Dictionary of Political Analysis, political thought stands for the “area of political philosophy concerned with the study of the ideas and philosophic systems of those thinkers held to be important, on grounds of their interest, influence, relevance, etc. in relation to the development of politics as a practice or a study.” Again, according to A Dictionary of Political Thought “political thought includes the theories through which people attempt to explain each other’s political behaviour, the values by which they judge it, and the mechanisms (such as law) whereby they attempt to control it.” Illustrating the close relation between

#### **BOX 1.1 a) WESTERN POLITICAL THOUGHT**

Western political thought across the ages represents a series of efforts to understand and solve the problems of human life and association. Often those efforts began with basic questions about the human condition. How can we as humans, given our nature and dispositions, best achieve whatever definition of the good life is accepted as proper? How can we balance the claims of the individual with the well-being of the entire community? To what extent is human behavior shaped by environment and culture? Are there bedrock constants, such as rationality and an innate moral sense, that distinguish humans in their efforts to live in a community? Or are we motivated primarily by base passions and selfish predispositions that must be controlled or inhibited before any sort of collective social existence is possible?

political philosophy and political thought, Scruton observes: “the concept of justice, which may form a part of ordinary political thought, may also be subject of philosophical analysis, with a view to determining its grounds.” Political thought is an account of the ideas of prominent political thinkers – past and present – about the problems of politics, predominantly about the nature and functions of the state and its organs. These ideas are generally presented in chronological order indicating the historical and geographical setting wherein these ideas were born. A comparative and critical study of these ideas is also included in the study of political thought. Political thought or political theory/philosophy is a normative project that enables us to judge human action or to prescribe the best course of action. Political thought is the study of values.

Political thought is not primarily concerned with the facts of political life. It is normative in that it is concerned with values, moral codes, social standards and ideals. Generally, in most cases, normative notions are value judgments. Political thought is concerned with the criticism of bad standards and the search for good,

beneficial, or defensible ones. Its goal is to discriminate between the good and the bad opinions, practices and ideals that structure the human society. It does this by subjecting the core principles of political and social life to critical scrutiny. Political thought has no rigid form; it is expressed in various forms, such as statements, treatises, pronouncements, speeches, rhetoric, political commentaries, a coherent idea, logical thinking, etc. What is pertinent about political thought is that it is 'time bound'; it changes as and when the practices and policies of the state change. Thus, we have Greek thought or Roman thought of the ancient period or the political thought of the medieval period.

### 1.1.2 MEANING AND NATURE OF POLITICAL THOUGHT

The meaning nature, purpose, functions, etc., of the state constitutes the heart and soul of political thought. The comprehensive scope of political thought is best illustrated in the works of thinkers like Plato, Aristotle, St Thomas Aquinas, Hegel and Green. Political thought generally reflects and is influenced by existing political conditions. Most political theories arose either to justify the authority or to challenge it to transform. Political theories also emerge when philosophers speculate about the prevailing political conditions. For example, we cannot understand Plato's *Republic* until we understand the conditions in the Greek city-states during Plato's time. More's *Utopia* depends upon the background of social unrest during the change from agriculture to sheep raising in England.

Political thought reflects the reasons that influence political changes and development. Political theories also influence political development. While conditioned by the existing condition, political theories in turn influence men to change their political institutions. Moreover, when there is a change in the conditions, it leads to the emergence of new theories. Political thought also reflects on the state of intellectual development at a particular historical juncture in a particular region or state. Similarly, the nature of political thought depends on the nature of political institutions as well as the progress of thought processes in other aspects or areas.

Further political thought is fundamentally relative in its subject matter and never makes any claims about absolute truth. In the past it grew out of actual conditions and existing modes of thought; at present, it represents problems with which we must deal.

However, there will not be any single answer to these problems in political thinking. This lack of unity is the strength of political thought which led to very rich and diverse ideas to come and flourish. These ideas, at a later period, were primarily responsible for the formation of new political systems and states. It is this lack of unanimity that leads to the differences of opinions that eventually end up in the creation of new political parties and forms.

If we analyse the subject matter with which political thought is concerned with, we come to know that different types of issues emerged at various times based on the prevailing social, political and economic conditions. In the ancient period, it was primarily concerned with ethics and politics, in the medieval period the focus is on the supremacy of spiritual and state authorities, in the post-renaissance period

#### BOX 1.1 b) Nature of Political Thought

Political thought is by its very nature concerned with public matters, the inclusive property of a community. Not only do such matters typically include common defense, domestic peace, economic advancement, and the administration of justice, but they also include a more abstract sense of collective purpose and direction, a network of social meaning embedded in a particular time and place. The exact form taken by political institutions responsible for public matters and the institutionalized practices whose purpose is to direct human action are the concerns of the entire community since every member is eager to secure some approximation of a meaningful life.

(particularly from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards) political thought centred on issues related to rivalry between monarchy and democratic forces. When political conditions have changed significantly from one period to another, the same problem assumes a different meaning. Thus, the individual has become the centre of liberal thinking from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards. The same liberal thinking also advocated for limited government. Similarly, from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, welfare politics, government regulations, state-centric public sector, and socialist ideology became more popular due to the emergence of large-scale wage labourers.

Moreover, a very small number of thinkers have attempted to produce a reliable and complete theory of the state. They have explored the origin of the state, which resulted in the appearance of multiple theories on the origin of the state. While divine theory points toward the god's will to the emergence of the state, Social Contractual theory subjects the emergence of the state to the voluntary and consensual agreement between the people. Contrary to these, the Evolutionary theory attributes the origin of the state to the requirements of the people for order and security.

From the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards, political thought started focusing on the nature and shape of sovereignty. The early political thinkers equated sovereignty with monarchy and they gave absolute power to the king. Challenging this absolute power of the king has led to the emergence of the notion of popular sovereignty where people are the sovereign. Accordingly, the nature of ethics, law and authority also transformed in the writings of the political thinkers. For example, the nature of the law has changed from the nature of divine sanction to monarchical orders to human reason in the writings of political thinkers. Similarly, modern democracies have emerged based on the idea that laws must be framed and performed by organs of popular government and the same must be modified periodically reflecting the changing demands and social needs.

Similarly, there were considerable differences among the political thinkers regarding the scope and purpose of the state activities. On the one hand, individualism advocates limited powers to the state and empowers the individual with a lot much authority, on the other hand, socialist thought argues for larger power to the state to increase the scope of social welfare and development of the community. We might find many other theories that can fall in between these two extremes.

Thus, we can divide political thinkers broadly into two categories according to their method of approaching the subject. The first group constructs an ideal state of affairs, and using that as a model, criticizes existing conditions. The idea is based on fundamental assumptions taken from actual experience. The result of this form of inquiry is that the thinkers concern themselves largely with the general principles underlying individual and social action. Plato chronologically and essentially leads the way in this deductive method of approach. The second group, whose first leading exponent was Aristotle, used an inductive method of reasoning to understand political problems. Their concern is more with the forms of government, their workings, and limitations than with the abstract principles upon which they are based. As each era shifts its ground on the basic assumption, the trend of political speculation is modified to this radical outlook.

Further, since political thought generally focuses on supporting or attacking existing political institutions, based on its nature it may be divided largely into two categories: a) conservative, and b) critical. While conservative thinkers want to maintain the status quo by upholding age-old traditions and values, critical theories oppose the status quo and advocate radical and transformative politics aiming to remedy evils from the existing systems.

### **1.1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF POLITICAL THOUGHT**

Political thought derives its importance from the purpose it serves in proposing diverse political values, which led to the formation of multiple political institutions to fulfil the needs of the people. It also helps us to understand the political reality and inspires us to change the reality if it is not serving the people's interests.

The most important dimension of political thought is it involves speculation at the highest level regarding what can be considered a good life and the political institutions suitable for realizing that life. The significance of political theory is in suggesting the moral criteria to judge the moral worth of a political state and to put forward alternative propositions to meet ethical standards.

Political thought has many dimensions: it describes political phenomena; explains the political reality; puts forward ideas about political goals; advocates one or the other kind of political action to attain the political objectives; and critically analyses the functioning of the political institutions. Most importantly, political thought addresses the fundamental question related to our lives: how to live together while fulfilling individual interests and aspirations. If politics is nothing but an activity related to the management of 'collective affairs', the significance of political thought is offering various ideas, doctrines and approaches to manage the collective life. Therefore, it pays attention to proposing certain ideas regarding what constitutes to be an ideal state, the basis for political legitimacy or authority, what can be the best form of government, how to regulate relations between individuals and the state, etc.

#### **BOX 1.1.c) Importance of Political Thought**

The role of government and that of our relationships with each other in terms of power make significant the activity of political thought, thinking systematically about these questions of politics. A well-developed and rich tradition of political thought has often been mined for arguments in support of, or against, alternative political arrangements. Many great thinkers are seen as part of this tradition because not only do they refer to one another in their work, but their writings are taken to have developed a common language for the discussion of political problems.

The significance of political thought lies in its attempt to give precision, accuracy and definiteness to the political terms that we use in our day-to-day life. Though every discipline may be attempting to do the same for its area of concern, however, it is very important for Political Science since many of its concepts such as state, sovereignty, power, freedom, justice, liberty, authority, democracy, etc., are used by an ordinary man to scholars of political science.

The study of political thought also helps in understanding history, as it provides an interpretation of historical developments. It offers insights into the intellectual environment of the past and enlightens us regarding the motives hidden in various political revolutions, movements, and activities. Moreover, if the developments in the past were influenced by human will, we need to know the ideas, ideals, values, and motives that channelled the will. We must know the past in order to understand the present.

Most significantly, the convergence of political thought with other knowledge streams benefits us in understanding the reality and environment around us much better manner. Political thought's engagement with morals and ethics, metaphysics, humans and society (anthropology and sociology), psychology and economics, law and jurisprudence, national and international, etc. equip us to understand and interpret life around us profoundly.

Similarly, political thinkers, while interpreting reality, take different perspectives or give primacy to one rather than to the other. If one gives importance to the values, others might prefer resources and power. This multiplicity or diversity of approaches has immense benefits for students of politics in making choices between one and the other.

However, it is in our common sense that political thought may not provide definite solutions to all questions and resolve all disputes. It can never explicitly state whether a parliamentary form of government or a presidential form of government is better. Similarly, it cannot provide answers as to whether socialism is a

better form of system than capitalism, for that matter, it never provides answers with a degree of finality. However, the study of political thought helps us in reflecting, deliberating, and debating in our search for answers. In the process, it infuses mutual trust, accommodation, respect for diversity, and tolerance to differences.

### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS I**

**NOTE:** Use the space given below for your answers. Use separate sheet if space is not sufficient.

1 Political thought is not primarily concerned with the facts of political life. Comment.

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2 How do you assess the meaning of Political Thought?

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3 The subject matter of Political Thought changes with the changes to the context in which it evolved. How do you understand this?

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4 We can divide political thinkers broadly into two categories according to their method of approaching the subject. Comment.

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#### **1.1.4 EMERGENCE OF WESTERN POLITICAL THOUGHT: THE SOPHISTS**

The beginning of Western political thought is generally believed to be started with the major intellectual awakening, an Enlightenment, in ancient Greece in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, when basic issues related to life, especially ethics and politics, were thoroughly explored and age-old ideas/thoughts were questioned. The Sophists were at the forefront of the Greek awakening; the others who played equally important roles were Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes, and Socrates. The Sophists invented and practiced new ways of thinking and reasoned debates. They tried to test the validity of ideas by placing them in opposite positions and used carry debates to determine which one of them had a stronger claim.

There are two reasons for beginning one's study of the history of Western political thought with the Sophists. Firstly, the Sophists are serious and thoroughly methodological political intellectuals, deliberating upon the most critical aspects of ethics which are extremely important to any student of politics. Secondly, the importance of the Sophists stems from the fact that they had immense influence on later political thinkers

such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. In fact, they set the template and range of the issues for the thinkers to delve into in a later period. Therefore, without understanding Sophists we cannot understand why Plato and Aristotle argued over certain issues, such as justice, democracy, polity, etc.

Sophists were unique in many ways in ancient Greek society. They were teachers who toured the entire Greece to teach. They taught all the things that make their students successful in their pursuits, such as rhetoric and public speaking. These were valuable abilities in a society (ancient Greece), where persuasively convincing others led to political power and economic wealth. Due to the permissiveness, tolerance, democracy, freedom of speech, and availability of wealth, many of the Sophists centred their activities in Athens. The most prominent Sophists were Protagoras, Thrasymachus, Hippias, Gorgias, Prodicus, Callicles, Lycophron, Antiphon and Cratylus. The Sophists identified as a separate group primarily because they were the ones who introduced professional teaching by charging fees to their students. Though they never shared the same kind of beliefs or values, however, all of them followed more or less the same kind of methods in their arguments (rhetoric), and focused more on developing communication skills among their students to make them successful in politics. The same skills were also useful to attain high administrative positions. The Sophists examined the ethical basis of political life and deliberated on whether one should live by existing customs (attributed to nature), or follow norms and legal rules established by human agreement. They argued that rules were framed as a result of the agreement between people, therefore, they denied the notion of justice based on nature.

Sophists had become popular in many ways in ancient Greece. Their teaching was mainly based on providing practical skills that can bring material wealth, social status and political power. They were in high demand, especially for their teachings in public speaking, as it was vital for those who wanted to pursue a profession in politics. In a society that values deliberation and debates, it is obvious that those who pursue people better (in demos, assemblies, courts) were successful in attaining power and positions.

Initial Sophists were well appreciated but later on they have become unpopular and subjected to controversy and hostility for many reasons. Many resented the high fees charged to their students. Very few aristocratic students could afford the charges, therefore many who wanted to study were denied the opportunity. In a way, Sophists taught the wealthy people on how to attain power and increase their wealth, which made democrats angry with the Sophists. The Sophists also attracted significant resentment because they challenged the existing conventions. Many of the new and unconventional ideas of the Sophists were very controversial and considered to threaten the existing customs and traditions, especially ethics and religion. Plato's writings inform us that Socrates was very critical of Sophists, challenged most of their ideas, and called Sophists as 'showy talkers' and shallow thinkers.

#### **BOX 1.1d): Sophists**

Sophists are professional teachers of the "art of rhetoric" who thrived in Greece around 400 BC. It is a body many different thinkers. The most influential doctrine associated with them was that of the distinction between "nature and convention". The Sophists gave some of the earliest formulations of the idea of natural law. They were noteworthy for their belief in progress, and for their attempt to persuade people that virtue, and the art of government, could be taught to all rational beings. This had a revolutionary impact on Athenian society, and also was partly responsible for Plato's attacks on them.

### **1.1.5 SOPHISTS: COMMON FEATURES**

**Humanists** – Though the Sophists did not constitute a school, but they had shared some tendencies in

common. Since they were humanists, they made humans the heart of their thought and study. Earlier Greek philosophers had concerned themselves with the external world; their aim was to discover the unity behind the manifold appearances in nature. Some found it in one element, e.g., water; and others in other elements like fire and air. They did not turn their attention to the world of men. The Sophists were the first to bring about a swing in the direction of humanistic studies like ethics, politics, the art of speech and discussion, and eloquence. They were the first to disengage the study of man and society from the study of nature. It was implicit in their teachings that man and society could be explained by principles different from those operating in nature. This tendency found its culmination in the teaching of Socrates who is said to have brought philosophy from heaven to earth by turning it from physical nature to human affairs. This was a great contribution of the Sophists not only to Greek political thought but also to the larger world. This shift in the direction of thinking was reflected eloquently in the well-known statement of Protagoras: "Man is the measure of all things". This has been sometimes interpreted in an individualistic sense to mean that for each man things are as they appear to him; that is good which appears good to him and that is bad which appears bad. Though this interpretation does not seem to be justifiable, Protagoras was not an individualist. All that he meant was that no knowledge of the world out of relationship to man was possible; all knowledge is a human enterprise and so depends upon human faculties.

**Sceptical Attitude** – Most of the Sophists had a sceptical attitude towards the ideals of absolute knowledge. The general application of their teaching is that there is nothing absolutely and universally true; there are no universally accepted principles and canons of thought and conduct. There are no abstract principles of justice which are valid everywhere. This amounts to a denial of rationality in nature which had been the basis of earlier Greek thought. Some Sophists, e.g. Gorgias developed a thoroughgoing scepticism from which no branch of the traditional beliefs of the Greeks remained immune. He held that nothing exists; that if it did exist it would be unknowable, and that if it could be known, the knowledge could not be communicated to others. Such complete scepticism tended to upset the traditional views about the nature of the state, the nature and origin of laws and the sanction behind them.

**State an Artificial thing** – In general, the Sophists held that the state is an artificial thing designed by men to achieve some end contrary to the natural order of things.

**Laws contrary to Nature** – The laws vary from state to state, some enjoying what others forbid. Such laws can be neither commands of God nor the manifestation of any abstract principle of justice; they are conventions made by men to suit their particular needs; the laws prohibit and make it difficult for the strong to dominate the weak and usurp all the power to themselves. Hence, laws are different from nature.

**Versatile** – Sophists were versatile; they were the historical romancers, the theosophists, the sceptics, and the psychologists of their day. There was hardly any subject which was not taught by them. We can see the Sophists' versatilities more clearly in the diversities of the subjects that they had studied. They rarely limited themselves to one subject, rather their interest was on multitudes. Their peak of versatility was reached in the person of Hippias who was at once a poet and mathematician, mythologist, moralist, historian and politician, and also knew music and other art in ancient Grece.

**Tutors** – The Sophists usually, but not necessarily always, accepted payment for the instructions imparted by them.

## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS II

**NOTE:** Use the space given below for your answers. Use separate sheet if space is not sufficient.

- 1 Sophists had immense influence on later political thinkers such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Explain.

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- 2 Who are the Sophists and mention some of their names?

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- 3 Though Sophists significantly differ from each other in their views, they have certain common features. Comment.

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### 1.1.6 SOCRATES AND SOPHISTS

It must be mentioned at the very outset that it is difficult to find out exactly, and in detail, what the various Sophists thought. Very little of their original writing has survived, often in small fragments which are hard to interpret. Much of the Sophists' ideas are mainly known from Plato, a philosopher who helped lay the foundations of Western philosophy and science. Plato studied philosophy under the guidance of Socrates. Plato deliberates on the Sophists' ideas, though he generally has a serious reservation about them. Because of this negative attitude towards the Sophists, Plato is to a large extent responsible for the present view on Sophists. He portrayed Sophists in a darker and more deleterious manner, blaming them as stingy instructors who deceive others for money and material benefits. In Plato's *Dialogues* on Socrates,

#### BOX 1.1d): Sophists

Sophists are professional teachers of the "art of rhetoric" who thrived in Greece around 400 BC. It is a body many different thinkers. The most influential doctrine associated with them was that of the distinction between "nature and convention". The Sophists gave some of the earliest formulations of the idea of natural law. They were noteworthy for their belief in progress, and for their attempt to persuade people that virtue, and the art of government, could be taught to all rational beings. This had a revolutionary impact on Athenian society, and also was partly responsible for Plato's attacks on them.

he informs us that Socrates refuted Sophists several times. We are not too sure how much was true, accurate, or fair of the picture provided by Plato on Sophists. Some of the Sophists, for example, Protagoras and Prodicus, are, however, portrayed in a fairly positive manner in Plato's writings.

Socrates, a teacher of Plato and the son of an Athenian sculptor was born in 470 BC. Although Socrates was trained in his family's profession of sculpture, he spent most of his time indulging in studying philosophical deliberations. As per the existing practice, he actively took up civic duties and fought in the war. His utmost

commitment to ethics and ethically bounded politics prevented him not to involved in any activities that were not lawful. He also became president of the Athenian Assembly. Socrates was sentenced to death in 399 BC by the Athens Court alleging that he was corrupting the society by not praying to the gods of the state, and, instead introducing new gods.

Many considered Socrates as one of the Sophists because he shared some of their ideas, particularly the human-centred approach. However, in reality, Socrates seriously differed from Sophists and made efforts to reveal their hollowness and pretentious character. He also questioned many of the ideas espoused by the Sophists. In fact, many of Socrates' ideas and philosophical ideas were a by-product of his differences with the Sophists. The following section delves into some of the important ideas of Socrates.

### **1.1.7 CENTRAL IDEAS OF SOCRATES**

One of the main difficulties in understanding the ideas of Socrates is that he wrote nothing and whatever knowledge we possess about him is made available to us by his pupils like Plato, Xenophon, Socrates, etc. through their writings.

**Views on Knowledge** – Socrates attached great importance to knowledge, which he considered a real and permanent possession of the mind. We have to understand that Socrates was not implying that knowledge is merely storing up of facts. On the other hand, he treated knowledge as identical to morality. He considered all other things as inferior to knowledge and asserted that objective good could be known only through logical investigation. Socrates identifies knowledge with virtue. The identification of virtue with knowledge had far-reaching implications in the field of politics. Socrates stated that those who know must rule. On this premise, later on, Plato built his concept of the rule of the philosopher king.

**Socrates on State** – For Socrates the state is natural. To him state was the expression of virtue, knowledge and wisdom. It was the result of a pre-natal contract and exists not only for the sake of life but good life. Naturally, Socrates thought that the state was the infusion of order and reason. Socrates stated that persons with expert knowledge and wisdom, and who can transmit their political instincts should conduct the political affairs.

**Views on Equality** – Socrates was fervently opposed to the notion of equality of men and strongly pronounced that the prevailing inequality would indicate that men could never be equal. He therefore, bitterly criticised the premise of the Athenian democracy that all citizens were equal and equally qualified to take part in the government. He asserted that only those who possess the highest wisdom and utmost virtue must entrusted to run the government.

**Views on Democracy** – Socrates was a bitter critic of the Athenian type of democracy which was neither a rule by law nor a rule by wise people. He did not favour of democratic methods, such as popular elections for government offices, particularly election by lots. In his capacity as a member of the council of Athens, Socrates intensely opposed the censure of the Athenian generals due to the pressure from the mob. His dislike for the prevailing democracy in Athens was to a large extent influenced him not to have faith in the principle of equality.

**Views on Laws** – Socrates has immense faith in laws and considered laws as next only to God. He considered that laws should be the basis for the conduct of the state. He considered that the customs and traditions provide the foundation for law and justice. He clearly stated that the violation of laws is both immoral and illegal. As Barker has observed, "He (Socrates) was always and never more than a loyal servant of Athens. Her laws were to him only less sacred than the command of God, and not to be disobeyed except for the righteousness's sake; nor would he leave the prison where he lay bound even when escape was easy, lest the

laws should rebuke his flight.”

### **1.1.8 SOCRATES’ REFUTATION OF SOPHISTS’ IDEAS**

Socrates’ mission in his life was to convince those people of their ignorance who claimed to be the wisest. He convinced others that they were unwise enough to profess to know they did not know, and that “he was wise enough to confess that he nothing knew save that he nothing knew.” He exposed the hollowness of the Sophists who claimed to be the teachers of Athenians. He refuted them in all their doctrines. He challenged and fought against shallow knowledge and stood for genuine wisdom.

The method that Socrates adopted in fulfilling his mission, was the dialectic method, which consisted of asking a person to define terms like Justice and Virtue; this method of questions and answers is primarily aimed at bringing out the inner ambiguities and inconsistencies of the position adopted by the opponent and ultimately convincing him of his ignorance. Dunning described his method as that of “doubt and definition.” Through this method, Socrates tried to evolve his philosophy by refuting contemporary notions. Prof. Barker while criticising Socrates’s method acknowledges its value for the discovery of truth. He says “it was a method unpleasant for the victim and a method which might become merely eristic, turning to argument in any direction for the sake of argument; but it was all the same, in the hands of Socrates, a genuine organ of truth.”

The main ideals of Socrates that come in contrast with that of the Sophists are the following:

1. Whereas Sophists had generally used the antithesis between nature and convention to deny the validity of social laws and customs, Socrates was definitely conservative and maintained that they must be observed. Nothing reveals more clearly his loyalty to Athens and her laws than the manner of his death. He would not escape from prison, for to have done so would have amounted to disloyalty to the laws of the state.
2. It should also be remembered that Socrates believed in an objective right and universal justice whose existence was denied by the Sophists, and sought to set up ethical rules on a definitely rational or intellectual basis. He questioned the nihilistic values of the elements in Sophists. He taught that virtue is knowledge and vice is ignorance.
3. The instruction imparted by him was liberal and not technical; he did not teach people how to achieve success in politics; he probed deeper and aimed at conveying what may be called scientific knowledge. For Socrates what mattered was not what a man knew but the way he knew it. He made a fundamental distinction between ordinary knowledge and real knowledge which sets him in a class wholly apart from the Sophists.
4. Socrates went on to an important step further than the Sophists in effecting a real breach with the earlier Greek philosophers. It is Socrates who constitutes the transition from the age of Anaximander to that of Plato and Aristotle and not the Sophists. The early Greek philosophers, Ionians as they were called, confined themselves to the mechanical explanation of things; they tried to find out how things were made and did not enquire why they were made. In other words, their point of view was not teleological. It was Socrates, and not the Sophists, who for the first time in the history of the thought concerned himself with the teleological explanation of things; he enquired into their purpose or final cause. Aristotle and Plato carried this forward in their writings later on.
5. The Sophists believed that human conduct could be made into an art, and professed the ability to give instructions in it. It can, therefore, be maintained that, like Socrates, they were committed to a proposition that goodness is knowledge. There is, however, a significant difference between Sophistic

and Socrates. Whereas the Sophists held that goodness was a special art that could be mastered like other arts by the attainment of a special knowledge. Socrates believed that goodness was a general capacity and thus unique. There can be no special art of goodness comparable to the art of navigation or healing. The knowledge that is essential to goodness is not special or professional knowledge that can be acquired through special teaching; it is rather the knowledge of the nature of things or ultimate reality. This is connected with the doctrine of two kinds of knowledge.

6. The Sophists demanded fees for the instructions imparted to their students. Most of their pupils came from the ranks of the rich. Socrates, in contrast, did not accept any fee and lived modestly, critically challenging what he considered wrong. He met and talked freely with every sort of person who wanted to listen to him and did not hobnob with the rich. He was thus able to show a greater independence of spirit than the Sophists.

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 3

**NOTE:** Use the space given below for your answers. Use separate sheet if space is not sufficient.

- 1 Socrates treated knowledge as identical to morality. Elaborate.

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- 2 Why Socrates became a bitter critic of Democracy?

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- 3 Socrates has immense faith in laws. Explain.

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- 4 Socrates was the first one to concerned with the teleological explanation of things. How do you understand this?

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### 1.1.9 LET US SUM UP

Socrates occupies a unique place in the history of political thought. He professed the wisdom of man and of god, and he believed that without having a belief in these two things, that is, in man and god, a rational and happy society cannot be realized. He raised the fundamental question of the possible conflict between political and ethical standards about right and wrong. Socrates' death demonstrated that the individual should be guided by the fundamental precepts that reason taught to him rather than by the laws of the state. He was a strong critic of the current conventional mores and conventional confusions that passed for wisdom in the marketplace. Socrates' great concern was the love and pursuit of wisdom, and that seemed to him, too, the

chief and fundamental concern of the state. Socrates strongly stood for the sovereignty of knowledge; however, in its political application, this doctrine of the sovereignty of knowledge might turn into a doctrine of enlightened despotism. It was the doctrine of enlightened despotism that was adopted later on by Plato in his *Republic*. Such a theory of enlightened despotism was necessarily inimical to democracy; it also became inimical to the rule of law. This again is a conclusion which, for a time at any rate, Plato was ready to draw. For the proper guidance of the state, he said, it was necessary that the wise should rule. Politics is a matter for thought, and government is a concern of the wise, he declared. Plato was very much influenced by these Socratic principles. Plato owes greatly to Socrates as some considerable measure of the political principles developed in the *Republic* really belonged to Socrates and were learned directly from him by Plato.

#### 1.1.10 KEY WORDS

|                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Abstract:</b>         | Existing only as an idea, not as a physical thing.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Anaximander:</b>      | A presocratic Greek philosopher who believed the universal substance to be infinity rather than something resembling ordinary objects (611-547 BC).                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Convention:</b>       | A traditional way of behaving or of doing something.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Deductive Method:</b> | The deductive method, also known as deductive reasoning or top-down reasoning, is a logical approach that starts with general ideas and then draws specific conclusions.                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Inductive Method:</b> | The inductive method is a way of reasoning that involves drawing general conclusions from specific observations. It's also known as inductive logic or bottom-up reasoning.                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Jurisprudence:</b>    | The science, theory or philosophy of law.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Natural Law:</b>      | A theory in ethics and philosophy that says that human beings possess intrinsic values that govern their reasoning and behaviour. Natural law maintains that these rules of right and wrong are inherent in people and are not created by society or court judges.                                |
| <b>Rhetoric:</b>         | Rhetoric is the art of persuasion. It is one of the three ancient arts of discourse (trivium) along with grammar and logic/dialectic.                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Teleological:</b>     | Relating to or involving the explanation of phenomena in terms of the purpose they serve rather than of the cause by which they arise.                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Utopia:</b>           | A place or state that exists only in the imagination, where everything is perfect.                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Virtue:</b>           | The Greek word for 'virtue' is <i>arete</i> , which can also be translated as "goodness", "excellence", or "fulfilment". The Greeks believed that virtue was tied to the idea of <i>ergon</i> , or function, and that the virtues of something were what allowed it to perform its function well. |

#### 1.1.11 FURTHER READINGS

- W. M. Spellman, *A Very Short History of Western Political Thought*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011, Chapter 1: City-States and Republics c. 400 BCE–c. 400 CE.
- Brian R. Nelson, *Western Political Thought: From Socrates to the Age of Ideology*. Illinois, Waveland Press, 2015, Chapter 1: Socrates.
- J.S. McClelland, *A History of Western Political Thought*. Routledge, London and New York, 1996, Chapter 1: Ancient Greek Political Thought; Chapter 2: Socrates and Plato.
- *A Cambridge Companion to Ancient Political Thought*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge,

2009, Chapter 5.

- Raymond G. Gettell, “The Nature of Political Thought”. *American Political Science Review*, Volume 17, Issue 2, May 1923, pp. 204 – 215, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/1944108>.
- John E. Trent, “Thoughts on Political Thought: An Introduction”. *International Political Science Review*, Volume 11, Number 1, January 1990, pp. 5-23.

#### **1.1.12 EXERCISES**

- 1 How do you understand the meaning of Political Thought?
- 2 Critically analyse the nature and significance of Political Thought.
- 3 Outline the main philosophical propositions of Sophists.
- 4 What are the central ideas of Socrates?
- 5 Write a note on Socrates Refutation of Sophist Ideas.

## **1.2 PLATO’S REPUBLIC: IDEALISM AND ITS CRITIQUE**

**- Dr. Rajnish Saryal**

### **STRUCTURE**

#### **1.2.0 Objectives**

#### **1.2.1 Introduction**

#### **1.2.2 Influence of Contemporary Situation on Plato’s Philosophy**

#### **1.2.3 Idealism in Plato’s The Republic**

#### **1.2.4 Justice and Ideal State**

#### **1.2.5 Ideal State and Education**

##### **1.1.5.1 Scheme of Education**

#### **1.2.6 Ideal State and Theory of Communism**

##### **1.1.6.1 Two Main forms of Plato’s Communism**

##### **1.1.6.2 Partial Application of Plato’s Communism**

##### **1.1.6.3 Character of Plato’s Communism of Property**

##### **1.1.6.4 Plato’s Communism of Wives**

##### **1.1.6.5 Scheme of Communism of Wives**

#### **1.2.7 Conception of the Philosopher King**

#### **1.2.8 Platonic Idealism and its Critics**

#### **1.2.9 Let Us Sum Up**

#### **1.2.10 Key Words**

#### **1.2.11 Further Readings**

#### **1.2.12 Exercises**

### **1.2.0 OBJECTIVES**

**Dear Learner, this lesson introduces you to one of the famous Western Political Philosophers, Plato. Your knowing of Plato also familiarises you with many foundational concepts of Political Science, such as state, law, citizen, republic, equality, justice, communism, idealism, etc. After going through this lesson, you will be able to understand:**

- importance of Plato among the galaxy of thinkers;
- influence of contemporary situation on Plato’s philosophical foundations;
- the significance of Plato’s works, particularly *The Republic*;
- Plato’s concepts of Justice, Ideal State, Education, and Communism; and

- Plato's conception of the Philosopher-King; and
- Idealism in Plato's philosophy and criticism it encountered with.

### **1.2.1 INTRODUCTION**

Plato was one of the greatest philosophers of the world. He was born in 427 BC in Greece and died in 347 B.C. He was named initially as Aristocles since he was born into an aristocratic family in Athens, one of the city-states. This was supplanted by the nickname "Plato", because of the width of his shoulders and the expanse of his brow. Plato joined the Socratic Circle in 407 BC and learned philosophy under his guidance. He became a great lover of wisdom under the influence of Socrates. From the very beginning, he had decided to embrace a Political career in Athens, but the death of Socrates drove him from that side to the study of philosophy as a profession. The tragic death of Socrates had a huge influence on every phase of Platonic thought. He developed a strong aversion to democracy, despised the mob, and could not even develop the traits of his aristocratic lineage. He strongly felt that democracy must be replaced by the rule of the best with the highest level of wisdom. It is no wonder then that his entire philosophical quest was centred on ways to find the wisest and persuade them to become the rulers.

Since Plato had tried his best to save the life of Socrates, many political leaders, especially the ruling classes, have become suspicious of Plato and his activities. Under these circumstances, he was urged by his friends that Athens was not a safe place for him and advised him to go on a voyage to see the world. Hence he set out for an extensive journey in 399 B.C. The existing sources are not revealing where he had travelled for a period of twelve years. But he acquired immense wisdom during those years. According to M.B. Foster, "Some of the travels ascribed to him are probably fictitious". But he is certain about his visit to Italy and Sicily. He returned to Athens in 387 B.C.

Plato now wants to focus on his quest to identify the philosopher-rulers. He founded a university – called the Academy – in a shady garden outside the walls. The Academy of Plato was both a school and an institute of scientific research. It was visited by nearly all the famous scientists of the time. The purpose of the foundation of the Academy was two-fold. In the first place, it served as an organization of pure research. In second place, the Academy was also a school of political training, from which statesmen and legislators. Like all the philosophers of Greece, he sought to impart knowledge to teach a philosophy that should be a way and an inspiration for life. His philosophy, in the first place, was the conversion of the soul, and in the second place, the service of mankind.

### **1.2.2 PLATO'S PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS: INFLUENCE OF CONTEMPORARY SITUATION**

Plato, an Athenian aristocrat by birth, had an ambition of a political career in the prime of his life. However, Socrates' cruel death at the hands of Athenian democracy proved to be a turning point in many ways. Now instead of aspiring for a political office, he started finding out the fundamental defects in Athenian democracy and other sister city-states. After studying the Athenian democracy minutely, Plato found that the condition of Athens was far from healthy. There were two fundamental flaws in the then Athens: One was excessive individualism and another was amateurish meddlesomeness. Due to these defects, Plato found that the city was divided into two hostile camps—the rich and the poor, one of the oppressors and the other oppressed.

Nothing stirred the noble soul of Plato in contemporary politics more than the violent spirit of individualism which made men capture the offices of the state to fulfil their own selfish ends. The ruling class, whichever was in power, would always use its political power to advance its economic interests. The political offices had no sanctity behind them. They became, rather the instruments to promote the financial interests of the

ruling class. Such a spirit of excessive individualism which was the result of the teaching of popular Sophist thinkers was Plato's main target of attack. The greatest opponents whom Plato had to refute were the younger Sophists who had propounded that the state was only a means to an end i.e. the individual. The state was only a change-congeries of the individuals, according to them.

It was this spirit of excessive individualism that had divided not only Athens but every other city into hostile cities. In actual practice there existed two cities side by side in one city. In other city-states which had oligarchical forms of government, the condition was even worse than in democracies. The ruling body which was always the representative of the rich people was always in a state of opposition to its subjects- the poorer section of the city. Because their interests clashed, each section was in search of an opportunity to overthrow the other. As Plato found it the root of all evil, was the love of money. Hence while suggesting the remedy for this evil, Plato abolishes the right of the ruler to have money or property or land or house of their own.

Plato still, again, found that the rich, who still sought to be richer, captured the offices of the state for the sake of advantages that its corrupt use might give them. They seized the authority of the state for the sake of the spoils which it might bring. The state which ought to be impartial between the different classes, itself became an instrument of one class that was opposed to the other. Instead of uniting the various classes by removing their differences, the state increased their differences by adding its weight to strengthen one class against the rest. No wonder the state was divided against itself or as Plato says "in every state there were two separate states."

Such a state of affairs prevailed not only in oligarchies but democracies also which were not exempted from the vice of political selfishness. Though apparently every man was treated equal to every other, yet the poor had an advantage there due to their greater number. As Plato found it, the citizens belonging to states where democracy was practiced not only paid themselves from the state exchequer for their political service rendered to the state but also used the authority to exploit the rich, through confiscation of their property or imposition of extraordinarily high taxes. They, too, like the ruling class of the oligarchy, made politics into a source of economic gain. It is this confusion of economics and politics alike in oligarchies and democracies that contributes heavily to the furiousness of civic strife or as Barker puts it "social war".

The other defect i.e. amateurish meddlesomeness was evident through the system lottery. Any ignorant person could hold political office just by a sheer chance of lot. In its place, Plato's functional specialization means that every person in the state should perform the functions for which he naturally fits. He should not interfere in the sphere of the other. The ruler should be specifically trained in the art and philosophy of ruling.

Thus, we find that Plato's political writings are the product of the circumstances under which he lived. It is only in order to eradicate the two great evils that he writes the *Republic*. Hence, the *Republic* is a polemic against current teachers and contemporary politics.

### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 1**

**NOTE:** Use the space given below for your answers. Use separate sheet if space is not sufficient.

1 What are the two unhealthy conditions that Plato discovered in Athenian Democracy?

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2 The main criticism of Plato of Sophists is the excessive individualism that they are promoting. Elaborate.

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3 What are the major problems Plato found in the city-state of Athens?

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### 1.2.3 IDEALISM IN PLATO'S THE REPUBLIC

Plato was a prolific writer and he left a number of philosophical works after his death. Among them, **Republic** is the greatest work of Plato. In the Republic Plato attempted to establish the philosophical conception of justice, and in so doing he set forth his conception of an ideal state in which justice prevails. The point of view is primarily ethical and idealistic. According to Benjamin Jowett, Republic is the greatest of all the works of Plato and "is the centre around which the other dialogue may be grouped." It is a work that deserves to be called Political Science. It applies semantics reasoning and critical inquiry to political ideas and institutions. It is not a utopia but the doctrine that man must fatally and inextricably remain a prisoner of natural and social circumstances, Plato has faith in man's ability to create a community that will correspond to the ideal of knowledge and, therefore, justice.

The **Republic** is universally regarded as one of the greatest works of all time. In this dialogue particularly the conception of the state is closely involved in a general philosophical, ethical, and social theory. Plato in the *Republic* describes what a community must be if man within it is to realize fully his highest capacities. Thus, the dialogue is concerned with projecting an ideal condition of society, and it is listed among the political "utopias"; but it is concerned also with criticism of an actual condition of society, and it is a work of great political insight. It is a work in which he inquiries into the nature of the firstly ordered

#### BOX 1.2a: Plato's Universalism

Plato's political thought, like his larger system, resembles a huge building in which each part has its place, and in which neither the parts nor the whole can be understood apart from each other. His political theory, therefore, includes a theory of ethics, as well as of psychology; economics, and sociology. The current separation of modern social science into discrete subfields would have struck Plato as absurd-like a building made of parts that did not fit into an integrated whole.

state and society. It is still the most fascinating work of political philosophy ever written, and even the most confirmed democrat can still learn a great deal from Plato's profound insights into politics, including his biting criticisms of the basic concepts of democracy. According to Catlin, "The Republic is an ethical treatise and, although an example of Socratic dialectic, is dogmatic in its conclusions, involves psychological investigations and contains an educational prospectus and a political constitution." It is an ethical treatise because the problem that Plato has to tackle is essentially ethical. The aim is to make the lives of the citizens good and virtuous. The method adopted by Plato in the development of his theme in the Republic is dialectical. Thorough dialectical reasoning which is based on question and answer, Plato tries to discover the ultimate reality. The approach of Plato is essentially psychological, because the construction of the ideal state with which Plato is occupied, is based on the psychology of the human soul and its essential elements. It contains a long and elaborate scheme for the organization of an ideal polity, which was to be realized through a

detailed, noble and unique system of education.

The *Republic* of Plato has come down to us with a double title – *The State* a name by which it is generally called or *Concerning Justice*. Whether Plato himself was responsible for the title or not does not matter, for it is an accurate description of the contents of the book. Actually, its range of subject matter is such that it may be said to deal with the whole of human life. The subject matter of the *Republic* is the complete philosophy of man. As Nettleship says, “The republic represents a dramatized philosophy of human life.”

Plato in the *Republic* starts with the question: what is a good man and how is he made good? As an individual could not become good apart from the state, the question naturally leads to the second, what is a good state and how is it made good? Thus, Ethics leads to Politics. Now Plato had derived from Socrates that Virtue is Knowledge. This goodness of the state presupposes knowledge of the good of its ruler. So the third question arises: What is the knowledge of good which the rulers of the state must possess? This question can be answered by Metaphysics. As a corollary of the third question, the fourth question arises: what is the method by which the state can lead citizens toward the ultimate

good? An answer to this question leads to the theory of education. Finally, there must be harmony between the ultimate end of the state in making man good, its educational methods and its social and economic organisation of the state. Thus, we find that the *Republic* is at once a treatise on Ethics, Politics, Metaphysics, Education and Sociology. But Plato’s literary craftsmanship must be appreciated in as much as he made it look like a single treatise. The various and diverse subjects are dovetailed into one another in such a way that the *Republic* forms a single and organic whole. Briefly, we can say that Plato’s view on Justice, the Ideal State, Philosopher King, Education, Communism of Property and Wives constituted the central theme of the *Republic*.

#### BOX 1.2b: The Republic

The Republic, is by all accounts a great work of political philosophy. It is quite simply a remarkable work of the human mind. One cannot read it and be untouched by its spirit and by the profundity of its insights. And this was precisely Plato’s intent: If the Republic could not alter people’s politics, it could at least alter the lives of those who read it. For the Republic is not just about politics; it is about the individual and how he or she should live his or her life. Because it deals with an ideal, the Republic has often been described as a utopian work of political philosophy. However, it is a work that attempts to establish an ideal standard, a normative measuring rod, by which to judge existing political practices.

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 2

**NOTE:** Use the space given below for your answers. Use separate sheet if space is not sufficient.

1 The *Republic* is universally regarded as one of the greatest works of all time. Comment.

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2 Why the *Republic* considered as a dramatized philosophy of human life?

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3 The *Republic* is at once a treatise on Ethics, Politics, Metaphysics, and Education. Elaborate.

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### 1.2.4 JUSTICE AND IDEAL STATE

The Republic of Plato is primarily a treatise on justice. The discussion with which it is started is to enquire into the meaning, nature and habitation of justice. This inquiry is conducted through the medium of a dialogue. The speakers are Socrates, Cephalus, Polemarchus, Lysias and Euthydemus, Thrasymachus and Plato's elder brothers, Glaucon and Adeimantus. This long dialogue, which starts out ostensibly as an inquiry into the meaning of justice, turns early into an examination of the life of the just man, which can be read "writ large" in the life of the "just" state.

Before we proceed along with Plato in the search for Justice, we must note the following points: -

- First, Plato is a deductive thinker who deduces all his political philosophy from certain fundamental assumptions. He was a consistent thinker and always true to his plan. We cannot reject his conclusions while accepting his premises.
- Second, one of his fundamental assumptions is the tripartite division of man's mind into Reason, Spirit and Appetite – and the corresponding division of society into three classes i.e. the Ruler, the Soldiers and the Farmers. In this respect, Plato is indebted to Pythagoras.
- Third, as the father of the Idealist School in Politics and Philosophy, Plato could conceive of "beauty" without a "beautiful thing". As his philosophy is based on deduction from the larger Universe, "Particular" never factored in his propositions; he has attributed greater meaning to "Universal". In this regard, Socrates had a great influence on him.
- Fourth, Plato also acquired from his master the idea that "Virtue is Knowledge". From this statement, we can easily derive that there could not be any virtue without knowledge.
- Fifth, Plato adopted a negative approach to discover justice and separate it from other types of ethics. He refutes all the prevailing notions of justice to tell us what justice is not. Only after exhausting this approach that Plato could give us his theory of justice.

Though it is very difficult to resist the temptation of following Plato's dialectical logic with which he refutes the "Prima Facie" theories of Justice, yet we shall attempt to understand briefly the essence of his arguments against these theories.

The first theory of justice is that of Traditional morality which considers Justice to be "giving to every man his due." The latter phrase results in the view that it consists of "doing good to one's friends and evil to enemies." Plato refutes this on three grounds. (1) One's supposed friends may be friends only in appearance. (2) To do evil to anyone, including our enemies is inconsistent with the most basic notion of morality. (3) This view considers only the relations between two individuals on individualistic grounds and ignores the social whole which is the *raison d'état* of any theory of Justice.

Radical morality is the second theory which was held by some sections of the Sophists. The latter held two propositions: (1) that Justice is the interest of the stronger. That is, it identifies justice with potential the strongest and the surest is to get what he wants. And the government is the strongest, it gets what it wants. Because if Justice is in the interest of the stronger, the justice for the people will be "to seek the interest of the ruler." Therefore, the Subjects pursuing their own interests will be unjust.

"Injustice is better than justice" is the second proposition of the Radical Sophists. Justice, in this case, means

conforming to the authority where one must, and pursuing one's own interests where one can. Injustice is following one's own interests and Justice is conformity to the ruler's interests. The Sophists, individualists as they were, went to the extreme form of individualism. It is this extreme form of individualism that Plato desires to counter in the *Republic*.

But here Plato is satisfied with logically refuting the two propositions of the Sophists. To the first, he opposes the Socratic conception of government as an art. All art is for the sake of the material it touches and handles and not for the sake of the artist. The ruler exercises the art of government not to pursue his own interest but to improve the condition of the governed.

To the second proposition, Plato replies that "justice is always better than injustice and that a just man is wiser, stronger and happier than an unjust man for he knows his limitation too".

The third theory that Plato refutes is Pragmatism. It states that "Justice is an artificial thing, the product of social convention". Justice, the theory of Pragmatism argues, is "the child of fear and is based on the necessity of the weaker and not the interest of the stronger".

Plato states that all three theories of justice mentioned above share a common mistake or wrongness; they all have considered justice something external, established through a convention. Contrary to this understanding, Plato considers that Justice is something internal, rooted in human Soul. It is innately a virtue. Due to this, the Justice is not based on a chance-convention.

Now a perfect artist as Plato is, he does not outright give his theory of Justice. Instead of attempting at one an analysis of the human mind, Plato adopts the method of Large Letter, i.e. the method of solving deeper mysteries with the help of more easily understandable mysteries of similar kind and this discovers and defines Justice with the help of Ideal State. Justice exists both in the state and the individual. But in the state, it is a bigger and easily visible form. Plato proposes to consider Justice first as it exists in the state in its broadest form.

It is here, while constructing the state, that Plato illustrates the nature of the human mind. The state, like the human mind, is divided into three portions – Rulers, Soldiers and Farmers – representing as it were the three elements of the human mind – Reason, Spirit and Appetite respectively. As pointed out by Barker, "This triplicity of the soul, whatever its source, is the foundation of much of the Republic". This in part explains the meaning of the often-quoted line from the Republic that "state is individual writ large."

In this construction, Plato proceeds by a psychological method in the Republic. He takes up each of the three elements of the human mind beginning with the lowest i.e. Appetite and proceeds to the highest, which is Reason. He shows how each of these in its turn contributes its quota towards the creation of the state. The origin of the state, according to Plato, has to be found in the needs of man which can be satisfied only if they supplement each other. Men have many wants and no man is self-sufficient. Accordingly, they have helpers and exchange with one another. Wherever there is society there is some sort of satisfaction of needs and some exchange of services for this purpose.

#### **BOX 1.2c: Plato's Justice and Division of Labour**

Plato was the first to picture political society as a system of distinctive or differentiated roles ... each represented a necessary function; each was defined in terms of its contribution to sustaining the whole society: each bore rights, duties, expectations which provided definite guides and signposts for human behaviour and defined the place of the individual within the system. The harmonization and integration of these roles made a political society a functioning interdependent whole.... From Plato onwards...the distinctive marks of political philosophy was its approach to political society as a functioning system (Sheldon Wolin, Politics and Vision, Princeton, 1960, p.33).

However, the exchange of services implies another principle of almost equal importance, the Division of Labour and Specialization. If exchange satisfies the needs, it means that everyone has something extra to offer to others and less of some which he wants to receive from others. While the farmer produces more food than he consumes, the shoemaker makes more shoes than he can wear. Then it serves both of their purposes if one concentrates on producing more food and the other focuses on making more shoes. However, this process of producing and exchanging needs depends on the most fundamental aspect human “Soul”. The Soul is the source for humans to develop to different aptitudes and skills to do a particular kind of work better than the others. The logical conclusion of this proposition is that one excels well in one’s work only when he applies himself consistently in a work for which he naturally fits. This was possible only when he knew what Soul that Nature had given to him.

Thus, for Plato, the realisation of the ideal state is rooted in the idea of Justice. Justice is the connecting thread on which society forms a harmonious union of individuals, where each finds his work in line with his natural fitness and training. According to Sabine “Justice is the proper interrelation of the three functions, whether of the classes in the state or of the faculties in an individual.”

In short, this is how Plato put forward his idea of Justice: “giving every man his due”. This “What is due to him” depends on what he is fit for and how he trained for it. And what is due from him is trying sincerely to complete those tasks that he is required to complete to serve the society and community.

In a nutshell, Plato’s theory of Justice is based on three principles:

1. The first is the principle of non-interference. No class should interfere with the task of other classes. Each section must devote itself to its own duty and must not meddle with others’ work.
2. The “Division of Labour” or functional specialisation is the second principle.
3. The third is the principle of harmony. Human virtue according to Plato is divided into wisdom, courage, and temperance. Plato assigns each of these virtues to each class. There remains Justice. The spirit of Justice is nothing but harmonise the three virtues.

This is the conception of Justice that Plato wants to put forward to us. He thought that his idea of justice is the answer to individualism and selfishness which he considered the most dangerous elements with which ancient Greece was infected. In Plato’s justice, the individual is no longer an isolated individual pursuing his own selfish interests but part of a larger order. Here, the state or community is the whole, not the individual.

### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 3**

**NOTE:** Use the space given below for your answers. Use separate sheet if space is not sufficient.

- 1 Plato has attributed greater meaning to “Universal”. Explain.

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- 2 How Plato rejects the Sophist argument of “giving to every man his due”?

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3 Plato did not agree with the proposition that Justice is the interest of the stronger. Comment.

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4 For Plato, the state, like the human mind, is divided into three portions – Rulers, Soldiers and Farmers. Elaborate.

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5 What are the THREE principles on which Plato's justice is based on?

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### 1.2.5 IDEAL STATE AND EDUCATION

No scheme of human life was as important to Plato as education. He calls it “the one great thing”. Plato's justice demanded that everyone should do his own according to the nature entitled him to a particular function or an office. Birth as a criterion for distributing functions had been rejected by Plato. In its place, he had substituted ‘capacity’ or ‘nature’ as a standard. Plato, therefore, suggested that functions and offices must be distributed after carefully ascertaining of a man's nature. It is a principle of Justice, and to this requirement, Plato's theory of education was an indispensable necessity. It was a positive remedy for the operation of Justice in the ideal state. There is, thus, an organic connection between Plato's theory of Justice and his theory of education.

Plato sees education as the only true way to the permanent stability of the state. Plato's general view of education is most forcibly expressed in Book VII of the *Republic*. In that book, he sets forth the object of education, which is to turn the eye toward the light which the soul already possesses. What he really wants to say is that the basic purpose of education is not to make attempts to transfer knowledge into the soul, but to get the qualities that are hidden in the soul out; in the process, says Plato, we discover the properties latent in our soul. This way we can direct our activities to the right objects. But how is this to be done? Plato's answer to this question is that it can be done by providing the human soul with the right type of surroundings. That is why education in the case of Plato means bringing the soul into that environment, which in each stage of its growth is best suited for its development.

#### 1.2.5.1 Scheme of Education

Plato's scheme of education represents a state-controlled system of compulsory education for both sexes. The education which is imparted in the beginning is equal for all. But, in fact, if it is carefully observed, education is exclusively meant for those who are to become the rulers of the state. In this method of education, the art of citizenship is identified with the art of ruling. It is, therefore, on a critical note a lopsided scheme where guardians alone are trained and educated. Plato's system of education is divisible into two parts, namely, Elementary education and Higher education.

### ***Elementary Education***

The elementary stage itself is divided into three sub-stages; the first sub-stage begins from the very birth and extends up to the age of six years. In this stage, the child is to be given lessons by examples and stories. It is to receive the knowledge of simple morals and religious truths. In the second sub-stage which extends from the age of six to eighteen years, Plato does not introduce anything novel. The content of Plato's educational curriculum as the second sub-stage in the elementary stage was typically Athenian, but it was directed to social purpose in the true Spartan spirit. But whereas the Spartan scheme aimed at the creation of a powerful military class with a view to victory in war, Plato's aim was much more general and comprehensive. Plato's aims were to enable the intellectual to fit himself in the social setup and to cultivate moral and intellectual virtues in him.

Plato was true to the content of Athenian education, in as much as he thought that the best education would be Music for the soul and gymnastics for the body. But he gave the two terms – Music and Gymnastics wider and comprehensive meaning. Music included the study of literature, playing the lyre and other fine arts. Similarly, Gymnastics meant, for Plato, the general care of the body which includes exercise, diet, and medicine. The training of gymnastics aimed at teaching such qualities required for the ruling classes, such as self-control and courage.

In the third sub-stage an exclusive compulsory military training was to be given to both the sexes for two years from the age of eighteen years to twenty years.

### ***Higher Education***

The students have to undergo a test when they reach 20 years. Those who showed aptitude for Science and Philosophy were to be given training for fifteen years more. Those who failed were to be included in the Auxiliaries i.e. military class. Thus we find that the distinction between elementary and higher education does not merely rest on differences of age level, but also involves differences of classes. Elementary education aims to train the youth, it is also intended to impart necessary skills to the military class. Higher education, which begins at middle age, is primarily meant to produce perfect guardians. The first is the training of the character through emotions, the second aims to provide understanding through Science and Philosophy.

According to Sabine, "Higher Education is the most original as well as the most characteristic proposal of the Republic." Plato's Higher education is divisible further into two sub-stages. The first sub-stage extends from the age of twenty to thirty years. The second sub-stage is from the age of thirty to forty years. In the first sub-stage – the curriculum is designed with the aim of making the recipient wise. Just as the special virtue of the warrior class is courage, the special virtue of the ruling class is wisdom. It is through higher education the perfect Guardians are trained. Hence, the syllabus includes the study of Mathematics, Astronomy, Logic and other Sciences. Plato lays great emphasis on Mathematics. The second sub-stage was to begin after an elimination test at the age of thirty. Those who showed still further aptitude for scientific knowledge were to have still further training in Dialectic for five years up to the age of thirty-five years. Dialectic was the only item which was included in the syllabus for this stage. Dialectic is the instrument by which knowledge of the pure ideas which constitute the highest reality, is attained. The highest of these ideas is the idea of the Good which is the cause of all beings and is the goal of knowledge. The Philosopher-Rulers are able to comprehend the idea of the Good during these five years. Hence they acquire real wisdom and knowledge and are entitled to rule. Actually, the rulers who are the natural rulers of his ideal state are the product of his higher education.

From the age of thirty-five, the Philosophers start ruling and continue up to the age of fifty at which they retire and resume study in the contemplation of the Good. Such a study they continue up to the end of their

lives. Hence, Plato's education is a life-long process. Plato's design of higher education was put into practice in his own Academy which was established in 386 B.C., sometime before the completion of *Republic*.

#### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 4**

**NOTE:** Use the space given below for your answers. Use separate sheet if space is not sufficient.

1 Plato's theory of education was an indispensable necessity. Elaborate.

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2 According to Plato, the fundamental purpose of education is not to transfer knowledge into the soul, but to get the qualities that are hidden in the soul out. How do you understand this proposition?

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3 Plato did not agree with the proposition that Justice is the interest of the stronger. Comment.

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4 Why Plato considered the best education would be Music for the soul and Gymnastics for the body?

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5 According to Sabine, "Higher Education is the most original as well as the most characteristic proposal of the *Republic*." Comment.

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#### **1.2.6 IDEAL STATE AND THEORY OF COMMUNISM**

Like education, Plato's Communism was the handmaid of his Justice. If education was a positive remedy for the operation of justice in the ideal state, Plato's communism was a negative remedy. Plato had an excessive distrust of human nature. In spite of so much education and training, Plato could not be convinced that members of the ruling and military class were completely reformed as to work on the altruistic motive. He could not be convinced that education accomplished its task. For the remaining task, he advocated communism as a sure remedy. Plato is also convinced that in the face of corrupting influences, the rulers as well as the soldiers will be shaken from acting according to those high ideals on which the very success of the ideal state depended. Their continuance, Plato regarded, was essentially dangerous for the ruling classes. So that family and property may not become great impediments in the discharge of their duties, Plato is never weary of criticising them. As "private property and family relationship", says Prof Dunning, "appears to be the

chief sources of dissension in every community, neither is to have recognition in the perfect state”.

#### **1.2.6.1 Two Main Forms of Plato’s Communism**

Plato’s communism takes two main forms. The first one makes a case for the abolition of private property which includes everything – house, land, or money. The second was the abolition of the family, which Prof Sabine has characterised as “the abolition of a permanent monogamous sexual relation and the substitution of regulated breeding at the behest of the rulers for the purpose of securing the best possible offspring”. All this was done in the name of justice and here again spiritual betterment was the ultimate aim.

#### **1.2.6.2 Partial Application of Plato’s Communism**

Plato’s ideal state consists of three different classes on the basis of natural capacities. The first one is the ruling class which comprises of those with wisdom and knowledge. The second is the “guardian” class which comprises the rulers and the defenders of the state, that is, the soldiers. The third class of the ideal state includes all the rest of the people – workers, labourers, artisans and clerks, etc. Communism in the *Republic* is meant only for the guardian class, that is, for the rulers and soldiers. The people of the third category, the artisans, traders, peasants, etc., are allowed to possess private property and families. Plato’s communism, therefore, intended primarily to serve political purposes.

#### **1.2.6.3 Character of Plato’s Communism of Property**

Plato’s communism of property is entirely different from that of all the modern socialists. There is no mention in the *Republic* of the socialization of all the means of production. Plato is only concerned with the product which is to be partly socialised. The guardians who live under communism are distinguished from the rest of the people by being partners in property. The ruling classes do not possess any private property. Neither individually nor collectively do they own a single acre; the land and its products are in the hands of the third class of farmers and cultivators. They have no houses; they live encamped in the common barracks, which are always open and public. Plato denies them of all gold and silver and tells them that “the diviner metal is within them”.

However, the pertinent question that arises in this connection is, what do they live on? The answer to this is that the guardians are to live on a salary paid to them in kind by farming classes according to a regular assessment, a salary paid year by year, and consisting of such necessities as will suffice for the year. These necessities are not to be divided among the guardians for private consumption; they are to be consumed at common tables like the Spartan system.

#### **BOX 1.2d: Plato’s Communism of Family and Property**

Plato abolished private family and property for the guardian class, for they encouraged nepotism, favouritism, particularism, factionalism and other corrupt practices among rulers. Politics did not mean promoting one’s personal interests. Instead it was to promote the common good. Plato thereby established a high standard for governing and governors.

#### **1.2.6.4 Plato’s Communism of Wives**

Communism of wives is a natural corollary of communism of property. As you have studied above, Plato’s communism of property is the logical corollary of his conception of justice. His major aim in envisaging communism was to bring about the “greatest degree of unity”. According to Plato, “There is no greater good for the state than the bond of unity.” However, his aim was only half-achieved with the abolition of property. He was shrewd enough to realise that abolition of the property alone would not do as family postulates property for its maintenance. If the family is retained, the private property will crop up in one

shape or the other. The evil consequence would be that the Guardians will be tempted to detract. Consequently, the abolition of property without the abolition of family will defeat its purpose. Hence, Plato laid even greater emphasis on the communism of wives.

It must be mentioned at the very outset that like communism of property communism of women applies to the Guardians only, i.e. Rulers and Soldiers. Plato advocated the communism of wives for fulfilling three purposes.

- 1) **Political Purpose** – Plato felt that family affection is a serious and powerful rival to loyalty to the state. Therefore, the major aim of Plato in abolishing family is to create the utmost unity in the state. It is for this purpose Plato abolishes the right of each guardian to have a separate family which according to him is the enemy of unity.
- 2) **Moral Purpose** – For Plato, there is no difference of kind between men and women except in the case of sex. Beyond that women are quite free to do what men can do. Moreover, the family system of Athens was against the principle of justice as envisaged who fit the best. Women are fitted to perform even outside the household. Plato, however, makes it very clear that he is not against the emancipation of women for its own sake. On the other hand, it is only a means to an end i.e. service of the state.
- 3) **Eugenic Purpose** – Plato suggests the communism of wives in order to bring about improvement in the race. This he accomplishes through the reform of marriage.

#### 1.2.6.5 Scheme of Communism of Wives

There are various facts that must be understood in order to have a clear knowledge of the Platonic scheme of communism:

First, all women are to be common to all men and vice versa. No woman is permanently wedded to any man.

Secondly, all guardians including men and women are to live together in common barracks.

Thirdly, the state arranges temporary mating between the best of men and the best of women for one year. At a particular nuptial season, the state would choose a particular number of couples for marriage for a period sufficient to produce the requisite number of children taking into view the population of the city.

Fourthly, the mating age for men is to be between 25 and 55 and for women between 20 and 40. Mating beyond this age is to be prohibited.

Fifthly, after the birth of a child, the male and female are to be separated and united to another person of the opposite sex if age and health permit such a union.

Sixthly, the children immediately after their birth are to be separated from their mother and taken under the custody of state nurses. The weaker child is to be killed immediately after the birth. All the parents married at a given season are to be taught that all the children born in due time after that season are their common children and vice versa.

Such is the Platonic scheme of communism of wives. Now, the major difference between communism of property and communism of wives is that in the former it is common renunciation of property on the part of guardians, which in the latter is a common ownership of woman on the part of guardians.

## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 5

**NOTE:** Use the space given below for your answers. Use separate sheet if space is not sufficient.

1 What are the three different classes that Plato's ideal state consists of?

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2 Plato's communism of property is entirely different from that of all the modern socialists. Explain.

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3 What are three purposes for which Plato advocated the communism of wives?

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4 Delineate three important aspects in Plato's Scheme of Communism of Wives.

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### 1.2.7 CONCEPTION OF THE PHILOSOPHER KING

Few thinkers have been as logically consistent as Plato. Plato's Conception of the "Rule of Philosophy" is a logical deduction from his first principle (triplicity of the human mind and virtue is knowledge) but also an induction from the current corruption in the various city-states. Based on this Plato believes that only competent, wise and efficient people should have the right to rule.

The Rule by the Philosopher-King is the most profoundly original conception in the entire political thought of Plato. Plato denounces Athenian democracy as the government of the ignoramuses and suggests a Rule of Philosophy which is by every means a government by few i.e. elite. At a number of places, Plato goes to the extent of saying that if there is only one top-most meritorious person in the state, let him become the Philosopher-King. But if there is more than one fairly equal Philosopher, let it be an aristocracy of intellect.

The Philosopher-king is the one who is the lover of wisdom. He is a passionate seeker of truth. He has knowledge of the "Idea of Good". With the help of such intellectual brilliance, he can see and judge better than others can as to what is most beneficial for the community. Hence the role of a Philosopher is best for any society.

The Philosopher Rulers are reason personified. The mentality of selfless service to the state is a derivation from the rational character of the Perfect Guardians. Plato's Philosopher Rulers are the products of highly technical training. Hence the government of Plato's Ideal state is the consequence of his system of education. The Philosopher-Rulers are absolute as far as their powers are concerned. They are absolute in the sense that they are not responsible or responsive to public opinion or to the customs or written laws. Such a

proposition of the despotism of Philosophers on the Part of Plato is quite natural given the first principle with which Plato starts i.e. "virtue is knowledge". Since the Philosopher-Rulers are qualified to become rulers by virtue of the possession of knowledge, the control of public opinion or laws upon their acts is irrelevant.

### 1.2.8 PLATONIC IDEALISM AND ITS CRITICS

Plato's ideal is not without its critics. In fact, one of Plato's more famous students was highly critical of such political ideals. This student, of course, is Aristotle. He believed that Plato's idealism was contradictory because the state conceived under it becomes more like a household that may even be reducible to the individual instead of a state. The problem is that the state is a collection of individuals who are diverse and complex by nature. Aristotle also disagrees with the way in which children are to be raised in Plato's Republic. He argues that the more common something is, the less cared for it will actually be. And since it is the case that all the adults are to care for the children, and the adults (or parents) care for many children and no unique children, the care provided to the children will suffer substantially. The more owners there are of that which is to be cared for, the more potential for neglect, and children ought to be the last thing in a state that should be neglected. Lastly, he argues that from the family unit, we learn to be patriotic. And since patriotism is an ideal, Plato was mistaken about how to nurture patriotism. It isn't taught in a nursery, military academy, or school, it is taught at home.

Aristotle's critiques are valid. Plato removes the necessary diversity that a state requires to flourish. A variety of experiences and opportunities for the citizens of the state allows the state to be rich in culture and influence neighbouring territories as well as have its populace become well-rounded. His critique about the family unit seems to be true as well. Parents have a natural tendency to care a great deal more about their own children than others. This is a good thing because it gives children the attention they need. This specified attention allows the child to understand values; first, the value of the family unit, then that of the local community, followed eventually the state. It's a learning process that must begin somewhere.

Another critic of Plato's political philosophy was Niccolo Machiavelli. He argued not necessarily against the specifics of Plato's *Republic*, but rather of the whole. He believed that idealism was unrealistic. He argued that no such perfect or ideal society has ever existed, and morality should never be a part of politics. When one incorporates morality into their practice as a politician, it will result in ruin. He argued that it is better to be feared than loved, and the only way to be loved perhaps was to be moral. However, since this resulted in failure, it leaves only fear as the practical choice. Fear endures time. Love is fickle and people will stop loving their prince whenever they become disappointed with him. Fear ensures that the people will help the politician regardless of good or challenging times. It's universal, so it should be adopted into every politician's arsenal.

Machiavelli takes the opposite extreme of Plato. Instead of idealism, he moves too close to realism, taking a much more pessimistic worldview. One may not agree with this position that it is better to be feared than loved, although it is understandable why Machiavelli endorses it. To be truly loved, it would mean that people are loyal to their prince. To be loyal would be to have a devotion to their state and leader regardless

#### BOX 1.2e: Plato' Philosopher-King

"It is for us, then, as founders of a commonwealth, to bring compulsion to bear on the noblest natures. They must be made to climb the ascent to the vision of Goodness, which we called the highest object of knowledge; and when they have looked upon it long enough, they must not be allowed, as they now are, to remain on the heights, refusing to come down again to the prisoners or to take any part in their labours and rewards, however much or little these may be worth". – Plato

of the turmoil it was experiencing. Of course, there are limitations here, but it is far better than being feared.

One of John Dewey's biggest objections to Plato's ideal state is its education system. He argued that Plato's education system was circular because it was a product of its society. However, the paradox is Plato's perfect society can only be brought about by the state's education systems. Thus, a major flaw is exposed in Plato's Republic. He also criticizes the three classes of the state on the grounds of lack of diversity, much like Aristotle did. Dewey argued that people are naturally diverse and have a wide range of talents and characteristics, therefore, they must be helped to grow. Plato's ideal would prevent this growth, resulting in a stagnant, stale society.

Immanuel Kant in the *Rule of Philosophy* in Plato's Ideal State says "That kings should become Philosophers or Philosophers Kings, is not likely to happen; nor would it be desirable, since the possession of power invariably debates the free Judgement of Reason." Here Lord Acton's dictum also can come true – "Absolute power corrupts absolutely".

Lastly, Karl Popper objects to Plato's *Republic* on the grounds that Plato's class division results in a totalitarian regime. He argues that the ruling class has far too much power because they control education, communication, the military and many other aspects of society that give the few a significant advantage while at the same time ultimately oppressing the majority. There is no freedom to express alternative ideas; there is no free economy to allow a free market. It is, according to Popper, a dictatorship. Moreover, Plato's Education Scheme and Rule of Philosopher-Kings are incompatible as Karl Popper says, "For if Philosophers were needed as permanent rulers, there would be no need for the Educational system to produce new ones."

Because freedom is a virtue, one may agree with Popper's objection. Plato doesn't seem to place much value on freedom in the sense of opportunity.

He seems to argue that opportunity is a cause for the unjust and unwise. And by removing opportunity and some freedoms, an ideal state-based justice be created. But freedom of expression is an ideal, as are freedom of opportunity and diversity. Plato doesn't recognize these as virtues but as hurdles for unjust acts that result from men's passions and hunger for power. While it is true that some may abuse such ideals, it doesn't change the fact that they are ideals. So to hinder them, to restrict them, or even eradicate them, is to commit an unjust act, something that Plato opposes. So it

#### **BOX 1.2f: Popper's Criticism of Plato**

Popper accused Plato, along with Hegel and Marx, as enemies of the open society. An open society was one which allowed its members to openly criticize the institutions and the structures of power without fear of reprisal on the grounds that none would have the monopoly of the truth. Popper attacked the historicism of Plato, Hegel and Marx to point out that their attempts to provide total and scientific explanations of society with the help of laws of history were essentially totalitarian in aim, principles and purpose.

would appear that Plato's ideal is self-contradictory on many grounds. It is a fun thought experiment perhaps, but it can never be anything more. For once it becomes realized, it because not an ideal state, but a horribly flawed state, the very type of state Plato sought to prevent.

### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 6**

**NOTE:** Use the space given below for your answers. Use separate sheet if space is not sufficient.

1 Plato's Conception of the "Rule of Philosophy" is a logical deduction from his first principle (triplicity of the human mind and virtue is knowledge). How do you understand this?

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2 Why many consider the notion of the Philosopher-King is the most original conception in the entire political thought of Plato?

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3 The Philosopher-Rulers are absolute as far as their powers are concerned. Comment.

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4 Delineate three important aspects in Plato's Scheme of Communism of Wives.

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5 Why Aristotle was critical of Plato's Idealism?

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### 1.2.9 LET US SUM UP

Plato was born in Athens in an aristocratic family. In *The Republic*, he analyses the main psychological and socio-political pillars of the ideal person and the ideal city. His ideas and writings are influenced by conditions and crises in ancient Greece, especially the Peloponnesian War, prevailing corruption, growing selfishness, and Socrates' execution carried out by democratic demagogues. Believing that these problems have individual and systemic causes, he considers both the just person and the just city as an indispensable whole. In other words, a good individual life can be lived in a good city and good people can create a good city.

In Plato's political thinking, justice, the foundation for individual self and social life, is a vital good value. Plato discards the idea that "justice is nothing other than the advantage of the stronger." Quite the opposite, justice is based on virtue, therefore, it becomes the fundamental source of happiness. Justice is awarded in this life and the hereafter, and injustice is punished.

Plato's political ideas remain influential. His idealist philosophy emphasizes ideas and ideals (independent of material and historical contexts), virtue vs. vice, and human values which are essential for social life. Therefore, they challenge contemporary philosophy's orientation towards materialism, and individualism, over "objectivism," raw empiricism, and relativism. His search for the ideal person and the ideal city based on justice and harmony still motivates us.

### 1.2.10 KEY WORDS

|                            |                                                                                                                                                      |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Division of Labour:</b> | The separation of a work process into a number of tasks, with each task performed by a separate person or group of persons.                          |
| <b>Metaphysics:</b>        | The branch of philosophy that deals with the nature of existence, truth, knowledge, and the basic structure of reality.                              |
| <b>raison d'état:</b>      | A purely political reason for action on the part of a ruler or government.                                                                           |
| <b>Republic:</b>           | A form of government in which a state is ruled by representatives of the citizen body.                                                               |
| <b>Political Subjects:</b> | Being a political subject is not possessing free will to build one's own identity. Instead, it is the politics of the state that decides who we are. |
| <b>Temperance:</b>         | The practice of controlling your actions, thoughts, behaviour, etc. in a way that it is always reasonable.                                           |

### 1.2.11 FURTHER READINGS

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### 1.2.12 EXERCISES

- 1 Critically analyze the conditions in ancient Greek City-States that have immense influence on Plato’s political thought.
- 2 Why Plato’s Republic is considered one of the greatest philosophical works?
- 3 Explain Plato’s views on Justice.
- 4 Why Education is very important in Plato’s conception Ideal State?
- 5 Critically analyze Plato’s views on Communism.
- 6 Briefly outline the notion of Philosopher-King in Plato’s political thought.
- 7 Write a note on Idealism in Plato’s philosophy and the major criticism against it.

## **1.3 ARISTOTLE’S POLITICS: METAPHYSICAL AND SCIENTIFIC ASSESSMENT**

**- Dr. Rajnish Saryal**

### **STRUCTURE**

#### **1.3.0 Objectives**

#### **1.3.1 Introduction**

#### **1.3.2 The Metaphysical Assessment**

1.3.2.1 Conception of Human Nature and State

#### **1.3.3 Aristotle’s View on Household (Slaves and Women)**

1.3.3.1 Nature and Justification of Slavery

1.3.3.2 Women and Family

1.3.3.3 Property

1.3.3.4 Distributed Justice

#### **1.3.4 Theory of Constitutions and Citizenship**

#### **1.3.5 Scientific Assessment of Politics**

#### **1.3.6 Theory of Revolution**

1.3.6.1 What is Revolution?

1.3.6.2 Causes of Revolution

1.3.6.3 Remedies of Revolution

#### **1.3.7 Let Us Sum Up**

#### **1.3.8 Key Words**

#### **1.3.9 Further Readings**

#### **1.3.10 Exercises**

#### **1.3.0 OBJECTIVES**

**After going through this lesson, you will be able to understand:**

- Aristotle’s propositions about Human Nature and State
- Aristotle’s views on Household, particularly women and slaves
- Aristotle’s theory of constitutions and citizenship
- Aristotle’s views about Revolutions
- How Aristotle balanced his metaphysical ideas with scientific assessment

### 1.3.1 INTRODUCTION

Aristotle was born in Stageira in Macedonia, the son of the court physician to the king of Macedonia. At the age of 17, he went to Athens to study at the Academy under Plato. Aristotle left Athens in 347 BC after Plato's death and returned in 335 BC. When Plato died, in 347 BC. He returned to Athens in 335 BC. He established a school called "the Lyceum" as a competitor to Plato's "Academy". The popular understanding of the intellectual relationship between both of them is best symbolized by Raphael's painting *The School of Athens*, in which an 'otherworldly' Plato is depicted gesturing towards the heavens, while his rebellious student Aristotle is pointing towards the ground. Raphael's painting points to the fact that as an idealist Plato is interested only in universals, the ideas that constitute the world of the Forms, whereas Aristotle is an empiricist and a materialist who is interested exclusively in particulars, or the individual things that are observable in the world around him.

The monumental work of Aristotle is *Politics*. Unfortunately, *Politics*, as it has come down to us, is an incomplete and imperfect work and lacks unity and system. The *Politics* has come down to us historically arranged in eight books whose order differs in different editions. These eight books can be roughly divided into three distinct groups, related to each other on doubt, but differing greatly in point of view and in manner of treatment of the subject matter. Books I, II, and III constitute one group; they may be said to form the common foundation upon which two different constructions which are quite independent of each other have been built. One of these constructions deals with the ideal state and the principles underlying it. It is found in Books VII and VIII. The second construction contains an explanation of the nature of constructions, the distinctions between them and the changes taking place within them. These topics are dealt with in Book IV, V and VI. Some commentators would put Books II, III, VII and VIII in one group, and Books IV, V and VI in the second group, and regard Book I as a general introduction to the treatise as a whole.

According to Jeagar the *Politics* represents two states in the development of the political thought of Aristotle, and its text falls into two main strata. One deals with the ideal state and a study of the earlier theories together with a criticism of Plato; it comprises

Book II, III, VII and VIII. Of these the last two contain Aristotle's attempt at a construction of the ideal state, while Book III is a study of the nature of the state and citizenship; it forms, as it were, a sort of introduction to the construction of the ideal state. Book II is a preparation for Books III, VII and VIII. It was characteristic of Aristotle to first examine the views of earlier writers before stating his own view on a subject and to develop his own ideas through criticism of them. Books II, III, VII and VIII seem to have been written not long after Aristotle's departure from Athens after the death of Plato.

In no other part of *Politics* Aristotle is more

Platonic than in Books VII and VIII. Here he adopts the view of his master that the main task of political philosophy is to construct the ideal state: and his ideal state is not much different from the sub-ideal state of the *Laws*; his prevailing interest is ethical in this part; the end of the State is conceived in moral terms as being none other than the production of the highest type of virtue in the citizens. The good man and the good citizen are considered to be identical, at least in the ideal state.

#### BOX 1.3a: Aristotle

Aristotle is considered one of the most brilliant, possibly the greatest, philosophers in the Western heritage. His investigations and writings cover the entire range of liberal arts studies, from physics and biology to ethics, logic, politics, theater, art, poetry, and music. Widely regarded as a genius, his ideas have influenced all future scholarship on ethics, aesthetics, science, philosophy, religion, and politics. Aristotle's views on government inform Classical political theory, Medieval theology, Modern republican thought, and contemporary democratic theory.

Sharply, contrasted with these Books and greatly differing from them in their tone and subject matter are Books IV, V and VI. They do not deal with the nature of the state and the addressing the nature of the ideal state, but they treat actual constitutions, their distinctions and divisions. Oligarchy and democracy and their sub-divisions, the causes of their decay, and the best ways to preserve them engage Aristotle's attention. They are more practical in tone than the other Books and contain a great mass of historical detail. Aristotle's approach in this part is almost entirely empirical; ethical considerations recede in the background. It is in these Books that politics and ethics are divorced and Aristotle seems most modern. They were inserted in the middle of the original draft (Books II, III, VII and VIII) with the result the original work dealing mainly with the nature of the state became enlarged into a general treatise on political science dealing with both ideal and actual states. Book I constitutes a general introduction to the whole work. Thus, the *Politics* of Aristotle is a blend of metaphysical and scientific inquiries. Here we shall briefly discuss the metaphysical and scientific contours of *Politics*.

### **1.3.2 THE METAPHYSICAL ASSESSMENT**

#### **1.3.2.1 Conception of Human Nature and State**

The state, according to Aristotle, is the highest form of political union, for it represents the pinnacle of social evolution. It is necessary, for it provides a framework for the satisfaction of basic wants and also ensures a means to secure and realize a good life in a uniquely human sense. An individual finds fulfilment from the advantages made possible by a state through its common endeavours, and one who does not feel its need is either an "angel" or a "beast". The state is prior to the individual, in the sense that it provides opportunities for the achievement of full humanity; social affiliation gives to individuals their species identity.

The state is an instrument for an individual's self-perfection. Far from being artificially or contractually created, it evolves naturally. Aristotle contends that man by nature is a political animal, making the state necessary and desirable

Like Plato, Aristotle asserts that education is an effective way to produce political unity, though he criticises his mentor for not recognising its economic significance. Education to Aristotle, symbolises a way of life, for individuals learn largely by doing. Its goal is not unity, but to foster and protect a way of life that encourages and sustains diverse social and political activities.

Aristotle is convinced of the individual's innate sociability and the natural desire to associate with other humans and remain in society, by virtue of the fact that a human being enjoys a unique capacity for moral choice and reasoned speech. Not only does reason distinguish humans from other social species, but it alone has a perception of good and evil, right and wrong, just and unjust, implying that these faculties can be developed only in company with others, and not in isolation. Not only is social cooperation necessary, but also desirable.

For Aristotle, the good of a community is clearly the greater, the perfect thing to attain and preserve, than the good of a single individual. The individual's social nature and the implied "political" content result in various public behaviour necessary for the pursuit of private happiness. For Aristotle, private life is a necessary, though not sufficient, condition for enjoying a full human existence.

For Aristotle, the state is an association of persons for the sake of securing the best moral life. How good a life in a state depends upon the people who constitute it and what they want to pursue. To answer these questions, Aristotle makes the Constitution the centre of the analysis. For him, the Constitution is not simply a set of norms defining a form of government but is a way of life that determines the moral and ethical character of the state. Therefore, the government survives as long as the form of government (constitution)

survives. Any change in the constitution leads to a change in the form of life as well. Aristotle says that “Only within an Ideal State is a good person and a good citizen identical”. In Aristotle’s thought according to Sabine, “law, constitution, state, form of government, all tend to coalesce, since from a moral point of view they are all equally relative to the purpose which causes the association to exist.”

According to Aristotle, the state develops from a lower form of association. A household or family is the basic unit of the association which evolves to fulfil the individual’s biological urges and other day-to-day requirements. A village emerges out of the consolidation of a group of households. A cluster of villages join together to form a political community or the *polis*. Each of these – household, village and the *polis* (the state) – indicates different levels of self-sufficiency or autarchy.

The nature of an association is in its end, namely self-sufficiency, which means not only the satisfaction of economic needs but also the realization of the full human potential. This is possible only within the *polis*. The *polis* is the highest sovereign and inclusive formation offering a structure for a complete and true life.

Aristotle specifically states that “a polis should be large enough to guarantee self-sufficiency and a small enough to ensure good government”. He defines a state as “a union of families and villages in a perfect and self-sufficing life by which we mean a happy and an honourable life.”

#### BOX 1.3b: Aristotle on Human Nature

Aristotle conceived of humans as naturally social and political by virtue of two human faculties: reasoned speech and moral choice. These uniquely human abilities make society and politics humanity’s home, and apart from his or her community, a person is not fully human. These traits of reason, speech, and ethics are innate in humanity but require cultivation and education to become fully developed. Humans are potentially the greatest creatures, but without “law and morals” they can fall below the beasts in depravity and cruelty. So it is everyone’s concern to have each person in the society receive an education and moral cultivation, or the whole country will suffer. Humankind exists between the gods and the beasts.

#### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 1

**NOTE:** Use the space given below for your answers. Use separate sheet if space is not sufficient.

- 1 According to Jeagar Aristotle’s *Politics* represents two states in the development of the political thought of Aristotle. Explain.

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- 2 The state, according to Aristotle, is the highest form of political union. Comment.

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- 3 Why does Aristotle consider the Community far superior to the individual?

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- 4 For Aristotle, the state is an association of persons for the sake of securing the best moral life. Elaborate.
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### 1.3.3 ARISTOTLE'S VIEW ON HOUSEHOLD (SLAVES AND WOMEN)

Since the state grows out of the primary association known as the family or household, Aristotle examines its nature and constituent elements. In the course of his analysis of it, he sets forth his views on many fundamental economic questions.

The first point on which he insists is that the family is an institution created by nature to fulfil everyday wants. It is the natural result of the sex instinct and the impulse for self-preservation and self-propagation. It is also necessary for the economic security of the associates. It would be, however, wrong to view it exclusively in economic and biological terms; it is also an indispensable school of human affection. As such, the family should be preserved. Plato was wrong in abolishing it. An institution which has stood the test of time for ages has proved its utility should not be discarded.

Aristotle is not blind to the evils that family shields; he does not regard private family and private property as too sacred to be touched and controlled by the state. He recognizes that the regulation of property is an important problem and is not averse to its regulation by legislation. But Aristotle also understood that the ills associated with property cannot be addressed through legislation, because "the root of the evil is not property but the inordinate love of man for it". The evil lies in the wickedness of man. The solution to this problem is in the right system of education. It is through ethics and good habits inherited in the institutions of property and family, and the moral values inculcated through these institutions, a solution can be identified.

The household that Aristotle discusses is significantly different from the state in terms of nature and functioning. He rejects the opinion of Plato that the state is household writ large; that a small state and a great household are essentially the same and the government of both is but one science. While only one kind of relationship is possible in the state that of the ruler and the ruled, three different kinds of relations exist in the household: parents and children, husband and wife, and master and slave. It may, however, be added that Aristotle finds the model for monarchic rule in the relationship of father and son, for aristocracy in the relation between husband and wife, and for democracy in that between brothers. Aristotle stresses that the family needs property for its existence and work.

#### 1.3.3.1 Nature and Justification of Slavery

One of the important questions discussed by Aristotle in connection with the household is the nature and justification of slavery. He thinks that household management is an art requires proper instruments. Property is an important element of the household, and therefore "the art of acquiring property is a part of the art of managing the household; for

#### BOX 1.3c: Aristotle's Justification of Slavery

Aristotle justified slavery from the point of view of the householder and the slave. A householder gained for he was relieved of menial chores, giving him the leisure time for moral and intellectual pursuits that would enable him to contribute to the affairs of the state and fulfil his duties as a citizen. A slave acquires moral and intellectual excellence from his master, which if left to himself would have been difficult. Aristotle justified slavery on the grounds of the triumph of reason and virtue, the master representing reason and virtue, and the slave's absence of reason, and non-virtue or less virtue. Thus, slavery was seen as being mutually beneficial and just.

no man can live well, or indeed live at all, unless he be provided with necessities". The instruments may be either animate or inanimate. Slaves are the animate instruments and property inanimate. He considers a slave as a domestic servant to do the menial type of work in a family. In inanimate property, he includes utensils, furniture, etc.

Aristotle seeks to justify slavery against the radical Sophists like Antiphon and Alcidas who maintained that the institution is unjust because it exists by convention and not by nature. The rule of a master over a slave is contrary to nature because by nature all men are equal.

Aristotle tries to justify slavery by basing it on the universal principle that "some should rule and others should be ruled is a thing, not only necessary but expedients; from the hour of their birth, some are marked out for subjection, others for rule". Aristotle feels that nature is universally ruled by the contrast of the superior and inferior and when several parts combine to form a whole, the inferior in nature must be subordinated to the superior for the attainment of the end or purpose of the whole. Thus, the soul rules over the body and reason over appetite in the constitution of man. Similarly, in a human association like family or the state, those people who are endowed with a high degree of reason and capacity for virtue must command and direct those who possess little or no such capacity. The first ones are by nature masters and the second are slaves. Those designed by nature to be masters have intellectual strength; those who are meant to be slaves by nature possess physical strength only. The combination of the two is essential for the purpose for which the household exists – namely, the development of the intellectual and moral qualities of the householder which is incompatible with the performance of manual and menial work on his part. Slavery is thus justified from the point of view of the master by the fact that it gives him leisure necessary for the exercise of virtue.

It is equally justified from the point of view of the slave also. A slave who lacks the capacity of virtue and possesses only physical strength can benefit from the exercise of intellectual and moral qualities second-hand by being subordinated to a master who possesses them. In short, slavery is for the good of the slave since it facilitates him to share in the virtuous life of the master.

It is important to mention here that Aristotle's defence of the institution of slavery is not disinterested. It is not a logical deduction from the first principle but a laboured justification of an existing institution which was assailed by the Sophists and others. Aristotle found it necessary to defend it not only because it was a recognized and useful institution, but also because it was necessitated by his conception of citizenship. Secondly, Aristotle describes "a slave as an instrument of action and not as an instrument of production". For Aristotle, slavery loses its rationale and justification if slaves are treated as instruments of production and not as instruments of action. The instrument of production is an industrial worker who produces wealth for his various masters. Aristotle does not support industrial slavery. An instrument of action is a domestic servant who derives some moral benefit as a result of his contact with his master, whereas, an industrial worker derives no such benefit. Despite this strong justification for the institution of slavery given by Aristotle, it has been severely criticized for its indefensible assumption on which it is based i.e. the division of mankind into two classes, one endowed with the capacity for virtue and the other lacking it.

### **1.3.3.2 Women and Family**

Aristotle provides a common-sense defence of the family. He does not abolish private households, for the family is a source of pleasure for both men and women, since it creates and establishes a bond that united members, allowing them the space for the exercise and development of their individual talents.

Aristotle is critical of the Socratic-Platonic conception of communism, on the premise that to abolish the family would mean its destruction as a school of moral and civic virtues for the young. For Aristotle, the private sphere was the foundation on which the public was organized. Aristotle is equally critical of the

Spartan model, which grants unrestricted freedom to its women, resulting in divisiveness and disunity. By emphasising virile power, men are made martial and ascetic, while women are left uncontrolled by both traditions and the laws of the state making them self-indulgent and luxurious. As a result, women cannot be trained in the art of courage, nor do they learn to submit to authority, thus leaving them to pursue their private interests rather than the common good. He concludes that to ignore women is to overlook one-half of the happiness of a society, making the latter unstable and vulnerable. Aristotle is emphatic that women should be made a part of the city and its educational process, but can be left out of the political process.

For Aristotle, women and the family belong to the private realm, which is really the world of the particular rather than the universal. The male being superior, stronger and better, ruled over the female – a defective, incomplete male. He describes a “woman as an infertile male”, a male is a male by virtue of a particular ability and a female by virtue of a particular inability”. The male is the active partner and the female is passive, required primarily for sexual reproduction. In marriage, the husband by his superior virtue is the more useful, and hence the dominant partner. Though the husband and wife are interdependent, they are not equal.

A well-ordered family is one that takes into account differences between its individual members and ensures that each works in a manner so as to contribute to the common good. Accepting this differentiation makes it easy to distribute tasks and authority that are naturally ordained and readily accepted.

A husband-wife relationship differs from the one between a governor and the governed, which keeps changing. In a political community, the position of the ruler and the ruled interchanges depending on circumstances and the dictates of justice. But in a husband-wife relationship, the former is endowed with a natural gift of command, and the latter for obedience. The husband-wife relationship is exercised in the interests of the members of the household to enable the husband to engage a winner, reinforcing him as the “head” within the household.

The woman, however, is not a slave. She is free and she supports and supplements the man. Although women constitute to half of the population, in Aristotle’s treatment, they are confined to the private sphere of the household.

A woman’s rightful place is her house because of her special abilities as a wife, mother, and householder. A woman as a mother spends a great part of her youth and time in bearing and rearing children, unable to enjoy the leisure that a man has and therefore, is decisively disadvantaged. Women are to be excluded from the public realm because their deliberative faculties are inconclusive and lack authority. Political life for Aristotle requires participation by those who are equal both with regard to leisure time and possession, for they had to engage themselves in reasoned discourse about (un)just issues. Women do not have these so they cannot play a direct political role.

Aristotle considerably defers from his teacher in matters related to women. Here, she never advocated for the equality of the sexes. But this does not mean that he does not accord any role to women. He grants a woman a distinct role in society, a position within her family and the home. Here, she can demonstrate her unique abilities as a wife, mother, and homemaker, preserving and stabilizing the family and home, and giving birth to and educating the young. The woman, though free, is like a slave, for she lacks reason, which is why she should submit to the superior wisdom of men. While a slave helps in the orderly functioning of a household, a woman manages her family and home.

However, on women’s, question, both Plato and Aristotle raise a critical issue. Plato’s understanding of women, for that matter any other aspect, is subordinated to his intention to create an ideal state. Aristotle, in contrast, defends the private family vigorously on the premise that it makes possible for the moral development

and the position of women within the household, for which they are best suited, and for the training of children as future citizens.

### **1.3.3.3 Property**

Both Plato and Aristotle regard economic activity as highly significant for the purpose of political analysis. Economic activity has to be subordinated to political, since the former is concerned with a single good, while political is concerned with the good life as a whole in its multidimensional sense. In discussing the acquisition of wealth, Aristotle distinguishes two modes; natural, and unnatural. The natural includes hunting, grazing and husbandry. It is natural because nature not only gives them to all individuals for fulfilment of their needs but also fixes a limit on their consumption in accordance with subsistence.

The use of money, however, leads to other forms of acquisition. Retail trade is one form with no limits on acquisition and hence is an illiberal occupation. Following the Greek prejudice, Aristotle rejects retail trade on moral grounds of life. He is critical of small businessmen, shopkeepers, and petty users for their corruption to gain financially. He prefers landed property to trade and commerce. The important aspect of wealth, for Aristotle, is not the greater or unlimited, but the right amount of wealth. Aristotle remains sufficiently ambiguous about what can be regarded as the right amount of wealth. Good life is his main focus. He stresses that material goods are necessary for leading a good and happy life, though they are not an end in themselves. In its scale of values, the happiness of the soul is infinitely superior and higher than any other pleasure in the world.

Aristotle's understanding of good economic activity is based on the product it produces. The most basic form of good economic activity is directed towards the use of the product. In this context, Aristotle cites activities like fishing, shoemaking farming. In activities where the producer and his family directly benefit, in the sense that their needs are fulfilled, it will have use-value. However, as society becomes more complex, trade increases and specialization of labour becomes the organizing principle, products are made for the purpose of exchange.

Aristotle is the first to pay attention to the economic basis of political institutions by focusing on the character and distribution of wealth and its influence on the form of government. He considers extreme inequality of wealth as an important cause for revolutions. He defends private property but is a great believer in well-distributed wealth.

### **1.3.3.4 Distributed Justice**

Justice, for Aristotle, is a complete virtue, though not absolute. It is in relation to one's neighbour. The associational character of virtue is "universal justice or lawfulness". Both Plato and Aristotle believe that the primary task of a state is to ensure justice. Aristotle distinguishes between distributive and corrective or rectification or remedial justice.

Distributive justice means that offices and wealth, rewards and dues are distributed among different social classes according to their contributions based in merit, defined in accordance with the spirit of the constitution. In an oligarchy, merit means wealth, while in aristocracy, it is related to virtue. In an ideal state, merit means virtue. Since Aristotle thinks that the purpose of the state is to secure and promote good life, the group that contributes maximum to this end can rightfully claim the society's honours. In Aristotle's opinion, a small group of virtuous people or an aristocracy is better placed to secure substantial benefits to society. In the last resort, it will also mean the coronation of one person with supreme virtue, or an absolute divine monarchy. Besides virtue and wealth, Aristotle recognizes freedom as an important criterion to the end of the state. Freedom means free birth, and also being independent of others.

Aristotle agreed with Plato's assertion that only virtue and wisdom ought to be criteria of who will rule and exercise political power but wonders how to approximate it in practice. Although Aristotle identifies virtue as the ultimate qualification for office, he allows for the enfranchisement of popular and oligarchic elements as well. He tries to assimilate the two doctrines of distributed justice that prevailed during his time. One is the democrats' assertion that equality derives from free birth, or that each will count for one, and no one for more than one. The other is the oligarchs' view that superiority in one represents superiority in others as well. The principles of equality and superiority can be made compatible if both are subordinated to justice.

Distributed justice means proportionate equality, and is linked to a theory of just rewards to equal shares according to the merit of its recipients. Each person will be awarded responsibilities as well as financial benefits in proportion to one's just deserts.

## **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 2**

**NOTE:** Use the space given below for your answers. Use separate sheet if space is not sufficient.

1 Why did Aristotle consider Plato was wrong in abolishing family?

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2 According to Aristotle, "the root of the evil is not property but the inordinate love of man for it". Comment.

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3 Why does Aristotle consider the household to be significantly different from the state in terms of nature and functioning?

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4 Aristotle justified slavery by basing it on the universal principle that "some should rule and others should be ruled". Elaborate.

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5 For Aristotle, women and the family belong to the private realm. Comment.

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### 1.3.4 THEORY OF CONSTITUTIONS AND CITIZENSHIP

Aristotle starts his analysis by distinguishing citizens from non-citizens. Citizens are separated from other people, such as slaves, women, children, old people, people who come from other parts and reside in the city, and ordinary workers. These people cannot become citizens. He defines the citizen as the one who has the right to take part in deliberative or judicial office. In Athens, which is a known democracy in ancient Greece, citizens had the right to occupy many public offices such as the assembly, the council, the courts, etc. The Greek city-states have differed from the contemporary democratic system in the sense that the citizens are directly involved in legislative making, rather than involved in the decision-making through their representatives. Therefore, in Aristotle's definition, the citizen is the one who is entitled to participate in the deliberation and who is actively participating in the public domain. As a logical extension to this, he defines the city-state as an association of such citizens who ensure the self-sustenance of life in the city-state.

In Aristotle's understanding, the constitution is a way of organizing the governing bodies of the city-state. The governing bodies take different forms based on the nature of the political community. It encompasses 'the people' in a 'democracy', and a 'select few' in the 'oligarchy' (the rich or the wealthier).

In his exposition of the constitution, Aristotle factors two aspects: 1) what is the reason for the city-state to emerge or come into being?; 2) what are the divergent forms of rule through which one individual or group can rule over another? For the first question, he answers that "human beings are by nature political animals, who naturally want to live together". He further states that only in the political community, when people form an association, that they attain a noble life. A society matures into a higher form of life only by forming a political community. For the second question, what are the divergent forms of the rule, Aristotle identifies different types of rule based on the nature of the soul of

#### BOX 1.3d: Aristotle's on Citizenship

Aristotle defined a state as a collective body of citizens. For Aristotle, a citizen was one who shared power in the polis, and unlike Plato, did not distinguish between "an active ruling group and a politically passive community". Aristotle stipulated that the young and the old could not be citizens, for one was immature and the other infirm. He did not regard women as citizens, for they lacked the deliberative faculty and the leisure to understand the workings of politics. A good citizen would have the intelligence and the ability to rule and be ruled. He, however, shared with Plato the perception that citizenship was a privilege and a status to be inherited.

the ruler and the subject. According to Aristotle, a 'despotic rule' prevailed in the master-slave relationship. He justifies this rule in cases where the slaves do not have deliberative skills and thus require a Master to guide them. In his understanding, a natural slave benefits from this rule because of the support and sustenance he gets from his master. The master's wisdom also helps him in attaining knowledge.

Aristotle next analyses the rule of the male over the female and the father over the children. He opines that males possess more ability with leadership skills than the female. Similarly, the elder is more perfect than the younger, therefore, he is more capable of leadership than the imperfect and immature younger. He says that paternal and marital rule is in the interest of the ruled since it ensures their well-being under a mature person. This relationship brought out a mutually advantaged condition where equal citizens taking turns govern each other's advantage. From this analysis, we can comprehend Aristotle's theory of constitution and forms of government. Aristotle in his *Politics* states that "constitutions which aim at the common advantage are correct and just without qualification, whereas those which aim only at the advantage of the rulers are deviant and unjust, because they involve despotic rule which is inappropriate for a community of free persons".

The difference between correct and deviant (or pure and pervasive) constitutions is further explained by stating that “the government may consist of one, a few, or a multitude”. Therefore, there will be many combinations of possible forms of government, of which, according to Aristotle, six are significant. These are shown in the Table below.

|                    | <b>Correct</b> | <b>Deviant</b> |
|--------------------|----------------|----------------|
| <b>One Ruler</b>   | Kingship       | Tyranny        |
| <b>Few Rulers</b>  | Aristocracy    | Oligarchy      |
| <b>Many Rulers</b> | Polity         | Democracy      |

After classifying six different constitutions based on the nature of governance, Aristotle attempted to answer what is the best constitution of the six. Many times, he modified his preferences and we can see the same thing in his *Politics*. He shifted from political and social analysis in defining the constitutions to economic ones. For instance, he stated that Oligarchy (rule of few) is a constitution where the rule of the rich is prevalent, whereas in Democracy (rule of people) it is the poor class which constitutes as ruling class. Similarly, he also characterised the Polity as the government dominated by the rule of the Middle Class, neither the rich nor the poor. However, initially he stated that the Polity is a combination of Aristocracy and Democracy.

In providing constitutional theory, in a way, Aristotle moved closer to his teacher Plato. Aristotle, similar to Plato, combined his constitutional theory with the theory of justice. For Aristotle, the notion of justice has two dimensions, though both of them are related with each other: one is “Universal”, and the other is “Particular”. The first is concerned with the collective happiness of the entire political community, therefore it deals with overall or universal “lawfulness” in the society. Aristotle stated that universal justice might take two different forms of constitutions: correct (just) and deviant (unjust).

The second aspect, that is justice in the “Particular” dimension, primarily focuses on “equality” or “fairness”. It focuses primarily on the distribution of social and economic resources in a fair manner to provide a minimum level of equality in society. “Everyone agrees”, Aristotle says, “that justice involves treating equal persons equally, and treating unequal persons unequally, but they do not agree on the standard by which individuals are deemed to be equally (or unequally) meritorious or deserving”. He says that justice demands that resources be distributed in proportion to the individual’s merit or contribution. Therefore, the problem with “oligarchy” is that it equates merit with the wealthy, whereas the merit has to be assessed based on the contribution, says Aristotle. On the other hand, the problem with the “democracy” is that it considers all those who are equal in free birth must entitled for equal entitlements. In Aristotle’s view, these two extreme forms of justice are wrong. They both conceive a false conception of the end of the city-state. The state is, as oligarchy portrays, not a business venture to increase wealth, or it is, as democracy conceives, an organization to dole undeserved advantages and liberty based on equality. Instead, Aristotle argues, “the good life is the end of the city-state,” that is, “a life consisting of noble actions”. Therefore, “aristocracy” is the ideal or right way to justice. It gives political rights only to those who are contributing to the political community. Aristocracy is the one where people with virtue, wisdom, property, and freedom are in a superior position. In Aristotle’s understanding, Aristocracy is in a sense the rule of the best persons. Therefore, in his ideal constitution, the citizens are virtuous.

### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 3**

**NOTE:** Use the space given below for your answers. Use separate sheet if space is not sufficient.

1 Write Aristotle's definition of Citizen.

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2 Aristotle identifies different types of rule based on the nature of the soul of the ruler and the subject. Comment.

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3 What are the six forms of government that Aristotle identifies?

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4 Aristotle, similar to Plato, combined his constitutional theory with the theory of justice. Elaborate.

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5 How is Aristotle's notion of "Universal" justice different from "Particular" justice?

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### **1.3.5 SCIENTIFIC ASSESSMENT OF POLITICS**

As pointed out earlier that all the eight Books into which Politics is divided are not homogenous in their tone and spirit, but fall into two groups. Books IV, V, and VI belong to the latter period and they breathe a different spirit from that of the other Books and are more practical and in their tone. It has been maintained that Aristotle's most abiding contribution to political science lies in the application of the empirical method to the study of the phenomena of the state. Aristotle's point of view in these books is sociological and not ethical is further indicated by the fact that there is not one form but many forms of existence and how distinguishes one from the other. Out of the six forms of government mentioned by him in Book III Aristotle concentrates attention on democracy, oligarchy and tranny, in Book IV ignores monarchy and aristocracy which he regards as belonging to the class of ideal states.

#### **1.3.5.1 Study of Specific Constitutions**

The purpose of political science is to guide "the good lawgiver and the true politician". Political science focuses on understanding different or diverse forms of constitutions: first, "the constitution which is best without qualification, i.e., most according to our prayers with no external impediment"; second, "the constitution that is best under the circumstances for it is probably impossible for many persons to attain the best constitution"; third, "the constitution which serves the aim a given population happens to have, i.e., the

one that is best based on a hypothesis". Aristotle states:

"for [the political scientist] ought to be able to study a given constitution, both how it might originally come to be, and, when it has come to be, in what manner it might be preserved for the longest time; I mean, for example, if a particular city happens neither to be governed by the best constitution, nor to be equipped even with necessary things, nor to be the [best] possible under existing circumstances, but to be a baser sort."

Therefore, Aristotle was not limited to exploring what is the ideal constitution but also inquired about the second-best government. The basic purpose of studying the second best is, in reality, this may be more practically possible than the ideal one, where the ruler can provide more justice.

In *Politics*, Aristotle was very critical of the views expressed by earlier political thinkers in espousing the constitution of ideal or "according to prayer". Though Plato had immensely influenced Aristotle's understanding of the ideal constitution or justice, however, he was very critical of his teacher. He says that it gives importance to the unity of the political community. It advocates a system of communism, which is not practical and is against human nature. Moreover, it disregards individual citizens. Contrary to this, in Aristotle's best constitution, all the citizens possess moral virtue and the required knowledge to carry out their responsibilities, therefore, there is an all-round happiness, and people attain a life of excellence. All of the citizens occupy public office and own private property because "one should call the city-state happy not by looking at a part of it but at all the citizens."

Aristotle states that in case citizens are short of the capacity to manage the affairs of the city-state, the rulers must conceive a suitable and possible constitution. The "Polity", the second-best constitution, "typically takes the form of a polity (in which citizens possess an inferior, more common grade of virtue) or mixed constitution (combining features of democracy, oligarchy, and, where possible, aristocracy, so that no group of citizens is in a position to abuse its rights)". Aristotle points out that in cases where establishing the ideal form of government is not possible, the best alternative is constituting a government which is governed by a larger middle class that is positioned between the poor and the rich. The less well-off people with moderate wealth find it "easiest to obey the rule of reason". Unlike either poor or rich, they are less inclined to act unjustly toward the citizens. Hence, a "constitution based on the middle class is the mean between the extremes of oligarchy (rule by the rich) and democracy (rule by the poor). That the middle [constitution] is best is evident, for it is the freest from faction: where the middle class is numerous, there least occur factions and divisions among citizens". The constitution of the middle, that is Polity, is therefore a more just and stable democracy and oligarchy.

#### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 4**

**NOTE:** Use the space given below for your answers. Use separate sheet if space is not sufficient.

1 Write Aristotle's views on the Constitution.

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2 Why does Aristotle consider "Polity" to be a practical form of government?

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- 3 For Aristotle, a “constitution based on the middle class is the mean between the extremes of oligarchy (rule by the rich) and democracy (rule by the poor)”. Elaborate.
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### 1.3.6 THEORY OF REVOLUTION

Crisis and destruction in political society brought drastic changes in the Governments of the city-states in ancient Greece. The internal bickering within each state, the rivalry between one with the other state, and the emergence of more powerful states in neighbouring areas are primarily the reasons for the crisis in Greek city-states. Living in the initial days of this crisis, Aristotle contemplated the crisis and attempted to document the causes of the Revolution in the society.

#### 1.3.6.1 What is Revolution?

For Aristotle, the meaning of revolution is straightforward: changes occur to the composition of the state or changes to its constitution. For instance, if a state constitution changes from ‘aristocracy’ to ‘polity’, it is a revolution. He considered a simple change even in the ruler or ruling party, without a change to the constitution, as a revolution,

In Book V of *Politics*, Aristotle discusses what constitutes a revolution and the reasons for the revolution. He also offers some suggestions on how to prevent revolution. Aristotle says that the differences of opinion in what constitutes justice in the city-state are among the most important factors for the revolution. Since the meaning of the notion of equality changes from one segment to another segment due to variations in class and other social differences, their understanding of justice also changes. These conflicts create factions in the city-states and each faction tries to change the constitution or ruler as per their understanding of equality or justice.

For Aristotle, equality has two meanings: absolute and proportional. The ‘absolute equality’ talks about the same rights to everybody, therefore the working class and other segments of the poor in the society demand it. On the other side, the rich or possessed sections want to have ‘proportional equality’ which is intended to provide equality based on their contribution – social, political and economic – therefore the elite, privileged, or those who are holding power are interested in it. Aristotle argues that neither pure oligarchy (where the rich and privileged hold power), nor pure democracy (where the poor control the power) survive longer because both have extreme views of equality, therefore, one excludes the other from power.

According to Aristotle, the fundamental aspect of revolution is people’s desire for equality. He says that equality has two characteristics –

#### BOX 1.3e: Aristotle’s Theory of Revolution

Aristotle discusses what causes political change or Revolutions. Generally, they are the fault of the government or rulers especially being unfaithful to the principles of the Constitution. Most radical changes in politics come from varying notions of Equality. Unlike Plato, Aristotle perceived multiple reasons for revolutions, rather than simply a regime’s prominent deficiency. He placed greater responsibility on the rulers to ensure stability and justice. Revolution could take the form of change in the constitution of a state, or they may leave the constitution unchanged, and remain content with just accruing more power for themselves.

absolute and proportional. The working class people want to secure absolute equality since they desire to enjoy the same rights that 'a few' are possessed. The few want proportional equality to continuously possessing or increasing superiority in power and privilege. Aristotle argues neither pure democracy nor pure oligarchy is lasting because they each have an extreme view of equality which excludes one of the two types. Therefore, he prefers a middle political system between two extremes by saying that it achieves relative stability rather than one-sided extremes.

Aristotle says that factional clashes over issues of interests, material profits, or honour, lead to contempt, insecurity, and fear towards each other. Similarly, factional conflicts arise in conditions where those who occupy public offices become either corrupt and accumulate wealth or are arrogant and do not accommodate others. Severe and violent conflicts arise whenever a few people control power due to large-scale reactions against the concentration of power. On the other hand, when someone has to pay the penalty for the wrongs committed, he develops resentment towards the law and indulges in violent reaction. On the other hand, regional imbalances also lead to fictional conflicts because the disproportionate growth of one part of the city leaves people in other parts resentful. The poorer regions initiate conflicts against the wealthy regions of the city. Sometimes, the disagreements among the rulers also lead to conflicts in the city-state. Likewise, fictional conflicts become frequent if opposition groups in the city (rich vs poor) are equal, and there will be less chances for conflict if one group is smaller and the other is larger. The larger group always dominates the smaller group, whereas, in the case of equality, both factions challenge each other very easily.

#### **1.3.6.2 Causes of Revolution**

Aristotle, the father of empiricism, devoted considerable time to analysing the main causes of the revolution. While analysing the causes, he paid more attention to 'democracy', rather than other systems of governance. In democracy revolution often occurs because of the irresponsible behaviour of popular leaders. Democratic systems are more prone to revolution because, says Aristotle, they are often transformed into a tyranny.

According to Aristotle, democracies are more prone to revolutionary changes because the demagogues, particularly those in power, carry attacks frequently on the wealthy. This leads to unity among the propertied classes and they overthrow the institutions of democracy. In another case, the demagogues may stop funds to the areas of the rich people, which breeds resentment against the demagogues. In Greek City-states Heraclea and Megara, the elite people were exiled by the demagogues, and the elite forged unity, returned to the city, defeated the democrats, and established the oligarchy subsequently.

We have to keep in mind here that in all the cases of revolution mentioned above, a majority holds the power, whereas the minority possesses the wealth of the city. This is the contradiction that is the main reason for the revolution.

The reasons for the revolution in 'oligarchy' are also the same: that is separation of political and economic power. In many of the Greek city-states oligarchies were ousted since only a few of the economic elite held the power. The excluded sections created disorders until they became part of the public office. In the process, the oligarchy was replaced by either a Polity (in Massilia), or a Democracy (Istros), or an Aristocracy (Heraclea). Aristotle also states that oligarchies were thrown out of power when demagogues in a governing body assumed power as it was happened in Athens where the demagogues got the support of the masses and political power shifted from the elite to the popular majority. Aristotle also discusses the cases where different sections of the oligarchy fight among themselves and how these conflicts lead to the destruction of the entire oligarchy.

Aristotle observes similar kinds of revolutionary changes in Aristocracies – where political power is concentrated in the hands of the elite and other powerful groups – when power is not shared in proportion to their wealth. In some other cases, the power of the aristocracy was challenged by the rising political power of the people

The variety of the causes of the revolution in diverse forms of government that Aristotle studied convinced him that the single most important factor for the revolution was ‘inequality’. His notion of inequality needs to be understood properly. It is NOT ‘absolute’ inequality that we can notice, but ‘relative’ or ‘proportional’ inequality that is the reason for the revolution. It has to be understood in terms of the relative political and economic status of people, which Aristotle calls “equality proportionate to desert”. For Aristotle, inequality is created by “a condition in which (a) groups that occupy a privileged political status do not enjoy a corresponding economic status, or (b) groups that have decisive economic advantages are deprived of corresponding political privileges”. This inequality in terms of the mismatch between political and economic status between various sections of the city-state is the primary reason for the resentment that causes revolution.

### 1.3.6.3 Remedies of Revolution

Aristotle suggests various ways to preserve the political systems from revolution. In his view, each type of the constitution (government) requires specific measures to preserve the state. He says that oligarchies and aristocracies (comprised of small ruling classes) must pay attention to act justly towards the majority of people. They should be sensitive to the sections that are not sharing any positions in the governing bodies. The oligarchy and polity need to change the composition of public offices on par with the relative hold of power in the city. They should be flexible enough to adjust assessments based on the changing nature of the city’s power configuration or the economic status of the citizens. Similarly, in a democracy (majority rule), the rich must be treated well, and their wealth must not be confiscated. In oligarchies, it should be the opposite. The poor and the majority should be respected and treated well; the poor should get opportunities to earn well. It is always better to establish equality for those who are not sharing power, such as the rich in democracy and the poor in oligarchy.

Aristotle says that monarchies can be preserved by restricting the authority of the king. Contrary to this, tyrannies can be secured by eliminating all potential rivals. A tyrant requires military virtue and must command admiration but not fear. He should show respect to the gods in his public appearances. He must also be respectful to women. The tyrant must personally honour the good citizens and use his officials to punish the offenders. They must not give any preferential treatment to either the poor or the rich. While undertaking these measures, the tyrant can limit the negative aspects of tyranny.

However, Aristotle also points out some general measures that are applicable to all regimes/systems to avoid revolutions. Some of them are mentioned below.

**1) Enforcement of Laws:** The system that enforces law uniformly is the one where the chances of a revolution are very low. The government should act strictly against law-breakers. The ruler and the public officials must know that people, in general, would like to obey the law. Aristotle even wants rulers to obey laws. If they don’t, people take advantage of it and don’t hesitate to break the law.

**2) Avoiding Concentration of Power:** Aristotle says that it is important to stop one person from becoming very powerful in a short period. He obviously ends up corrupt.

**3) Balance:** One way to prevent revolution, says Aristotle, is to open public offices to all categories of

people. One person or a single group should attain excessive power. Similarly, a few sections should not be allowed to amass wealth in such a way that they dominate the entire system. People will develop resentment towards these people and it eventually ends up in revolution.

**4) Avoiding Fictional Conflicts:** Every regime must try to avoid fictional conflicts in the city-state. Fictional conflict is the main reason for the instability and revolution.

**5) Avoiding Corruption:** Public offices should be organized in such a way as to avoid all sorts of corruption or using the public office for profit. This can lead to reduced societal corruption. The poor will not show interest in public office if corruption is not allowed because it will lead them to earn money. In such a case, only the rich can afford to occupy public office while the poor spend time at work to become well-off.

**6) Constitutional Education:** Education about their constitution and regime is very essential for every political system, says Aristotle. People should know about their constitution, the nature of the government, and the laws in force.

These are some of the measures that Aristotle suggested to avoid revolutions and preserve the political systems. In a nutshell, Aristotle considered the security and stability of the regime more important than anything else. He considers that encroaching into the privacy of the individual is not wrong if it is required for the security of the state.

Aristotle thinks that a mixed form of government is better to avoid the revolution. Therefore, though Aristocracy was the best form of government for him, yet he preferred “Polity” as the best possible form of government. The stability of the system will be better in Polity because it finely combines democracy and oligarchy. The Polity prevents drastic inequalities and, therefore, reduces the possibility of conflict. Since power is distributed evenly among the different sections of the state, it also prevents revolution.

## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 5

**NOTE:** Use the space given below for your answers. Use separate sheet if space is not sufficient.

1 How does Aristotle define revolution?

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2 According to Aristotle, the fundamental aspect of revolution is people’s desire for equality. Comment.

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3 Why does Aristotle consider democracies are more prone to revolutionary changes?

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- 4 Write three important remedies that Aristotle identified to prevent revolutions.
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### 1.3.7 LET US SUM UP

Aristotle is called the father of political science because he is the one who has given to us the subject matter of political science. He has given us the core elements of the discipline of political science, such as constitutionalism, the supremacy of law, the nature of the political regime, politics of moderation, the concept of absolute and proportionate equality, justice, causes for revolution, factional interests, etc. He can also be considered as father of the 'empiricism' because he is the first one to compare hundreds of constitutions to identify various categories or types of regimes or forms of government. Aristotle considers that ethics are integral to politics and politics are integral to the individual. That is why he called "man is a political animal". He says that man realizes himself while participating in politics. Man's involvement with the functioning of political institutions brings out his potential. Aristotle's involvement with practical politics never took him away from ethics and contemplation. Though he differs considerably from his teacher Plato, however, he always walks with his master in upholding the social dimension in human life. He thinks that man makes good of himself through his engagement in society. He also walks along with Plato in upholding the absolute necessity of wisdom and knowledge for the rulers.

### 1.3.8 Key Words

|                                |                                                                                                                           |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Aristocracy:</b>            | A government by the best individuals or by a small privileged or socially high-rank class.                                |
| <b>Deliberative Democracy:</b> | A form of thought or theory that claims that political decisions should be the product of fair and reasonable discussion. |
| <b>Empirical:</b>              | Knowledge derived from or guided by direct experience or by experiment, rather than abstract principles or theory         |
| <b>Homogenous:</b>             | Consisting of parts or having qualities that are the same.                                                                |
| <b>Metaphysical:</b>           | A branch of philosophy that is about understanding existence and knowledge                                                |
| <b>Oligarchy:</b>              | Rule of a small (often rich) group of people.                                                                             |
| <b>Tyranny:</b>                | An autocratic form of rule in which one individual or very small group exercises power without any legal restraint.       |

### 1.3.9 FURTHER READINGS

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### **1.3.10 EXERCISES**

- 1 Analyse Aristotle's conception of human nature and state.
- 2 Why does Aristotle differ from Plato with regard to property?
- 3 Write a note on Aristotle's views on Slaves and Women.
- 4 Briefly explain Aristotle's notion of "Distributive Justice".
- 5 Write an essay on Aristotle's theory of Constitution and Citizenship.
- 6 Briefly explain the major 'Forms of Government' that Aristotle identified.
- 7 Write a note on scientific assessment of Aristotle's Politics.
- 8 Explain Aristotle's views on the Revolution.

## **1.4 ST. AUGUSTINE: CHURCH AND STATE, DOCTRINE OF SIN AND SALVATION**

**- Dr. Rajnish Saryal**

### **STRUCTURE**

- 1.4.0 Objectives**
- 1.4.1 Introduction**
- 1.4.2 St. Augustine**
- 1.4.3 Christians and the State**
- 1.4.4 Philosophy of St. Augustine**
- 1.4.5 St. Augustine's Conception of Two Cities**
- 1.4.6 The City of God**
  - 1.4.6.1 The Church
- 1.4.7 The State**
- 1.4.8 Augustine's Views on Justice**
- 1.4.9 St. Augustine's Views on Sin**
  - 1.4.9.1 The Original Sin
  - 1.4.9.2 The Three Stages of Sin
- 1.4.10 St. Augustine's Views on Salvation**
- 1.4.11 Let's Sum-Up**
- 1.4.12 Key Words**
- 1.4.13 Further Readings**
- 1.4.14 Exercises**

### **1.4.0 OBJECTIVES**

**Dear Learner, this lesson provides you with an understanding of one of the most important Christian theologians of the Middle Ages. It interestingly analyses the State-Church debate related to power and authority. After going through this lesson, you will be able to understand:**

- St. Augustine's Christian Philosophy;
- the conflict between Church and State in the Middle Ages;
- St. Augustine's Conception of Two Cities;
- Augustine's views on Justice; and
- St. Augustine's notions on sin and salvation.

### 1.4.1 INTRODUCTION

The decline of the Roman Empire coincided with the rise of Christianity. Early Church Fathers, especially St. Paul, saw Roman discipline as a preparatory force for Christianity, considering Roman justice a “defense against the fury of the unbelievers.” However, as time passed, Roman Emperors began to view Christianity with hostility. The Christian belief in a dual destiny for mankind and the Roman Empire’s insistence on performing rituals and services inconsistent with Church teachings led to mounting friction and eventually open hostility. This conflict resulted in widespread persecution of Christians, though the Church remained steadfast. Despite attempts to suppress Christianity, it continued to thrive, and Christians engaged in various conspiracies against the Roman rulers. The weakening emperors of the declining empire were unable to crush the burgeoning Christian movement. The conflict between the two powers reached its zenith under Emperor Decius and concluded with Emperor Diocletian (250 A.D. - 304 A.D.). Although the pagan state exerted immense effort to eradicate Christianity, it ultimately failed. The emperors, seeking internal peace and unity, were disheartened by the situation, as the Church, rather than uniting the Empire, became a source of division and turmoil.

Amid this discord, barbarian invaders such as the Huns, Vandals, Teutons, and Visigoths descended upon the already crumbling Empire, culminating in the sacking of Rome in 410 A.D. These invaders, lacking their own advanced civilization, obliterated the Roman way of life, leading to a complete destruction of a culture that had flourished for centuries. Rome, which had stood inviolable for eight centuries and served as the centre of the most powerful empire ever known, was devastated. The wealth of the world had been poured into Rome, adorning it with magnificent temples and palaces. It had been the epicentre of guidance and power, unrivalled in its grandeur and influence.

After the Visigoth sack of Rome, some argued that Christianity was to blame for the Empire’s fall. From 313 A.D. to 393 A.D., Christianity and paganism coexisted in the Empire, with harsh laws against Christians lifted. Following this period, a series of laws increasingly favoured Christianity, culminating in its official status as the state religion under Emperor Theodosius I in 393 A.D. The fall of Rome shortly after Christianity’s triumph led many, both pagans and some Christians, to link the rise of Christianity with the Empire’s weakening. Pagans argued that Christian virtues, such as otherworldliness, meekness, pacifism, and disregard for public affairs and national deities, had eroded Rome’s strength. Old gods’ devotees, frustrated and persecuted, claimed that Rome’s decline was due to the abandonment of ancient faiths and the wrath of slighted deities.

While Christians denied the pagan accusations, they were distressed that the Empire’s conversion had not prevented its catastrophic downfall and were troubled by the Empire’s inability to safeguard itself from destruction. St. Augustine, understanding both paganism and Christianity, responded to the criticisms and defended Christianity while addressing the claim that the victory of Christianity had led to the Empire’s demise.

### 1.4.2 ST. AUGUSTINE (354-430 A.D.)

St. Augustine is widely regarded as the “greatest of the Fathers of the Church.” He hailed from Roman North Africa, where his parents lived—his father was a pagan and his mother a devout Christian. In his early thirties, Augustine was converted to Christianity by St. Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan. His rise within the Church was swift; by the age of forty-two, he became the Bishop of Hippo in North Africa, a position he held until his death in 430 A.D. Renowned as a writer, Augustine is best known for his influential work “Confessions,” but he also authored numerous treatises on philosophical issues and critiques of other contemporary religious sects.

His most significant and celebrated work is *De Civitate Dei* (The City of God), written in 413 A.D. after

over twelve years of labour. This extensive work, composed of twenty-two books, is divided into two main sections. The first ten books defend Christianity against pagan accusations that Rome's fall was due to Christian influence. The remaining twelve books present Augustine's own views on human nature and society, arguing that the fall of Rome exemplifies the transient and unstable nature of earthly kingdoms, with true security and permanence found only in a spiritual realm. Augustine contrasts the "City of God," which comprises the redeemed in both this world and the next, with the "City of the World," representing the devil's kingdom and his followers.

#### BOX 1.4a: St. Augustine

Augustine is probably the most influential thinker in the Western Christian church, both Catholic and Protestant. This "Augustinian" Christianity remains the basis of most Catholic and Reformed theology. Augustine wrote an enormous amount of religious literature, sermons, letters, and books, the most famous of which are his *Confessions* and *The City of God*. The latter contains his political philosophy, the first systematic Christian political theory in the West.

*De Civitate Dei* is considered one of the most challenging works in the Western tradition, known for its vague definitions, obscure arguments, and controversial conclusions. Despite these issues, its core philosophy is clear and has significantly influenced medieval discussions on the origins of political society, the relationship between civil government and divine law, justice, the qualities of a just ruler versus a tyrant, and Christian perspectives on slavery and property. Professor McIlwain acknowledges that Augustine's *City of God* had a greater impact on medieval political thought than any other early medieval work.

### 1.4.3 CHRISTIANS AND THE STATE

Christian thinkers in the West sought to explain the nature of political society by drawing on various sources. Christianity emerged in a context heavily influenced by Roman institutions, including Roman law, and Greek philosophical ideas. Roman perspectives defined political society as a community governed by law, while Greek philosophers like Plato and Aristotle viewed the "polis" as essential for moral education and personal development. Aristotle argued that only animals and gods exist outside the "polis"—animals because they are less than humans, and gods because they are beyond human. According to the Greeks, civil law must align with moral law; otherwise, tyranny results, where the ruler's power overrides justice.

Early Christians had mixed views on the Roman State. Some believed the end of the world and the coming of God's kingdom were imminent, making the development of a Christian political theory unnecessary. Others saw the Roman State as antithetical to Christianity and rejected it entirely, viewing the Church—the community of believers—as the only true society. For these Christians, the Scriptures alone sufficed, and they saw no need for Greek or Roman political concepts. The notions of theocracy (the Church as the sole legitimate political authority) and fideism (faith as the only path to knowledge) were often interconnected. Other Christians acknowledged the State's role and began to explore theories about the relationship between the Church and the State, as well as the supernatural society versus the natural one. This exploration paralleled efforts to reconcile faith-based knowledge with knowledge acquired through natural reason.

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 1

**NOTE:** Use the space given below for your answers. Use separate sheet if space is not sufficient.

1 Why the rise of Christianity is associated with the weakening of the Roman Empire?

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2 Briefly state the importance of Augustine’s work *De Civitate Dei*.

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3 What are the views of early Christians on the Roman State?

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#### 1.4.4 PHILOSOPHY OF ST. AUGUSTINE

Prof. G. H. Sabine notes that “His philosophy was only slightly systematic, yet his intellect absorbed almost all of the ancient knowledge, which he largely transmitted to the Middle Ages.” In developing and illustrating the central themes of the *City of God*, Augustine merged fundamental ideas from Greek and Roman authors, especially Plato and Cicero, with emerging Christian concepts regarding the nature and role of political communities. Prof. Sabine adds, “His writings served as a ‘mine of ideas’ from which later writers, both Catholic and Protestant, drew extensively. His most distinctive idea is the vision of a Christian commonwealth and a philosophy of history that portrays this commonwealth as the pinnacle of human spiritual development. Through his influence, this concept became a permanent fixture in Christian thought, extending from the Middle Ages into modern times.”

Similarly, Prof. Dunning observes that while St. Augustine’s *De Civitate Dei* encompasses a broad range of human history, theology, and philosophy, its central theme is the notion of God’s elect forming a commonwealth of the redeemed in the afterlife—a commonwealth symbolized on Earth by the Church. Augustine developed this idea along lines similar to those of Plato and Cicero, incorporating their political philosophies into a system where key Christian doctrines play a central role.

#### 1.4.5 ST. AUGUSTINE’S CONCEPTION OF TWO CITIES

When examined in its historical context, St. Augustine’s *De Civitate Dei* reflects the circumstances of his time. It is clear that political philosophy and history have always been intertwined. Augustine developed the concept of two cities—the City of God and the City of the Devil—primarily to address the fall of the Roman Empire. His argument was that all earthly cities are destined to fall, but there exists one city that is eternal and unshakable: the City of God. He attributed Rome’s downfall to the vices fostered by paganism, such as cruelty, extortion, pride, luxury, and debauchery. By doing so, he shifted the debate to the pagan camp and defended Christianity against the accusation that it caused Rome’s collapse.

##### BOX 1.4b: Augustine’s Conception of Two Cities

Augustine’s political thought revolves around The Two Cities: the City of God—or transcendent heavenly kingdom—and the City of Man—or all earthly governments. The City of God is that eternal realm ruled directly by God of perfect Justice, perfect peace, and perfect love. The City of Man is all earthly states characterized by imperfect justice, imperfect peace, and incomplete love. Because of humanity’s sinful nature, worldly governments will always be marked by corruption, greed, and lust for power; its values are ever wealth, domination, and prestige—emerging from human sin and pride.

Augustine's philosophical ideas, including his theory on the significance and direction of human history, aimed to place Roman history within a broader perspective. He described the two cities as follows: the earthly city is formed by the love of self, even to the disregard of God, while the heavenly city is shaped by the love of God, even to the neglect of self. The earthly city seeks glory from men, whereas the heavenly city finds its greatest glory in God, who is the witness of conscience. The earthly city is characterized by rulers who seek power, while the heavenly city has leaders who serve each other in love. The earthly city, founded by Cain, is driven by worldly desires and self-love. In contrast, the heavenly city, founded by Abel, is based on the love of God and aims for spiritual salvation.

Augustine posits that all human history is a dramatic struggle between these two cities, with the ultimate victory belonging to the City of God. He interprets the fall of Rome as an example of the inevitable demise of earthly empires, which are unstable and built upon human instincts related to war and domination.

However, interpreting Augustine's concept of the City of God and the City of the Earth can be challenging. Prof. G. H. Sabine suggests that caution is necessary when applying this theory to historical facts, as Augustine did not intend to identify these cities precisely with existing human institutions. The City of God might represent the communion of the redeemed, both in this world and the next, while the City of the Earth could symbolize the kingdom of the Devil and wicked men. Prof. F. J. C. Hearnshaw questions whether Augustine meant the Church by the City of God or if he had something else in mind. Similarly, the precise identification of the City of the Earth remains ambiguous—whether it refers to the state or the Roman Empire itself.

Despite these ambiguities, Augustine's vision was clear: he believed that the future lay with the Christian Church, which he anticipated would triumph and fulfil God's ultimate purpose. Prof. William Ebenstein notes that Augustine was more concerned with ways of life rather than specific institutions. The struggle, he argues, is not between Church and State but between two opposing ways of life: the self-love and lust for power of the earthly city versus the love of God that underpins the heavenly city. Augustine, therefore, divides humanity into two groups: those who live according to self and those who live according to God, with each destined for eternal outcomes based on their alignment with these principles. This interpretation resonates with common sense and emphasizes that Augustine viewed the two cities in a mystical or symbolic sense.

#### **1.4.6 THE CITY OF GOD**

St. Augustine of Hippo (354-430) was the first Christian thinker to explicitly address the roles of the Church and the State. However, it's important to note that Augustine was not a political philosopher in the vein of Plato or Aristotle. His primary focus was on theology and the Christian faith, and his discussions on political society were secondary to his main apologetic aim. Consequently, *The City of God* is not a treatise on political philosophy like Plato's *Republic* or Aristotle's *Politics*. Instead, it serves as a defence of Christianity against accusations that it caused the fall of the Roman Empire (which was sacked in 410 A.D.). Augustine's reflections on the relationship between Church and State are incidental to his defence of Christianity.

Nevertheless, one can derive a theory of political society and the interaction between society and the Church from Augustine's work. For Augustine, the Church is more than just a group of people with shared religious beliefs; it is a true society—a community of believers with its own organization, laws, and common good. The title of his influential work, *The City of God*, reflects this understanding. The term *Civitas* does not simply mean 'city' in the modern sense but refers to a body of citizens, similar to the Greek *polis* and our concept of 'society.' While the Greeks viewed the *polis* as the highest form of society, Augustine sees political society as subordinate to the higher society established by the Christian Church. Augustine's perspective diverges significantly from that of Plato and Aristotle. For him, the Church, or the supernatural

society, is founded by God and sustained by divine grace. It is within this society that individuals find salvation and true happiness through their union with God, based on selfless love for God and one another.

#### **1.4.6.1 The Church**

Augustine's views on the Church are deeply significant. He argued that for entry into the eternal kingdom of heaven—the 'city of God'—there must be a visible earthly agency to guide people in the right direction. For Augustine, this agency is the Church. He saw the Church as a part of the heavenly city, sojourning on earth and living by faith, likening it to a captive and stranger in the earthly city. He viewed the Church as a crucial mechanism for human salvation, through which the grace of God operates in history. He described the Church's history as the 'march of God in the world.'

Augustine believed that while the orders of the state should be obeyed to promote peace and good social order, they should not be followed if they conflict with religious and moral laws. He asserted that a wise person must live socially and that everyone desires peace. To him, the state plays a vital role in establishing social peace, and he echoed Greco-Roman thought in noting that the state, in its own way, is better than other forms of human good because it seeks earthly peace for the sake of enjoying earthly goods.

According to Ebenstein, the peace provided by the state is not an end in itself but a means to facilitate service to God. It represents temporary tranquillity that allows individuals to work toward the eternal peace of the heavenly city. Augustine's ideal is that the state should be a Christian state, serving a community unified by Christian faith, prioritizing spiritual interests above all else, and contributing to human salvation by maintaining the purity of the faith.

#### **1.4.7 THE STATE**

In contrast to the supernatural society of the 'city of God' or the Church, Augustine describes the 'earthly society' (*civitas terrena*) as the secular realm with its own laws and institutions existing outside the Church. Augustine's view of the earthly society is complex: at times, he acknowledges its role in providing for non-spiritual needs and thus sees it as good in itself. At other times, he suggests that the earthly society exists because of human sinfulness after the Fall, implying that if the Fall had not occurred, the State would not have been necessary and the Church alone would suffice. He also explicitly argues that secular society originates from human selfishness or self-love and is characterized by conflict and power struggles. Augustine asserts that the two cities derive from two different loves: the earthly city from the love of self that rejects God, and the heavenly city from the love of God that rejects self-love. The earthly city seeks human glory, while the heavenly city seeks to glorify God. The earthly city is governed by ambitious rulers driven by the lust for power, whereas the heavenly city operates through mutual love among rulers and subjects.

Augustine's critique of the secular state at times mirrors Hobbes' view of the state as a form of absolute power or sovereignty. In one notable passage from 'The City of God,' Augustine compares kingdoms to pirate gangs, suggesting that both are essentially similar in their reliance on power and coercion. The pirate's retort to Alexander the Great highlights this parallel: both are essentially power structures, distinguished only by scale.

Augustine's final position seems to be that the state has its own legitimate role in maintaining peace and order, and the Church should respect the state's autonomy without interfering directly in politics. He argues that the spiritual society, while on earth, consists of individuals from various temporal societies and does not oppose the laws of these societies as long as they aim to preserve temporal order and do not contradict the worship of God.

However, Augustine also recognizes that human beings, corrupted by sin, are inclined toward self-interest

unless guided by God's grace through the Church. Without this divine guidance, political society can become a mechanism of power and coercion, resembling Hobbes' description. From this perspective, Augustine sees politics as a necessary evil, reflecting his scepticism about the effectiveness of political institutions.

Although Augustine's theoretical view does not advocate for a theocratic state where the Church absorbs the political order, his ideas have been interpreted in a theocratic manner throughout Western Christian history. From the sixth century onward, figures like Gregory the Great and Isidore of Seville viewed the state as an instrument of the Church. The coronation of monarchs symbolized their dependence on the Church's spiritual authority. Augustine's influence persisted in later theocratic frameworks, such as Calvin's Geneva and early Puritan settlements in the U.S., and echoes in some modern Christian views advocating for Church intervention in politics to achieve spiritual and moral objectives.

The debate over the Church's relationship with political authority continued through the Middle Ages, marked by conflicts between popes and secular rulers and evolving theological perspectives. By the thirteenth century, influenced by Aristotelian thought and political realities, a dualistic view emerged, recognizing the state's complete independence in its sphere and the Church's autonomy in its spiritual domain, supported by Christ's injunction to "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's."

#### **BOX 1.4b: Augustine's Hierarchy of Authority**

St. Augustine developed a theory of the hierarchy of authority. The most basic authority, ordained of God, is parents, then local officials, then regional officials then national officials, then the church, and finally God. If a person receives conflicting orders from two authorities, that person should obey the higher authority. So, if the government orders a citizen to do something contrary to God's law and will, he should disobey the state and be obedient to God. This may cause Christians to be persecuted by the government, but martyrdom guarantees heavenly glory.

### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 2**

**NOTE:** Use the space given below for your answers. Use separate sheet if space is not sufficient.

- 1 Augustine merged fundamental ideas from Greek and Roman thinkers with emerging Christian concepts regarding the nature and role of political communities. Comment.

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- 2 Augustine developed the concept of two cities—the City of God and the City of the Devil—primarily to address the fall of the Roman Empire. Elaborate.

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- 3 Briefly state Augustine's views on Church?

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- 4 Augustine's critique of the secular state at times mirrors Hobbes' view of the state as a form of absolute power or sovereignty. Explain.
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#### 1.4.8 VIEWS ON JUSTICE

St. Augustine's notion of justice was significantly influenced by Plato, however, he infused it with a religious dimension. For Augustine, justice and peace are the cardinal virtues of the City of God. He asserts that justice alone binds a society together ethically, and true justice cannot exist in a society where individuals pursue only trivial interests and lack a grasp of eternal values and Christian faith. According to Augustine, without justice, there can be no peace, as peace is fundamentally rooted in justice. He equates justice with the proper relationship between man and God, arguing that peace is more than just the absence of conflict—without justice, there can be no true law (*jus*). Augustine explicitly states in *De Civitate Dei* that without justice, a state is indistinguishable from a band of robbers. To Augustine, justice means adhering to the natural order and fulfilling the duties that arise from this order. Like Plato, Augustine believes that individuals are just when they perform their duties. Plato assigned duties based on state authority to meet communal needs, but Augustine criticizes private property driven by greed. He argues that those who claim private ownership of what was meant for the common good should at least share some of their possessions with the poor.

#### 1.4.9 ST. AUGUSTINE'S VIEWS ON SIN

St. Augustine (354–430) is regarded as the father of Western Christianity, achieving for the Western church what St. Paul had started for the broader Christian faith: the development of a unified and authoritative set of teachings from varied and contested traditions. He was not only a devoted lover and father but also famously struggled with issues of sexuality. While Augustine's extensive theological work, including around ninety books and eight thousand sermons disseminated throughout the Roman Empire by teams of stenographers and copyists, was highly original, his personal struggle for celibacy, detailed in his autobiography 'Confessions,' was a common aspect of the saintly journey. Augustine's unique contribution lay in his self-blame for his struggles, rather than attributing them to external temptations. His introspective quest to understand sin led him to explore his own experiences, providing a broader explanation for universal desires to sin.

Augustine's prolonged effort to achieve chastity has been the subject of satire for centuries. It is often assumed that his celibacy followed a life of excess. In reality, both his childhood and his life as a father were relatively unremarkable. Augustine documented his life not because he saw it as extraordinary but because he believed it reflected the universal human experience. Though his father was not a practicing Christian and died when Augustine was still young, his mother, Monica, raised him as a Catholic. As a young man, Augustine had a committed relationship with a Catholic woman from a neighbouring town, with whom he had a son, Adeodatus (meaning 'gift of God'), born in 372. Augustine notes that he remained faithful to her for fifteen years until his family arranged his engagement to a woman of higher social status. The two-year period before his fiancée came of age, which was twelve, became a crucial time for Augustine's self-discovery. An old translation of 'Confessions' vividly captures his inner conflict:

[She] who was accustomed to be his bedfellow, being removed as an obstacle to his marriage, left his heart broken and wounded. She returned to Africa, promising never to know another man, leaving

him with the son they had together. Meanwhile, Augustine, unable to imitate her constancy, and driven more by lust than love for marriage, sought another partner to sustain the same soul-disease.

In the wake of a broken relationship, Augustine turned to sex for solace—a comfort for the body but a torment for the soul. This period of inner turmoil prompted him to deeply explore his own soul, seeking to understand the root of evil, and to lament: ‘what torments did my heart endure in that travail, what sighs were those, O my God!’

#### **1.4.9.1 The Original Sin**

At the heart of his understanding of human nature, Augustine discovered not the inherent evil emphasized by the Manicheans and Platonists, but evidence of the enduring love of the Creator God. Augustine recognized that “even beyond the soul and mind,” there is the unchanging light of the Lord, and that all creation exists because it is from Him. He questioned, “Who placed this [evil] power in me, and who grafted this bitterness onto my being, since I was entirely made by my most sweet God?” Augustine argued that evil could not originate from the Devil, as even the Devil was created by the “good Creator.” Through the Bible, particularly the teachings of Apostle Paul, Augustine learned that “the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh.” He believed that acknowledging this reality, through “tears of confession, a troubled spirit, and a broken and contrite heart,” was the crucial first step toward salvation.

The aim of *Confessions* was to document how Augustine came to accept the truth about the human condition. It was not meant to highlight the author’s growing piety or the inherent sinfulness of sexual desire but to underscore the profound depravity that must be recognized before one can receive God’s grace. Augustine’s view was that the desire to sin could not be eradicated through human effort alone. For instance, he reflected on a seemingly trivial youthful prank—stealing pears from an orchard. Despite having no need for the pears and never eating them, Augustine found enjoyment in the act purely because it was wrong. He saw this as an illustration of humanity’s innate desire to sin, a perversity that taints every aspect of human nature.

In 387, Augustine chose Christ and celibacy, and he and his son, Adeodatus, were baptized together. The boy, whom Augustine’s father had disparagingly called “the child of my sin,” was now also a child of grace. Augustine and Adeodatus, who shared the grief of Monica’s death later that year, lived together as part of a scholarly community Augustine established in North Africa. Adeodatus, a central figure in these discussions, died in 389 or 390, before reaching eighteen. The Church often overlooked Augustine’s loyalty and love for his son and his mother due to its view of such behaviour as inconsistent with sainthood.

In 391, at thirty-seven, Augustine became a priest in Hippo and was made bishop in 395. By the early fifth century, while studying Genesis, he expanded upon the doctrine introduced in *Confessions*. Augustine’s focus shifted to emphasizing how the original sin in Eden had irrevocably corrupted human nature. He leaned on tradition, theology, and customs to support his argument, accepting that original sin was not fully detailed in the Bible but insisting that acknowledging it was essential for avoiding the temptation to seek salvation through one’s deeds alone.

Augustine’s account of original sin raised complex questions about its transmission. Although this topic sparked confusion and debate for centuries, Augustine maintained a straightforward explanation: sin was physically transmitted through sexual intercourse. Jesus alone was free from this transmission due to His immaculate conception. Despite his grim view of human nature, Augustine did not disdain the body but criticized ascetics who saw it as a natural enemy. He believed that evil desires, once entrenched in human nature, became deeply ingrained, and that human will alone could not overcome them.

Augustine’s doctrine of original sin suited the context of his time, addressing why even the most moral

individuals were still destined for hell and justifying precautionary baptisms. The presence of rival Christian sects, like the Donatists in North Africa, tested Augustine's assertion that the Church was a community of sinners. When debates became taxing, the doctrine of original sin provided justification for the forceful suppression of dissent. Augustine argued that because people were not rational beings capable of choosing good on their own, disciplinary measures were necessary to manage their behaviour.

By the end of his life, Augustine's doctrine of original sin had evolved. Whereas he had once maintained a notion of free will, he later believed that human beings were so tainted by sin that they could not even choose to accept God's mercy. Those who appeared to be saved were actually predestined by God. This paradox offered hope to the saved while condemning the rest to damnation.

Augustine's birth coincided with a period of Roman prosperity, but by his death in 430, the Vandals were besieging Hippo. The growing power of the barbarians paralleled Augustine's increasingly bleak view of human nature, though their invasions were not the sole cause of his pessimism. His most despondent views on human nature were developed during intense public debates with intellectual ascetics from Rome after the sack of Rome in 410. It was in this heated cultural conflict that Augustine's doctrines were refined and ultimately received papal and imperial endorsement.

#### 1.4.9.2 The Three Stages of Sin

In *De Trin*, Augustine outlines three stages of sin:

1. **Concupiscence of the Flesh:** This initial stage occurs when the senses (such as sight, smell, taste, touch, and hearing) detect something pleasurable, presenting an initial temptation.
2. **Contemplation:** In this stage, the mind lingers on the pleasurable sense impression, relishing it instead of directing it toward God, its Creator. This internal enjoyment and focus happen within the heart, an area Augustine explores deeply.
3. **Consent of the Will:** This final stage is when actual sin occurs, as the will consents to the sinful action. Some interpretations suggest that sin is already present in Stage 2, even if no overt act is committed.

Augustine's framework involves the universal hierarchies of 'Flesh' (female) and 'Reason' (male). According to medieval scholar D.W. Robertson Jr., remembering these stages is easier through the Latin prefix "con-" for each stage, and he humorously notes that "con" in French can refer to a female sexual organ, linking it metaphorically to adultery and sin. Augustine's discussion extends to the proper and improper uses of worldly things, exploring how these can lead to sin when abused.

#### 1.4.10 ST. AUGUSTINE: VIEWS ON SALVATION

St. Augustine explored the nature of salvation and Christian life through the three primary stages of the gospel story: creation, fall, and redemption. His views were notably challenged by Pelagius, a heretic and theological opponent. Augustine's perspectives can be drawn from his *Confessions*, particularly Book 1.

According to Augustine, human nature was originally good, as created by God. He asserts in *Confessions* that "the God who made me must be good," reflecting his belief in the inherent goodness of human nature at its origin. Augustine also suggests that free will and conscience were integral to God's original design for humanity. He recalls his pre-conversion state, noting, "I knew that I had a will, as surely as I knew that there was life in me." Although Augustine recognized that the fall severely constrained human will, he would affirm its initial freedom in God's design. Additionally, Augustine saw conscience—defined as the internal ability to discern good from evil—as a fundamental aspect of human nature. He described it as God's law

written in human hearts, a law that remains even amidst sin.

#### 1.4.10.1 The 'Fall of Humanity'

According to Augustine, human nature underwent a profound transformation due to Adam's first sin, known as 'the fall.' This event introduced 'the bond of original sin,' which had several significant consequences. First, this bond brought death to humanity, with Augustine portraying Adam as the first sinner in whom all of humanity died. Second, it altered human nature, fostering an inherent inclination towards sin. The fall created a sinful 'heritage of misery,' making all humans inevitably sinful from birth. Augustine reflects on this state of sinfulness, lamenting, "Lord, where or when was I, your servant, ever innocent?" He views this condition as a just punishment from God, stemming from a damaged human will.

Augustine posits that the fall compromised human free will, rendering it incapable of fully embracing God. Before his conversion, Augustine recognized a conflict within himself: one will that yearned for God and another that rejected Him. He observed that without divine intervention, the will to reject God prevailed. Reflecting on his pre-conversion years, Augustine questioned where his free will had gone. In his theology, 'habit' plays a crucial role in constraining the fallen will. He describes habit as a repetitive behaviour that aligns the will with sin. Augustine's own experience illustrates this: sin first arose from his corrupted will, yielding to sin established a habit, and eventually, he confessed that failing to resist the habit made it a necessity. For Augustine, habit effectively binds fallen individuals in a cycle of sin, limiting the exercise of free will.

#### 1.4.10.2 The Salvation

Augustine's concept of salvation logically stems from his understanding of the fallen human will. He asserts that the will cannot incline towards God on its own; rather, God must initiate the process of salvation. Reflecting on his own conversion, Augustine writes to God, "You called me; you cried out to me; you broke my barrier of deafness. You shone upon me; your radiance enveloped me; you put my blindness to flight." This and other passages highlight Augustine's belief in God's sovereignty over conversion, as humans cannot contribute to this process. Augustine also notes that, upon conversion, God restores human free will, describing it as "summoned in a moment." Furthermore, he acknowledges that God forgives the sins of converts, confessing, "you have forgiven me such great sins."

At the point of conversion, God begins to heal the convert from the sickness of sin, a process Augustine refers to as God 'remaking' his creation. Despite this, the Christian life remains a struggle between flesh and spirit, fraught with temptations and a persistent tendency toward sin. Augustine maintains that while believers are called to obey, the power to perform good works comes from God. The ultimate goal of Christian salvation is resurrection with Christ and entry into the 'blessed country of heaven,' with ongoing transformation continuing until that time.

Central to Augustine's view of salvation is Christ. Augustine describes Christ's humanity as 'mortal' but perfect and faultless, and his divinity as 'the Word of God,' equal to and identified with God. Christ is also seen as the 'Mediator' between God and humanity. Augustine outlines several roles Christ plays in salvation:

1. **Sacrifice:** Christ's sacrifice pays humanity's debt of sin, serving as both 'Priest' and 'Sacrifice' for atonement.
2. **Death:** Christ takes on the death sentence for sin, nullifying the death of the wicked.
3. **Reconciliation:** Through the cross, Christ reconciles people with God, dissolving the enmity between them.

4. **Victory:** Christ defeats the powers of evil on the cross, with Augustine referring to Him as the ‘Victor.’
5. **Example:** Christ provides a living example of humility and good works.

Pelagius contested Augustine’s views on several points. First, he argued that if the human will is inherently bent toward sin, then God could not justly hold humans accountable for their sins. Second, Pelagius questioned whether it is possible to fulfil God’s moral commandments if humans are inevitably inclined to sin. Third, he believed Augustine underestimated the inherent goodness and power of human nature, noting that even non-worshippers sometimes display goodness. Lastly, Pelagius argued that if God solely initiates salvation and all people are equally sinful and helpless, it would be unjust for God to save some and condemn others. Therefore, he posited that God leaves the choice of salvation up to individuals.

In summary, Augustine’s perspective on salvation and the Christian life contrasts sharply with Pelagius’s. While both acknowledge the goodness of human nature as originally designed by God, they differ fundamentally on the impact of Adam’s sin and the nature of salvation. For Augustine, Adam’s sin was pivotal, corrupting human nature to the extent that it tends toward sin and cannot freely embrace God. Salvation, therefore, is entirely initiated and accomplished by Christ. Augustine, reflecting the Catholic Church’s view, believed in initial justification by faith alone, but also that good works are necessary for salvation thereafter. He explicitly rejected the notion of salvation by faith alone.

### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 3**

**NOTE:** Use the space given below for your answers. Use separate sheet if space is not sufficient.

- 1 St. Augustine’s notion of justice was significantly influenced by Plato. Comment.

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- 2 Augustine equates justice with the proper relationship between man and God. Elaborate.

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- 3 Augustine’s account of original sin raised complex questions about its transmission. Explain.

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- 4 Briefly outline Augustine’s views on Salvation.

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### **1.4.11 LET US SUM UP**

St. Augustine, a pivotal figure in Christian thought, marks the beginning of the Middle Ages with his profound

influence. His ideas are evident in the writings of both Catholic and Protestant thinkers throughout the medieval period. Augustine's vision of a Christian commonwealth set a standard for all Christians to aspire to. His concepts of a world governed by justice and peace can be traced back to his works. His interpretation of Rome's fall laid the groundwork for the scientific study of history. Although his ideas were later adapted by thinkers like Hegel, Augustine's influence was deeply rooted in the philosophies of Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and the Stoics, bridging the ancient and medieval worlds. Despite being an idealist, Augustine is recognized as one of the first major 'realists' in Western philosophical tradition. His depiction of social realities in "Civitas Dei" provides a nuanced account of social factions, tensions, and conflicts, which are universal at all levels of the community. Augustine's focus on these dynamics, even within the family unit, highlights the ongoing struggle to maintain peace and integrity, both in intimate settings and on a global scale.

#### 1.4.12 KEY WORDS

- Celibacy:** The state of not being married, or abstention from sexual intercourse.
- Free Will:** The term "free will" has emerged over the past two millennia as a designator for a significant kind of control over one's actions. It is the ability to act and make choices independent of any outside influence:
- Middle Ages:** A period in European history that began after the fall of the Roman Empire in 476 CE and lasted until around 1450.
- Salvation:** It is a condition in the Christian religion being saved from the power of evil.
- Theology:** Theology is the study of religious faith and practice.

#### 1.4.13 FURTHER READINGS

- Anthony Burns, "Augustine on Administration: The Politics of Social Institutions in The City of God". *The European Legacy*, Volume 26, Issue 1, 2021.
- Charles Kahn, "The Discovery of the Will: From Aristotle to Augustine," in *The Question of Eclecticism*, eds., J. M. Dillon and A. A. Long (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).
- E.J.Hundert, "Augustine and the Sources of Divided Self". *Political Theory*, Volume 20, Issue 1, 1992.
- John M Rist, "Augustine on Free Will and Predestination". *The Journal of Theological Studies*, Volume XX, Issue 2, October 1969, pp. 420–447.
- Michael T. Rizzi, "Review: St. Augustine in dialogue with the 21st century". *America: The Jesuit Review*. July-August 2024. <https://www.americamagazine.org/arts-culture/2024/06/27/review-augustine-bonnette-revolutionary-hope-248229>
- P.R.L. Brown, "Augustine," in *Trends in Medieval Political Thought*, edited by B. Smalley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 1-21.

#### 1.4.14 EXERCISES

- 1 Write a note on St. Augustine's notion of 'Two Cities'.
- 2 Write an essay on Augustine's views on State-Church relationship.
- 3 Critically analyse Augustine's conception of 'Original Sin'.
- 4 How do you understand Augustine's "The Fall of Humanity"?
- 5 Critically analyse Augustine's notions of Sin and Salvation.

## **2.1 MACHIAVELLI: STATE, STATECRAFT AND PUBLIC MORALITY**

**- Dr. Rajnish Saryal**

### **STRUCTURE**

#### **2.1.0 Objectives**

#### **2.1.1 Introduction**

#### **2.1.2 Machiavelli – Methods**

##### **2.1.2.1 Empirical Methods**

#### **2.1.3 Theory of State**

#### **2.1.4 Machiavelli on Statecraft**

#### **2.1.5 Machiavelli on Public Morality**

#### **2.1.6 Let Us Sum Up**

#### **2.1.7 Exercises**

#### **2.1.8 Suggested Readings**

#### **2.1.0 OBJECTIVES**

**After going through this lesson, you will be able to:**

- Know the significance of Machiavelli to Western Political Thought
- Understand Machiavelli's Method
- Comprehend Machiavelli's Theory of State
- Know Machiavelli's views on Statecraft and Public Morality

#### **2.1.1 INTRODUCTION**

Niccolo Machiavelli was born in 1469 in Florence (which is in present-day Italy) when the entire Europe was witnessing great turmoil. His involvement in politics started at a very young age when he was 29. Machiavelli was appointed as the second chancellor of the Republic of Florence. The new government selected him for this though he did not have much experience in politics or administration. This appointment to the powerful diplomatic position can be attributed largely due to the growing influence of "humanists" in Italian politics. Their insistence on selection of knowledgeable people to key positions paved the way for Machiavelli to be appointed since he was known for his expertise in classical studies, moral philosophy, logic, and ancient history.

The role of the second chancellor involved significant responsibilities for managing the Republic's foreign and diplomatic affairs, allowing Machiavelli the chance to travel and directly witness the successes and failures of European leaders. These experiences as a diplomat and ambassador profoundly shaped his views on effective leadership methodology. Machiavelli's later writings reveal that much of his political philosophy was built on the insights he gained from the diplomatic and military events of his era.

Machiavelli's initial task was to represent Florence at the court of Louis XII of France, aiming to soothe the

French leader following a failure in their joint effort against Pisa. It soon became evident to him that Florence's self-perception of its significance was starkly misaligned with the reality of its military status and financial resources. To someone well-versed in contemporary principles of kingship, his own government seemed indecisive and feeble. Taking this setback to heart, Machiavelli later wrote compellingly about the crucial importance of military strength, the risks of delay, the pitfalls of appearing uncertain, and the necessity for boldness, ruthlessness, and tangible power.

In October 1502, Machiavelli was dispatched to meet César Borgia, the duke of Romagna. Borgia was a formidable and audacious military leader who later sought a formal alliance with the Florence. During this period of intense political upheaval in Italy, Machiavelli gained significant insights from his observations of contemporary statecraft through his interactions with Borgia. He was deeply impressed by Borgia, who was a fearless and bold leader with total autonomy, operated with utmost secrecy, and acted with rapid decisiveness. Borgia's success stemmed from his daring, physical prowess, and predatory instincts. However, despite his admiration for Borgia's leadership style, Machiavelli was critical of the duke's apparent overconfidence. Machiavelli disapproved of Borgia's assumption that his strategic efforts to secure a loyal successor to the papacy would automatically ensure a favourable outcome. He viewed Borgia's reliance on luck as a flaw, frequently using him as an example of the dangers of depending on chance in his later philosophical writings. Machiavelli concluded that truly effective leadership requires mastering one's own fate rather than relying on fortune.

The other famous leader whom Machiavelli engaged was Pope Julius II, recently elected to the papacy. Initially, Machiavelli believed the warrior pope was doomed to fail. However, he eventually came to support Julius's ambitious plan to reclaim the lost papal status. Julius's boldness and commanding authority—particularly the absolute nature of his power—offered hope for an unexpected victory. While Machiavelli admired with his aggressiveness, he later observed that had there been times when he needed to act with caution, such a shift would have led to his downfall; for he would never have deviated from his instinctive methods. For Machiavelli, a leader must be adaptable, tailoring their strategy not just to their personal inclinations but to the most effective course of action. Indeed, a major flaw shared by these leaders was a dangerous rigidity in the face of changing circumstances. Then, it is not surprise that Machiavelli's political philosophy was founded on the principles of versatility and effectiveness.

Tragically for Machiavelli, Julius II's aggression ultimately triumphed in the short term. Following his alliance with Ferdinand of Spain, the Medicis reoccupied Florence, leading to the dissolution of the Republic in September 1512. Machiavelli was dismissed from his position at the chancery, sentenced to imprisonment, and faced a substantial fine due to accusations of conspiring against the new Medicean regime. However, the following year, Julius II passed away, and his successor, Leo X, issued a general amnesty during the celebrations, allowing Machiavelli to retire early to his country home.

Although he constantly hoped to return to political life, Machiavelli spent the rest of his years focused on writing and reflection. From then on, he observed the political landscape not as a participant but as an analyst. Machiavelli became a prolific and versatile writer, producing works such as the biography *Life of Castruccio Castracani*, the civic and social history of his time (*The History of Florence*), and what many regard as the finest Italian play of the century, *Mandragola*. However, he is most renowned for his political philosophy. In *Discourses on Livy*, Machiavelli systematically examines his political and diplomatic experiences, the lessons of both contemporary and ancient history, and articulates his views on statecraft. His most famous book, *Il Principe (The Prince)*, is filled with various political maxims, propositions and advises to the princes.

Machiavelli's aspirations to fully re-enter the political scene were never happened. In 1521, he wrote *The Art of War*, and in 1525. Pope Clement VII granted him a stipend for his historical contributions, notably his *History of Florence*, which was published posthumously. After the Medici were ousted in 1527, Machiavelli's connections with them made him a target of suspicion for the new regime. Even the brief restoration of the Republic did not restore his earlier position. He died in 1527 a few miles from his cherished Florence.

### 2.1.2 MACHIAVELLI - METHODS

By the time Machiavelli wrote his works, the medieval conception of the political sphere as a microcosm reflecting the structural order of the broader universe had been dismantled. What was once viewed as an embodiment of universal purposes had now become a battleground of competing forces. Machiavelli did not aim to transform this reality fundamentally but merely reflected it. His admiration for classical antiquity and worldly values was not novel; he was deeply influenced by Florentine humanism and his intellectual predecessors. Some scholars interpret his writings strictly within their historical context, influenced by these factors. However, Machiavelli's skepticism towards metaphysical ideas is evident in his texts. Therefore, understanding his approach to these ideas is essential for grasping Machiavelli's political philosophy and why it was filled with cynicism. The following section will briefly explore Machiavelli's hostility towards metaphysics.

The continuous search for precedents has caused some to overlook that a doctrine should be assessed not just by its literal interpretation but by its underlying spirit. Influential thinkers often use traditional forms or language to articulate novel ideas. Machiavelli's redefinition of the key concept of *virtù* exemplifies this. While civic humanists viewed *virtù* in the Aristotelian sense as a moral good—representing humane, prudent, and wise behaviour—Machiavelli reinterpreted it as a force of nature. For him, *virtù* encompassed traits such as courage, ambition, shrewdness, drive, willpower, energy, and self-reliance. This Roman concept of virtue differs from the Greek or Christian understanding and rejects the notion that “virtue is its own reward.” Instead, Machiavellian *virtù* always serves a greater purpose, finding its most classic expression in warfare.

The Originality of Machiavelli is not only highlighted by his unconventional use of traditional language but also by what he chooses to omit. Notably, in *The Prince* and his other works, he neither mentions nor endorses concepts like natural justice or natural laws—key ideas in the classical and medieval traditions and common among his contemporaries. Machiavelli appears to disregard such abstract universals, rejecting standards that exist outside of history. For him, history is simply a sequence of physical events without transcendent meaning. What we often refer to as absolute values are, in his view, remnants of traditional metaphysics—human inventions presented as divine. According to Machiavelli, our moral rules are entirely conventional, arising from the practical necessities of human existence within communities. They are born out of natural necessities not because of natural laws; they exist because they are essential for human survival, not because they are divinely ordained or inherently embedded in human nature, as the Bible or Aristotelian philosophy would suggest.

Notably absent from *The Prince* and the *Discourses* is the word “soul” (*anima*). In the philosophies of Plato, Aristotle, and later Christian theology, the soul distinguishes humans from the rest of nature, conferring a unique dignity. However, while *anima* never appears in Machiavelli's two major works, the term *animo* (“spirit” or “spiritedness”) is frequently used, typically referring to a “fighting spirit”—the will to defend one's body, family, homeland, and so on against actual or potential threats. This notion of spirit is grounded in physicality, whereas the concept of the soul (*anima*) seeks to transcend it. Once again, Machiavelli seems to suggest that we are fundamentally objects in nature, governed by “natural necessity.”

Machiavelli in a way rejects the idea of a metaphysical structure to the universe—the belief that certain

things possess an “essence” or purpose instilled by God or nature. There is no hint of Aristotelian or Christian teleology in his work, no reference to an ideal order, to the concept of man’s place in the great chain of being, or to any ultimate fulfilment towards which creation is headed. He makes no assumption of the existence of divine law; the only natural laws he acknowledges are those of physical necessity. Nor does he concern himself with the salvation of souls or the contemplation of God’s creation. His focus remains firmly on the material world.

Francesco De Sanctis, a 19th-century Hegelian liberal, viewed Machiavelli as giving voice to the emerging conflict between theology and science—two distinct “ways of thinking and acting.” The scientific perspective was rooted in the revolutionary notion that human consciousness is independent of any transcendent authority, serving merely as the self-awareness of humans acting within society and history to harness nature for their own ends. By helping to pioneer this new perspective, Machiavelli embodied “the most profound negation of the Middle Ages.” He sought truth on earth rather than in heaven, relying on observation rather than on established axiomatic principles.

### 2.1.2.1 Empirical Methods

Due to his opposition to metaphysics, Machiavelli’s main contribution to intellectual history was the development of the “inductive method”—the approach of basing knowledge on the gathering, comparison, and analysis of what we refer to as facts. This method stands in contrast to the medieval practice—still partly upheld by Machiavelli’s contemporaries—of seeking explanations through extensive inference and deduction. As a result, Machiavelli is celebrated as the founder of modern political science.

Machiavelli clearly viewed himself as an initiator who replaced the study of “things as they are” with “things as they are imagined.” His focus was on examining “what is actually done” rather than “what should be done.” By distinguishing between analytical and normative political inquiry, he believed he was forging “a path yet untrodden by anyone.” For Machiavelli, the vast array of facts to be analyzed encompassed the entirety of history, from antiquity to the present. He believed that understanding “things as they are” necessitated understanding “things as they were.” In his view, history could provide a stable body of knowledge that transcends the ever-changing flow of events.

Machiavelli saw himself as a pioneer in replacing the focus on “things as they are imagined” with “things as they are.” He is interested in analysing “what is actually done” rather than “what should be done.” By separating analytical political inquiry from normative considerations, he believed he was treading “a path yet untrodden by anyone.” For Machiavelli, the vast range of facts to be examined encompassed the entirety of history, from antiquity to the present. He recognized that understanding “things as they are” requires an understanding of “things as they were.” He believed that history could provide a stable foundation of knowledge that transcends the ever-changing nature of events.

However, critics who challenge Machiavelli’s scientific credentials often take their arguments too far. It is unfair, for instance, to accuse him of deriving crude generalizations from ancient Roman principles and practices without considering their specific contexts. *The Prince* is replete with references to recent history and contemporary politics, clearly reflecting Machiavelli’s experience in chancery service. In all his works, he typically supports his general propositions with examples from various historical periods, indicating his awareness of the distinction between behaviour typical of a specific era and broader historical laws.

Machiavelli cannot, by any means, be considered a “pure” scientist. His aim was not solely to *explain* but also to *prescribe*, and at times, to *criticize*. His works are filled with precepts, critiques, warnings, practical suggestions, and useful maxims. The final chapter of *The Prince*, where his realistic analysis gives way to passionate nationalism, dispels the notion that Machiavelli was merely a detached, cynical technician without

ideals. However, a deep commitment to certain political ideals is not incompatible with a strong dedication to objective methods of analysis. His new approach required a strict separation between the object of inquiry and the inquiring mind, ensuring that his values did not distort his empirical analysis. While he may have occasionally fallen short, readers are often struck by his remarkable objectivity and his ability to set aside personal bias in the pursuit of knowledge.

### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 1**

**NOTE:** Use the space given below for your answers. Use separate sheet if space is not sufficient.

1. Machiavelli the pioneer of modern political thought. Comment?

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2 Discuss the main theme of Machiavelli book The Prince?

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### **2.1.3 THEORY OF STATE**

Machiavelli showed little interest in developing a coherent theory on the origin of the state, its functions, the structure of government, or its relationship with individuals. He did not engage in abstract questions such as, “What is the state?” or “How did it come into being?” It seems doubtful that he even considered the state in a theoretical or abstract sense. His focus was on the actual states of his time. As Maxey aptly puts it, “No fine-spun theories, no abstruse speculation; no complex doctrines find room in its twenty-six brief chapters, but only tried and practical rules of experience, rules tested in the laboratory of everyday affairs.” Machiavelli viewed the state primarily in terms of governmental organization that could provide security and peace. Allen similarly notes that “but, in the main, Machiavelli expressed ideas about the state of his own times rather than about the states...Neither the ‘Prince’ nor the ‘Discourses’ expresses in a coherent manner any political theory of the state or that of government. Being himself a practical politician, to him practical theorem of how to keep the states in order was more important than the abstract theory of origin of state.”

However, it would be wrong to conclude from the above discussion that Machiavelli lacked a political theory altogether. Although he did not formulate a comprehensive political philosophy, later thinkers organized his various scattered ideas into a coherent theory. While Machiavelli’s political thoughts were not systematically developed, they were expressed through observations on contemporary conditions. As Sabine notes, “behind those utterances, or implicit in them however there often was a consistent point of view, which might be developed into a political theory and in fact was so developed after his time. Machiavelli was not much interested in philosophy and not much inclined to generalize beyond maxims useful to a statesman.”

Machiavelli was not interested in an idealistic conception of the state; his primary focus was on the unity of the body politic and the consolidation of power. Adopting an empirical approach, he carefully studied the history of the medieval period, from the 4<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> century, a time dominated by the feudal system. In this system, kings divided their territories into smaller regions, each granted to a noble or tenant chief. There were no common laws or centralized authority, leading to a chaotic and fragmented structure. Amidst this confusion, the Church emerged as the superior authority, resulting in constant conflict between spiritual and

temporal powers. The Pope claimed authority over all princes, reducing the state (civil authority) to little more than the Church's police force. Consequently, a true national life could not develop within such a system. Machiavelli analyzed Italian society in depth, observing that feudalism and the Church not only undermined the state's identity and significance but also rendered the state subordinate. He completely separated religion from politics, breaking with the medieval tradition that political authority was controlled by the Church. Machiavelli asserted that the state is independent of the Church, with its own rules of conduct, and is the highest, supreme, and autonomous power. He declared that the state is superior to all other associations in human society. Rejecting the feudal system, he advocated for a powerful central authority that would be supreme over all institutions.

The main focus of Machiavelli's political thought is power, which he emphasized as a vital element of politics. He argued that the moral code prescribed by the Church for individuals is not applicable to rulers. According to Machiavelli, a ruler must understand that success is achieved through power, and in the pursuit of political power, any means can be justified. He viewed politics as a constant struggle for power, asserting that all politics is essentially power politics. For Machiavelli, the absolute state was the ultimate goal, and power was the means to achieve it. He stated that the primary aim of *The Prince* was to strengthen and unify the country, establish peace and order, and expel foreign invaders. To accomplish this, any means would be acceptable.

There are several reasons why Machiavelli advocated for a secular and powerful state. Living in Renaissance Italy, he was deeply influenced by the new spirit of the Renaissance, which brought about an intellectual awakening that introduced a rational, scientific approach to all aspects of life. The Renaissance replaced faith with reason. Italy, at the centre of the Renaissance, was the most modern and urbanized country in Europe. However, its wealth, intellect, and artistic achievements were accompanied by moral decay and political chaos. During Machiavelli's time, the worst aspects were the rampant corruption and selfishness among Italian rulers and church officials. Machiavelli embodied a culture experiencing a deep political crisis. Italy was fragmented into numerous small but independent states, some of which, like Florence and Venice, were republics, while others were ruled by despots. Internally, these states were plagued by intense political rivalries and personal ambitions, while externally, they were constantly at war with one another. This political fragmentation made Italy weak and vulnerable to the ambitions of powerful neighboring states like France, Prussia, and Spain. When France invaded Italy and defeated the Medici rulers, Machiavelli witnessed this tragedy firsthand. This traumatic experience led him to conclude that unless Italy was united under a strong central government, it would always be at risk of conquest and annexation by neighboring powers.

In summary, we can identify several key ideas from Machiavelli about the state, which contribute to a systematic political theory:

1. **The State as the Highest Human Association:** Machiavelli views the state as the highest form of human association, necessary because humans are inherently ambitious, egoistic, and selfish, yet also weak and fickle. He argues that the state originates from individuals' calculating self-interest. Machiavelli gives this idea a distinctly materialistic angle, suggesting that humans, driven by endless desires, created the state primarily to satisfy their craving for additional fulfilment.
2. **The State as an Artificial Creation:** Machiavelli believes that the state is not a natural development for human beings but rather an artificial construct. It is not something rooted in human social instincts.
3. **Forms of Government:** Machiavelli identifies three forms of state—Monarchy, Aristocracy, and Republic. He extensively discusses the Monarch and the Republic, largely ignoring Aristocracy,

which he holds in low regard. While he considers the Republic to be the best form of government, he acknowledges that the conditions in Italy at the time had deteriorated to the point where a Republic was no longer practical. Instead, Monarchy was better suited to Italy's needs, as it was ideal for establishing a new state or reforming a corrupt one.

4. **Secular State:** Allen describes that "The Machiavellian state is, to begin with, in the complete sense, an entirely secular thing." with no divine justification for its existence. According to Machiavelli, the state arises from the interplay of material interests, and the Church has no legitimate role within it. However, recognizing the Church's power in existing states, Machiavelli advised his fictional Prince to respect the religion of his subjects. Religion, he argued, instils virtues like humility, obedience, and lawfulness in citizens, making it a valuable tool for curbing anti-social behaviour. Machiavelli believed that religion was the best way to check men's evil and anarchic tendencies. He suggested that a ruler should support the Church to maintain order and foster a sense of duty to the state. Although Machiavelli rejected the idea of divine law and the Church's superiority over or independence from the state, he did not dismiss religion entirely. In *Discourses*, he even emphasizes the importance of giving religion a prominent role within the state. According to him, religion is crucial for the state's health and prosperity. As Foster succinctly puts it, Machiavelli assigns religion an important place in the state—but a place that is within the state, not above or separate from it. In Machiavelli's view, the Church is merely an instrument of the state.
5. **State Should Maintain its Own Army:** Machiavelli believed that the state should maintain its own army, composed of its own citizens, rather than relying on others, especially mercenary soldiers. He observed that the lawlessness in Italy during his time was due to mercenaries—soldiers who fought for the highest bidder and were loyal to none—replacing the citizen-soldiers of earlier free cities. Machiavelli witnessed the national army of France decisively defeating Italy's mercenaries, leading him to emphasize the need for a well-trained and well-equipped citizen army bound by loyalty. In his ideal state, military training would be mandatory for all able-bodied citizens aged seventeen to forty. Without a national army, he argued, a state could not survive.
6. **Quality of Citizens:** The Machiavellian state is composed of citizens imbued with a sense of honesty, law-abidingness, and reliability in fulfilling their public duties. The presence of these qualities signifies a healthy state. It is only in corrupt or abnormal states that these virtues are absent among citizens.
7. **State Must Attempt to Expand Power:** Machiavelli believed that a normal and healthy state is driven by an impulse to expand its power. Both Republics and Monarchies, he argued, are naturally inclined to extend their dominions. A Prince is driven to expansion by an insatiable desire for power, while a Republic seeks to preserve itself in a competitive world, where failure to expand could lead to its demise at the hands of others. The Roman Republic's expansion serves as a prime example. A well-trained army is essential for both aggrandizement and self-preservation. Machiavelli viewed the acquisition of an empire as natural to a state, just as growth is to a human body. He stated that all free governments have two primary aims: to enlarge their dominions and to preserve their liberties. For Machiavelli, expansion is a sign of a state's health.
8. **Importance of Law and Law-Giver:** Finally, in Machiavelli's state, the law-giver or legislator plays a crucial role in establishing order. His study of Greek and Roman history made him appreciate the importance of laws and the law-giver. While he considered force and fear as powerful administrative tools, he also believed that good laws are the foundation of a state. Laws crafted by a wise legislator not only regulate citizens' actions but also foster civic and moral virtues, shaping the national character.

Such laws are valuable in both newly established and corrupt states. A wise law-giver can repeal bad laws, introduce new ones, and transform society. According to Sabine, “There is practically no limit to what a statesmen can do, provided he understands the rules of his art. He can treat down old states and build new, change forms of government, transplant population, and build new virtues in the characters of his subjects. If a ruler lack soldiers, he need blame no one but himself, for he should have adopted such measures to correct the cowardice and effeminacy of his people. The law-giver is the architect not only of the state but to society as well, with all its moral, religious and economic institutions.” The circumstances of Machiavelli’s time, along with the logic of his political philosophy, led him to place great importance on the role of the law-giver.

The issues discussed above may suggest a well-ordered theory of the state by Machiavelli, but it is important to acknowledge that *The Prince* and *The Discourses* are more focused on the art of governance rather than on a comprehensive theory of the state. Machiavelli never intended to write a treatise on political theory; his primary concern was offering practical advice to rulers on how to address day-to-day administrative challenges and maintain their hold on power.

#### **2.1.4 MACHIAVELLI ON STATECRAFT**

Machiavelli’s science of statecraft (or maxims to the ruler) develop out of his ministerial correspondence, study of history and its lessons, the wisdom of the ancient and from examples of great and noble deeds. *The Prince* is full of hard and calculated advice about how a new prince should act to establish himself in a recently conquered principedom, and a good deal of the advice is about the use of violence and deceit. His advice to new princes is an extrapolation from the actions of already successful princes. Machiavelli seems to be saying to princes: ‘do what others have already done’, only choose your precedents carefully to make sure that you imitate the right prince in the right circumstances. And the notion that princes might have to do some pretty nasty things now and again to save their states had been a commonplace since ancient times.

He cautions unwise princes that they will come to grief if they ignore these maxims, for by adhering them they will be free from their dependence on fortune. He believes that history taught, and to ignore its lessons will be suicidal.

Some significant aspects of the advice to the ruler are as follows:

1. Machiavelli elaborates the doctrine of “Raison D Etat”.
2. End justifies the Means.
3. State is sovereign, autonomous and non-religious.
4. A prince must combine the qualities of a lion and a fox.
5. Use a double standard of morality.
6. Favour despotic rule.
7. Maintain strong army.
8. Human nature is low and ungrateful, so Prince must consider this nature of man.
9. He should win the popularity of his people must not touch the property of the people.
10. A prince must have council of wise men and not of flatterers.
11. Separate politics from religion. 12. Remain free from emotions.

**1. Machiavelli elaborates the doctrine of Raison D ‘Etat’:** “Raison d’État” refers to the “Reason of

State,” which emphasizes actions and policies that prioritize the safety and security of the state. Machiavelli argues that the state must ensure its own survival before focusing on the welfare of its people. For this purpose, any means the state adopts are justified in his view. He believes that in politics, decisions should be guided by the harsh realities of power struggles and survival. The actions of the state should be judged based on their ability to create an independent, self-sufficient, well-ordered, and well-maintained state. Machiavelli advised the prince that in order to preserve and protect such a state, any measures taken are justifiable. The prince should prioritize power above all else, recognizing that morality and ethics operate in different spheres and should not be conflated with the state’s interests. For a prince, the power of the state is of utmost importance, and self-sufficiency means having a strong army, a unified government, national unity, and a solid economic foundation.

**2. End justifies the Means:** Machiavelli justifies the concept of “Reason of State.” He posits that the state is the highest form of human association and should be revered almost like a deity, even at the expense of individual interests. A ruler should understand that anything that brings success and power, including cunning and shrewdness, is virtuous. Politics, according to Machiavelli, is an inherently precarious endeavour that cannot be conducted in a purely decent and orderly fashion. The state has fundamental objectives and responsibilities, such as protecting life, maintaining law and order, and ensuring the well-being of its citizens. Therefore, the state must have sufficient means at its disposal to fulfil these duties.

**3. State is sovereign, autonomous and non-religious:** Machiavelli argued that the state is superior to all other human associations. It is sovereign and autonomous, meaning that moral and religious considerations do not constrain the prince. The prince operates above and beyond conventional morality and may use religion to achieve his goals. Religion should not influence politics, nor should the church control the state. In fact, the sovereign state wields absolute power over all individuals and institutions. The state is essential and distinct from all other institutions and, therefore, should be evaluated by different criteria. For Machiavelli, state power is the ultimate goal, and religion serves merely as an instrument to support it. The state exists to fulfil the material interests of its people, and Machiavelli separated politics from theology and government from religion. He did not view the state as having a moral purpose but rather focused on the practical aspects of human life, asserting that politics is an independent sphere governed by its own principles and laws.

**4. A prince must combine the qualities of a lion and a fox:** Machiavelli advised the prince to emulate the qualities of both the fox and the lion. By adopting the cunning and foresight of the fox, the prince can effectively plan and strategize to achieve his goals. Meanwhile, emulating the strength and power of the lion will provide the necessary force to accomplish those goals. A fox may be shrewd and perceptive, but lacks the strength of a lion, while a lion without the fox’s cunning would be reckless. Therefore, a successful ruler must blend the qualities of both animals: the bravery of the lion and the cunning of the fox. Physical force is crucial in times of anarchy and disorder, but law and morality are essential to curb selfishness and cultivate civic virtues.

**5. Use Dual standard of politics:** Machiavelli proposed a dual standard of morality, one for the ruler and another for his subjects. He argued that morality is not necessary for the ruler who is the creator of both law and morality and thus stands above them. The primary duty of the ruler is to preserve the state, and to this end, he may employ means such as deceit, conspiracy, and even violence. Absolute morality, Machiavelli contended, is neither possible nor desirable in politics. Conversely, he believed that morality is crucial for the people. Moral citizens are more likely to obey the laws of the state and sacrifice for their nation, fostering civic responsibility and patriotic spirit. Thus, Machiavelli advocates a double standard of morality.

**6. Favoured despotic ruler:** Machiavelli argues that both princes and ordinary people enjoy being loved. However, he contends that love is not always reliable because those in love may behave unpredictably. Fear, on the other hand, is infallible: “If you have them by the balls, their hearts and minds will follow.” Thus, Machiavelli asserts that it is politically preferable for a prince to be feared than merely loved. He believes that the foundation of government lies in the “reason of state,” rather than divine mandate to punish sin. According to Machiavelli, government arises from the inherent weaknesses and insufficiencies of human nature. In societies where people are corrupt and selfish and the law is ineffective, normal administration is unfeasible. A powerful government is necessary to impose order, curb excessive desires, and regulate people’s behaviour.

**7. Maintain strong army:** Machiavelli advises maintaining constant military readiness to ensure the state’s preservation. The prince should establish a robust and reliable army to address both internal and external threats to his power. A strong and regular army is essential for a state’s defence. The state should build an independent, professional, and loyal military force, composed of its own citizens. This army should be prepared not only to protect national borders but also to pursue expansion. All able-bodied citizens must undergo compulsory military training to ensure they are equipped for service.

**8. Human nature is low and ungrateful, so prince must consider this nature of man:** Machiavelli argues that a rational analysis of politics must start with an understanding of human nature. He scrutinizes human behaviour with particular focus and portrays human nature as inherently flawed. According to Machiavelli, humans are characterized by weakness, ingratitude, fear, and a lust for power, and he assumes that all people are fundamentally bad. Key aspects of human nature include:

- a) **Limitless Desires:** Humans have insatiable desires and are inherently selfish and aggressive, leading to constant strife and competition.
- b) **Desire for Security:** The masses seek security, recognizing that only state laws can provide it. Consequently, they cooperate with and obey the laws. A successful ruler must ensure the safety and protection of the people.
- c) **Need for Force:** People must be controlled by force because it instils fear. Only through force and repression can the state manage and check human malevolence. Therefore, government should rely on force rather than persuasion.
- d) **Ambition and Discontent:** Humans are naturally ambitious and never satisfied with their position. This drive for dominance leads to enmities and wars. Overall, human nature is seen as selfish, power-hungry, and conflict-prone, driven by materialistic motives. Fear of punishment is the most reliable means of maintaining control and order.

**9. Should try to win popularity of his people:** The prince should aim to gain the popularity, goodwill, and affection of his people. He should ensure that his subjects are materially satisfied by avoiding excessive taxation. Additionally, the prince should respect and preserve long-standing customs and traditions, as people are naturally conservative. He should avoid any personal desire for the wealth or women of his subjects and remain vigilant towards potential dissenters.

**10. A prince must have council of wise men and not of flatterers:** A strong government and internal unity are crucial for any state. The prince must carefully select his officers and advisers, promptly removing those who are disloyal. He should appoint wise individuals to his council and allow them full freedom to speak the truth. The prince should consult them on all matters, listen to their opinions, and then make his own decisions after thoughtful consideration.

**11. Separate politics from religion:** Before Machiavelli, medieval political philosophers held that religion was the foundation of the state. However, Machiavelli fully emancipated the state from church control, rejecting medieval religious philosophy. He dismissed Aquinas's theory that divine law is essential for human guidance, asserting instead that the only goal man should pursue is his own material well-being. Machiavelli did not view the state as having a moral purpose but emphasized the importance of worldly life. He argued that politics operates independently with its own principles and laws, free from religious or moral constraints. Machiavelli did not disregard religion and morality entirely. In the opening chapter of the Discourses, he suggests that princes who wish to maintain power should respect and preserve the purity of all religions. He saw religion as a tool for the state, providing instrumental value rather than inherent moral guidance. Religion, according to Machiavelli, plays a crucial role in fostering unity and integrity within the state, as it creates a sense of community, establishes social harmony, and cultivates civic and patriotic spirit. The decline in religious respect among people signals the state's potential ruin. Despite acknowledging the role of religion in maintaining societal cohesion, Machiavelli maintained that religion cannot influence politics and the church should not control the state. In his view, the sovereign state holds absolute power over all individuals and institutions, with the church subordinate to it. Machiavelli's separation of religion from politics paved the way for the emergence of the secular state. While he was not opposed to religion and morality, he advocated for a dual standard of morality, placing the state above both. For Machiavelli, the state is the highest form of social organization and must be judged by different standards. He sanctioned the use of immoral means by rulers when necessary to preserve the state, defining the separation of politics from ethics as the essence of his thought.

**12. Prince must be free from emotions:** The prince should leverage the emotions of his people to serve the state's interests. He must remain composed, calculating, and opportunistic. Machiavelli advises that a prince should understand how to act with the qualities of a beast when necessary. He warns against being excessively generous, strict, or kind, emphasizing the importance of moderation. A prince should adapt his demeanour—being gentle or severe—as circumstances demand. His relationship with his subjects should resemble that of a father with his children, demonstrating strength and asserting authority whenever required.

**13. Ordered state:** In *the Prince*, Machiavelli endorsed absolutism and the necessity of a strong, effective government. His support for absolutism stemmed from his experiences with the chaos, lawlessness, corruption, and misrule that characterized Italy at the time. Observing how King Charles VIII of France easily captured Florence with little resistance, Machiavelli argued for a well-organized, disciplined, and militarily robust state. He believed that without a strong state, a country could not hope to survive in international politics. According to Machiavelli, only a well-ordered state could provide security against both external threats and internal disorder. He maintained that princes cannot afford the moral leniency available to their subjects. The constant vigilance required to govern effectively is not natural to most people and must be learned. If a prince neglects to master his role and relies on Christian ethics—assuming that people are generally good or bad—he risks endangering his state. Machiavelli argued that while one might choose to love enemies, trust their loyalty, or turn the other cheek, such an approach could jeopardize the state. Wise individuals, he suggested, would naturally prefer to live in a well-governed state that commands respect and deters potential threats, rather than one that is weak and susceptible to military conquest.

### 2.1.5 MACHIAVELLI ON PUBLIC MORALITY

The greatness in Machiavelli's writing lies in his approach to religion and morality, which set him apart from his predecessors. Throughout the Ancient and Medieval periods, politics had been closely tied to ethics and morality. Although Aristotle made a tentative attempt to distinguish politics from ethics, he did not fully succeed, as he still viewed the state primarily as a moral institution. Machiavelli, however, was the first to

clearly separate politics from ethics and morality. He rejected the medieval emphasis on virtues like humility and disdain for worldly pursuits, focusing instead on the acquisition, maintenance, consolidation, and expansion of power as the primary goals of a successful ruler or state. For Machiavelli, the fundamental concern of a state is its survival and the preservation of its power. He argued that states and rulers should be evaluated based on their effectiveness in protecting citizens, ensuring their well-being, expanding their territory, and defending national interests. Politics, according to Machiavelli, is a continuous struggle for power and domination, and it must be judged by its own criteria to ensure the survival of states. He emphasized that his analysis of political rules reflects the harsh realities of politics rather than idealistic or imaginative notions.

Machiavelli does not endorse the use of immoral or wicked methods but emphasizes the importance of the end goal, which may justify the use of any means. He argues that a ruler does not need to strictly follow conventional morality but should be prepared to act outside these bounds if necessary. In contrast, Machiavelli insists that private individuals must exhibit the highest moral values. He believes that the home and family are crucial in cultivating these virtues, such as independence, simplicity, purity, loyalty, and trust. While he encourages flexibility in a statesman's conduct of state affairs, he maintains that individuals should uphold these moral values in their personal lives.

Machiavelli distinguishes between two levels of morality: public and private. Neither is inherently superior to the other, but when a conflict arises, the one that yields the most practical result should take precedence. Practically, this means that if necessary, a ruler might take actions that are publicly moral to secure the state's liberty, even if they compromise private morality in the short term. Machiavelli views politics and morality as separate domains with distinct spheres of inquiry. Politics pertains to state conduct, while morality concerns individual behavior. They do not intersect or overlap. The ruler, embodying the state, operates on a different moral plane than the subjects. The state has its own morality, focused on success and power, whereas private individuals must adhere to the highest moral standards. Sabine notes that Machiavelli advocates for two distinct moral standards: one for rulers, judged by their ability to maintain and enhance their power, and another for private citizens, judged by their contribution to the social group. The ruler, being outside the group or in a unique relation to it, operates above the group's morality. As the creator of the state, the ruler is not bound by laws or morals enacted for the group but is judged solely by the success of his political strategies for expanding and securing the state's power.

In politics, the concepts of fairness and foulness are fluid, shifting with circumstances and situations. There are no universal rules, as everything becomes a matter of political expediency. A prince must balance being compassionate, humane, loyal, and honest with the readiness to employ force, deceit, and treachery. Machiavelli argues that political actions should align with high moral standards—such as compassion, good faith, trustworthiness, and honesty—during stable periods. However, in times of crisis and disorder, adherence to these principles may lead to downfall. He contends that power is not divine and dismisses the notion that states arise from divine will as absurd. Machiavelli notes that virtues can be detrimental to a prince who strictly adheres to them. Instead, he suggests that while a prince should appear compassionate, trustworthy, humane, honest, and religious, he must also be prepared to act contrary to these virtues when necessary. A prince, especially a new one, might need to deviate from principles of faith, charity, humanity, and religion to maintain power. Thus, a prince should be adaptable to the changing winds of fortune and circumstances, avoiding moral deviations if possible, but knowing when to adopt less virtuous actions if required.

Machiavelli emphasizes that while force is crucial for managing state affairs, religion also plays a significant role. He advocates using religion to foster national customs and a mind-set that supports societal peace and order. Public spirit is vital to state stability, with religion and liberty being key contributors. He advises the

prince to promote religious belief among the populace, even if he himself is irreligious or holds little faith. By separating religion from politics, Machiavelli paved the way for the modern emphasis on secularization in thought and life.

The distinction between the conduct rules for individuals and those for a ruler is valid only under one condition: the ruler must align his interests with those of his subjects, whether in a corrupt or free state. A prince can only be successful if he considers the welfare of his subjects as his own concern. The primary focus of a prince should be the public good, as there is no other basis for stability or order. The needs of the state justify extreme measures, including treachery and brutality. Even actions like murder, deceit, and assault are permissible if they serve to protect the state's interests. In *the Discourses*, Machiavelli writes, "when the safety of our country is absolutely at stake there need be no questions of what is just or unjust, merciful or cruel, praiseworthy or disgraceful but all other considerations set aside, that course alone is to be taken which may save our country and maintain its liberty".

Machiavelli is clear that the morality of politics differs from that of private life. While murder or betrayal among individuals undermines the safety and security of others, Machiavelli expects individuals to uphold faith and act ethically. However, he allows a prince to disregard these principles for the state's benefit. He argues, "a wise lord cannot, nor ought he to, keep faith when such observance may turned against him, and when the reasons that caused him to pledge it exist no longer. If men are entirely good, this prospect will not held, but because they are bad, and will not keep faith with you, you too are bound to observe it with them; and no prince is ever at a loss for plausible reasons to cloak a breach of faith."

Contrary to traditional political theory, which suggests that ethical conduct is beneficial for moral elevation, Machiavelli acknowledges the inherent irony in political realities. In a fragmented world, politics must align with practical necessities, addressing the challenges that require innovative solutions. While Machiavelli recognizes that civilization and a good society demand high moral standards, he is pragmatic about the fact that the moral fabric of a society is shaped by its people. His amorality suggests that a ruler may need to employ tactics that are not strictly ethical in certain situations. Consequently, Machiavelli discussed not only the science of politics but also its art. Politics, for him, is an end in itself rather than a means to achieve higher goals like justice or truth. The success of a state is measured by its efficiency, not its legitimacy, making his principles applicable to both lawful and unlawful regimes. He assumes that states, much like individuals, will vary greatly in nature. He also highlighted that in times of relatively stable social order, "all moral questions can be raised from within the context of the norms which the community shares; in periods of instability it is these norms themselves which are questioned and tested against the criteria of human desires and needs."

Machiavelli has faced substantial criticism for his apparent endorsement of immorality in public life. However, a closer examination of his views reveals that he is not moral or immoral but rather amoral. As Prof Maxey has said "in Machiavelli's eye the state knows no ethics. What it does is neither ethical nor unethical but entirely non-ethical. It is of the neutral gender so far as right and wrong are concerned." "In the realm of statecraft and in the affairs of government there is but one criterion by which to judge the character of an action and that is by its results. If the results are good the action cannot be called wrong, nor is it necessarily right; the safe thing to do is to call it expedient; and if the results are bad, to say the action was inexpedient." Sabine and Dunning also express similar views. Moralists commit error by equating the ethical standards of the individual with those of the state. They mistakenly apply the same ethical rules to both, despite their fundamentally different natures. Machiavelli can be compared to a physician of the state, who is concerned with the functionality of the body rather than its ethics. His focus is on restoring and maintaining the state's well-being.

## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 2

**NOTE:** Use the space given below for your answers. Use separate sheet if space is not sufficient.

### 1 Write a short note on Machiavelli views on state.

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### 2 BRIEFLY STATE MACHIVELLI VIEWS ON PUBLIC MORALITY.

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#### 2.1.6 LET US SUM UP

After studying this lesson, it becomes clear how controversial Machiavelli remains. He faced both admiration and criticism for his ideas, largely due to misunderstandings about the context in which he wrote and a lack of awareness of their full implications. As L. A. Burd noted in the Cambridge Modern History, vol. I, “Living at a time when the old political order in Europe was collapsing and new problems both in state and in society were arising with dazzling rapidity, he endeavoured to interpret the logical meaning of events, to forecast the inevitable issues, and to elicit and formulate the rules which, destined henceforth to dominate political action, were then taking shape among the fresh-forming conditions of national life”.

Niccolo Machiavelli earned a negative reputation as no other philosopher in the history of political theory. “The murderous Machiavel” as William Shakespeare called him. The term “Machiavellianism” symbolised villainy. The initial reaction to Machiavelli’s writings was one of shock, and he was denounced as an inventor of the devil. “A damned Machiavel”, commented Shakespeare, “holds the candle to the devil himself”, referring to the devil as “Old Nick” after Machiavelli’s first name. This was because Machiavelli sanctioned the use of deception, cruelty, force, violence and the like for achieving the desired political ends.

Despite his controversies, Machiavelli had his admirers. Spinoza saw him as a champion of the people for his critical examination of *The Prince*. Montesquieu viewed him as a defender of liberty, a perspective that emerged from *The Discourses* rather than *The Prince*. Montesquieu distinguished between Machiavelli and Machiavellianism, recognizing him as a pioneer in political sociology. Rousseau, a follower of Montesquieu, depicted Machiavelli as a Republican and critic of tyranny, portraying him as a commendable citizen and honourable man. For Enlightenment thinkers, Machiavelli represented a new era in political thought. They admired him for integrating contemporary history with ancient political theory, and for his focus on realism and pragmatism in understanding human nature and political operations. As Lerner notes, “The whole drift of this work is towards a political realism, unknown to the formal writings of his time.”

Machiavelli emphasized the significance of politics as a public duty and the necessity for rulers to follow principles distinct from those applied in private life. He was among the first to stress that politics should be judged solely by political criteria, making moral platitudes outdated and irrelevant. While *The Prince* offered guidance on how rulers could acquire and maintain power, *The Discourses* provided strategies for a new revolutionary regime to sustain itself through public involvement and the leadership of a philosopher-prince. For Machiavelli, success served as the benchmark for evaluating political activities and assessing achievements

against initial promises. This approach allowed him to study political power objectively, free from religious and moral biases, and to explore the secular foundations of political authority and the state. His writings were notable for their practical and concrete nature, rather than being speculative or abstract. He marked the beginning of a new era by rejecting idealism and emphasizing the need to understand political realities. As the first to capture the essence of these changes and initiate a scientific approach to political study, he earned the title of the “first modern political theorist and scientist.”

### **2.1.7 EXERCISES**

1. Examine in detail the Machiavelli’s views on state?
2. Critically examine Machiavelli’s views on statecraft?
3. Briefly state the Machiavelli’s methods of study political thought?

### **2.1.8 SUGGESTED READINGS**

Nelson, Brian, *Western Political Thought*, Second Edition, Pearson: New Delhi, 2021

Sabine, G.H, & Thomas T.L, *A History of Political Theory*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, New Delhi: OUP, 1973

Ten, C.L, *Mill on Liberty*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980

Wayper, C L, *Teach Yourself Political Thought*; New Delhi: Surjeet Publications, 2017

Gauba, O.P, *Western Political Thought*, Macmillan Publications India Ltd, 2011

Mukherjee, Subarta, *History of Political Thought: Plato to Marx*, Delhi, PHI Learning, 2019.

## **2.2 HOBBS' LEVIATHAN: THEORY OF STATE, KNOWLEDGE, INDIVIDUALISM AND ABSOLUTISM**

**- Dr. Rajnish Saryal**

### **STRUCTURE**

#### **2.2.0 Objectives**

#### **2.2.1 Introduction**

#### **2.2.2 Hobbes Philosophy/Knowledge**

##### **2.2.2.1 Analysis of Human Nature**

#### **2.2.3 State of Nature**

#### **2.2.4 The Law of Nature**

#### **2.2.5 Social Contract and Theory of State**

##### **2.2.5.1 Attributes of Sovereignty**

#### **2.2.6 Individualism and Absolutism in Hobbes's Political Thought**

#### **2.2.7 Let Us Sum Up**

#### **2.2.8 Exercises**

#### **2.2.9 Suggested Readings**

#### **2.2.0 OBJECTIVES**

**After going through this lesson you will be able to:**

- know important aspects related to Hobbes Philosophy/knowledge;
- acquainted with Hobbes views on Human Nature and State of Nature
- understand the Law of Nature and Social Contract
- comprehend the attributes of Sovereignty
- know how Hobbes can be seen as an individualist as well as an absolutist

#### **2.2.1 INTRODUCTION**

Hobbes was born in 1588 and lived through the turbulent political landscape of 17<sup>th</sup>-century England, passing away at the age of ninety-one in 1679. He did not come from a background of power, wealth, or influence; his father was a disgraced village vicar. However, he was fortunate that his wealthy uncle could provide for his education, recognizing Hobbes' intellectual potential early on. This support allowed Hobbes to receive a thorough education in the classics of Latin and Greek, which eventually led him to study at Oxford. There, he found little satisfaction in the dominant Aristotelian-Scholastic philosophy of the time.

Hobbes' abilities and connections led him to become a tutor to the Cavendish family, who later produced the second Duke of Devonshire. He spent much of his life in the households of noblemen. During a Grand Tour

in 1610, Hobbes encountered the emerging scientific thought, and by the early 1620s, he had formed a close friendship with Francis Bacon, serving as his secretary. A committed Royalist, Hobbes fled to France in 1641 to avoid the Civil War. While in exile, he had the opportunity to meet figures like Galileo and other prominent scientists and intellectuals of the period.

During his exile in France (1641-51), Hobbes spent part of his time as a mathematics tutor to the future Charles II. During this period, he also worked on his most famous work, *Leviathan*, which was published in London upon his return to England. Hobbes' decision to return to England remains somewhat mysterious, though it is likely due to a mix of homesickness and his growing reputation in exile circles for religious unorthodoxy, if not outright atheism. Despite this, Charles II always held a fondness for Hobbes. After the Restoration, Hobbes was welcomed back to court and granted a royal pension of £100 a year.

Thomas Hobbes lived through one of the most crucial times in early modern English history: the English Civil War (1642–1648). This conflict, in broad terms, was a struggle between the King and his Monarchist supporters, who favoured traditional monarchical authority, and the Parliamentarians, led by Oliver Cromwell, who sought to expand the power of Parliament. Hobbes' political philosophy represents a middle ground between these two factions. He rejected the theory of the Divine Right of Kings, famously articulated by Robert Filmer in *Patriarcha*, which claimed that a monarch's authority was divinely ordained, absolute, and that political obligation stemmed from a religious duty to obey God. Hobbes also dismissed the Parliamentarians' early democratic argument for shared power between the King and Parliament.

By rejecting both views, Hobbes struck a balance as both a radical and a conservative thinker. Radically, he argued that political authority and obligation are grounded in the self-interest of individuals, who are naturally equal, with no inherent ruler. Yet, he also upheld the conservative notion that society's survival depends on ceding absolute authority to a sovereign, ensuring stability and order.

Despite the social and political upheavals that influenced Thomas Hobbes's life and ideas, they never hindered his intellectual progress. His early role as a tutor provided him with ample opportunity to read, write, and publish, including his acclaimed 1629 translation of Thucydides. This position also connected him with leading English intellectuals, such as Francis Bacon. During his self-imposed exile in France, Hobbes's growing reputation as a scientist and thinker brought him into contact with key European intellectuals, including Descartes, Mersenne, and Gassendi, leading to both collaboration and debate. Hobbes, known for his combative nature, engaged in prolonged disputes with clerics, mathematicians, scientists, and philosophers, sometimes damaging his own intellectual standing—his repeated, and erroneous, claims about “squaring the circle” becoming a notable example.

Hobbes remained intellectually active despite declining health—likely Parkinson's disease—from the age of sixty. Even in his eighties, he continued dictating his thoughts and defending his positions in various controversies. Hobbes became renowned across multiple disciplines: as a scientist (notably in optics), a mathematician (particularly in geometry), a translator of classical works, a legal theorist, and a debater in metaphysical and epistemological discussions. However, his greatest and most lasting reputation arose from his writings on morality and politics.

## **2.2.2 HOBBS' PHILOSOPHY/KNOWLEDGE**

All political philosophy must be fundamentally concerned with humans, their nature and their surroundings. The central questions for any political theorist are: What is man? What is the state? Why should the individual obey the state? As a result, political philosophers typically begin their study of the state by first examining human nature. This is especially true in the case of Hobbes, as his philosophy centres around the individual.

Hobbes begins his theory by stating that sensations in the human mind are produced by the motion of particles. According to him, all mental phenomena arise from sensation. Receptive faculties such as perception, imagination, memory, prudence, and reason are the cumulative outcomes of sensation. In addition to these, Hobbes identifies more significant forces in the mind, which he terms “active” forces, including emotions, passions, and desires. He asserts that emotions and passions are innate and natural, while reason is artificial and self-acquired. Thus, man is primarily driven by passions, not by reason.

Hobbes further argues that the motion of particles affects “vitality,” which he associates with the heart rather than the brain. When vitality increases, it generates desire, and when it decreases, it creates aversion. From these two primary emotions, Hobbes derives all other complex emotions. He believes that emotions come in pairs: what a man desires, he labels as “good” (since it enhances vitality), and the pleasure accompanying desire reflects this. Conversely, what a man dislikes, he calls “evil” (as it diminishes vitality), and the feeling of aversion is accompanied by pain. For Hobbes, all emotions are either forms of desire or aversion.

In Hobbes’s view, the concepts of good and evil are subjective, constantly changing, and transient. Human desires shift over time, and there is no ultimate or final goal in life. As Hobbes puts it, “The end of every man is continued success in obtaining those things which he from time to time desires.” He calls this state of ongoing fulfilment “felicity,” which is achieved through the acquisition of “powers.” Thus, life is a “perpetual and restless desire for power after power that ceases only in death.”

#### **2.2.2.1 Analysis of Human Nature**

The Scientific Revolution, with its ground-breaking discoveries that the universe could be explained and predicted through universal laws of nature, had a profound influence on Hobbes. He aimed to develop a theory of human nature that mirrored the scientific advancements being made in the study of the physical universe. His psychological theory is shaped by mechanism—the belief that everything in the universe is the result of matter in motion. For Hobbes, this principle also applies to human behaviour.

According to Hobbes, human actions can be understood as the result of smaller, often unseen, internal processes. Behaviours such as walking and talking are caused by underlying actions within our bodies, which are in turn triggered by interactions with external objects, whether human or otherwise. These interactions set off chains of causes and effects, ultimately producing the observable behaviour in humans. In this view, human actions and decisions can be explained by the same universal laws of nature that govern the movements of celestial bodies.

For instance, the gradual fading of memory can be explained by inertia: as we encounter more sensory input, the remnants of earlier experiences diminish over time. From Hobbes’ perspective, humans are essentially complex organic machines, responding to external stimuli in a mechanistic way, governed by universal laws of human nature.

According to Hobbes, the mechanistic nature of human psychology implies that normative concepts are inherently subjective. Terms like “love” and “hate” are merely expressions we use to describe what we are attracted to or repelled by. Similarly, “good” and “bad” have no objective meaning beyond reflecting our personal appetites and aversions. Moral language, therefore, does not describe any objective reality but instead mirrors individual preferences and tastes.

Beyond this subjectivism, Hobbes also concludes from his mechanistic view of human nature that people are inherently and exclusively self-interested. All individuals pursue only what they believe serves their personal best interests. They are drawn to what they desire and repelled by what they dislike, responding in a mechanistic way. This principle applies universally to all human actions, regardless of the context—whether in society or

outside of it, whether dealing with strangers or friends, whether pursuing minor goals or grander desires like power and status. Every action is driven by the pursuit of personal advantage and the fulfilment of individual desires. According to Hobbes, humans are endlessly driven by appetites and are fundamentally concerned only with themselves. Even acts like caring for children, he argues, can be explained by self-interest, as the caregiver anticipates future obligations from those they help to survive.

In addition to being self-interested, Hobbes asserts that humans are also rational. They possess the capacity to pursue their desires in the most effective and efficient manner. However, since values are subjective, reason does not assess the merit of a person's goals; instead, it functions as a tool to find the best means to achieve them. Hobbes likens reason to "scouts and spies," whose role is to explore and discover paths to what is desired. Rationality, in his view, is purely instrumental—it can calculate, compare, and weigh different options, enabling individuals to choose the best strategies to fulfil their given ends.

### **2.2.3 STATE OF NATURE**

From these principles of human nature, Hobbes develops a provocative and persuasive argument for why individuals should willingly submit to political authority. He does this by imagining a hypothetical scenario where people exist before the formation of society—what he calls the State of Nature.

According to Hobbes, the justification for political obligation is rooted in human self-interest and rationality. Although naturally self-interested, individuals are also rational enough to recognize that submitting to the authority of a sovereign will allow them to live in a civil society, which ultimately serves their own best interests. To make this case, Hobbes envisions the State of Nature, where individuals are exclusively self-interested, relatively equal in power (even the strongest can be killed in their sleep), resources are scarce, and no authority exists to compel cooperation.

In such a condition, Hobbes argues, life would be unbearably harsh. In the State of Nature, each person would constantly fear for their life, unable to secure the long-term fulfilment of their needs or desires. No complex or sustained cooperation could occur, as this state would be characterized by absolute distrust. Given the reasonable assumption that people primarily seek to avoid death, Hobbes concludes that the State of Nature is the worst possible situation for humanity—a state of perpetual, unavoidable war.

According to Hobbes, the harsh conditions of the state of nature arise primarily from the absence of an overarching political authority. The state of nature is "natural" in a specific sense: for Hobbes, political authority is not inherent but artificial—government is a human creation. In the natural condition, human beings lack this authority.

Hobbes explains that the only naturally occurring authority is that of a mother over her child, as the child is much weaker and owes its survival to her. Among adults, however, this dynamic does not exist. While some people are physically stronger than others, and Hobbes sarcastically dismisses the idea that some are wiser, he acknowledges that some are foolish while others are dangerously cunning. Still, he argues that every adult is, in essence, equal in their ability to kill one another. Even the strongest person must sleep, and even the weakest can rally others to help in killing someone stronger.

Because all adults share this capacity to threaten each other's lives, Hobbes concludes that there is no natural source of authority to govern them. In this view, he strongly rejects the notion that monarchs or rulers have a natural or God-given right to rule over others.

In Hobbes' state of nature, people have the right to do whatever they believe is necessary to ensure their own survival. The greatest danger they face in this condition is violent death at the hands of others. If individuals have any natural rights, Hobbes argues, the first and foremost is the right to protect themselves

from violent death. But Hobbes goes further, making his argument even more compelling. People not only have the right to self-preservation but also the right to determine what actions are necessary to achieve it.

This is where Hobbes' view of human nature becomes crucial. He suggests that people often do not make wise judgments. However, in the state of nature, no one is in a position to definitively establish what constitutes good judgment. If someone decides that killing another person is a reasonable or necessary step to protect their own life, then in Hobbes' state of nature, they have the right to do so. Of course, others may judge the situation differently. But since insecurity and distrust dominate the state of nature, misunderstandings are unlikely to be resolved peacefully. There is no trusted authority to arbitrate disputes, so each person is forced to act as their own judge, with the stakes being as high as life or death.

For this reason, Hobbes makes bold claims that may seem entirely amoral. He states, "To this war of every man against every man," he says, "this also is consequent [i.e., it follows]: that nothing can be unjust. The notions of right and wrong, justice and injustice have no place [in the state of nature]." In *Leviathan*, he further argues that in the state of nature, everyone has a right to all things, "even to one another's body." While Hobbes is dramatizing his point, the underlying idea is defensible. If I believe I need something—whether it's an object, another person's labour, or even their death—to ensure my survival, then in the state of nature, there is no common authority to determine whether my judgment is right or wrong. According to Hobbes, when humans lack a shared authority, as they do in the state of nature, they are almost certain to descend into dangerous and potentially deadly conflict.

Precisely stating, in the state of nature, there is a basic equality of power, and everyone believes they are capable of obtaining whatever they desire. Since everyone has the same needs for limited resources, combined with the fact that people act primarily out of self-interest, this leads to competition between individuals for those scarce resources.

As a result, Hobbes concludes that in the state of nature (before the establishment of government), humans would be in a constant state of war and conflict, with each person competing for the world's resources, which are insufficient to satisfy everyone's desires. In this natural state, people live in "continual fear and danger of violent death," and life is "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short."

### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 1**

**NOTE:** Use the space given below for your answers. Use separate sheet if space is not sufficient.

1. Analyse Hobbes views on human nature?

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2 Briefly state the main aspects of Hobbes philosophy?

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### **2.2.4 THE LAW OF NATURE**

The situation is not entirely hopeless, as humans are rational beings and can recognize the laws of nature, which guide them toward escaping the state of nature and establishing a civil society. However, the question

of how people suddenly become reasonable enough to follow these laws of nature requires further exploration.

Hobbes believes the state of nature is something we must avoid at all costs, except for preserving our own lives (our “right of nature,” as he previously explained). But what kind of “ought” is this? There are two main ways to interpret Hobbes here. One interpretation is that it is a counsel of prudence: avoid the state of nature if you wish to avoid violent death. In this case, Hobbes’s advice applies to us only if (i) we agree that violent death is what we should most fear and avoid, and (ii) we accept Hobbes’s claim that only an unaccountable sovereign can prevent us from falling into the state of nature. This interpretation aligns with an egoistic, self-interest view of Hobbes’s philosophy, but it also presents significant challenges, which will be explored further.

The other way to interpret Hobbes also has its challenges. This view suggests that Hobbes is claiming we are morally obligated to avoid the state of nature. We have a duty to prevent such a condition from arising and, if possible, to bring it to an end. Hobbes often expresses the idea that we have such moral duties. However, this raises two key questions: Why do we have these obligations, and what makes them obligatory?

Hobbes addresses these issues by using the concept of natural law, an idea drawn from ancient and medieval philosophy. Like those before him, he believes human reason can discover eternal principles that should guide our behaviour, independent of (but complementary to) any religious or divine teachings. In other words, these laws come from nature, not from God. However, Hobbes radically reinterprets the content of natural law. He does not believe natural law gives people any right to criticize or disobey government laws. This puts him at odds with Protestant thinkers who believed religious conscience could justify disobeying “immoral” laws, and with Catholics who believed the Pope’s commands had primacy over those of secular governments.

While Hobbes outlines nineteen laws of nature, the first two are the most politically significant. A third, which emphasizes the importance of honouring contracts, is crucial to his moral justification for obedience to the sovereign. The remaining sixteen can be summarized as “do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” While these details are important for Hobbes scholars, they do not significantly impact his overall theory and can be set aside here.

The first law reads as follows:

“Every man ought to endeavour peace, as far as he has hope of obtaining it, and when he cannot obtain it, that he may seek and use all helps and advantages of war.” (*Leviathan*, xiv.4)

This restates the arguments we have already seen about our “right of nature,” which tells us the condition where peace no longer possible. The second law of nature is more complicated:

“That a man be willing, when others are so too, as far-forth as for peace and defence of himself he shall think it necessary, to lay down this right to all things, and be contented with so much liberty against other men, as he would allow other men against himself.” (*Leviathan*, xiv.5)

Hobbes aims to address the transition from the state of nature to civil society. However, his approach can be misleading and has led to considerable confusion and debate. Hobbes presents the second law of nature in a way that suggests we should all lay down our weapons, relinquish much of our “right of nature,” and collectively authorize a sovereign who will dictate what is permissible and enforce obedience. According to Hobbes, the terms of this social contract are “I authorize and give up my right of governing myself, to this man, or to this assembly of men, on this condition, that thou give up thy right to him, and authorize all his actions in like manner...”

The problem is evident. If the state of nature is as dire as Hobbes describes, it would be nearly impossible for people to reach such an agreement or implement it effectively.

At the end of *Leviathan*, Hobbes seems to acknowledge this issue, stating, “there is scarcely a commonwealth in the world whose beginnings can in conscience be justified.” In other words, governments have typically been established through force and deception, rather than through collective agreement. Nonetheless, Hobbes defends existing governments that are capable of maintaining peace among their subjects, rather than an idealized government created through a peaceful contract from the state of nature. His main argument is that we should act as if we had voluntarily entered into such a contract with everyone in our society—except for the sovereign authority itself.

### 2.2.5 SOCIAL CONTRACT AND THEORY OF STATE

In Hobbes’s concept of the social contract, all individuals—except the person or group holding sovereign power—give up their “right to all things.” They agree to drastically limit their natural rights, retaining only the right to defend themselves in the face of immediate danger. How limited this right becomes in civil society is a matter of ongoing debate, as determining what constitutes an immediate threat is subjective. For example, individuals are allowed to defend themselves if the sovereign attempts to kill them. But what if the sovereign appoints them as soldiers? Or if the sovereign appears weak, casting doubt on their ability to maintain peace?

The sovereign, however, retains their natural right, which, as Hobbes describes, is effectively the right to everything—deciding what others must do, determining property laws, resolving disputes, and more. Although Hobbes acknowledges that there are moral limits to what a sovereign should do (such as being accountable to God), these limits have no practical impact. Since the sovereign is the sole rightful judge in all disputes—at least on earth—those moral constraints do not influence the sovereign’s authority. For Hobbes, the key question in all moral and political matters is always: who has the right to judge? In the state of nature, each person acts as their own judge, which is part of why Hobbes sees it as a state of perpetual conflict. In civil society, the sovereign alone holds that authority.

In simpler terms, Hobbes’s view can be summarized as follows: The most fundamental law of nature, according to Hobbes, is that every person should seek peace when others are willing to do the same, but retain the right to pursue war if others do not seek peace. Being rational, people recognize the logic of this principle and are motivated to create a social contract that allows them to escape the harsh conditions of the State of Nature. This social contract involves two main agreements: first, individuals collectively agree to give up the rights they had against each other in the State of Nature; second, they empower a person or group to enforce these agreements and maintain order.

Hobbes argues that because the sovereign has the authority to punish those who break the contract, with consequences worse than the inability to act freely, people have a strong self-interest in adhering to the rules of morality and justice. Society becomes possible because, unlike the State of Nature, there is now a powerful authority that can compel people to cooperate. Although life under a sovereign can be strict (Hobbes believes that because people’s passions often overpower their reason, the sovereign must have absolute authority), it is still better than the chaos of the State of Nature. Regardless of how poorly the sovereign governs or how much individuals may object to their rule, Hobbes insists that resisting the sovereign’s power is never justified, as it is the only force preventing a return to the dreaded State of Nature.

If we closely analyse the above discussion, we understand that society, politics, morality, and everything that enables what Hobbes calls “commodious living” are entirely conventional. Before the social contract—where individuals agree to live together and empower a sovereign with absolute authority—there is no

concept of immorality or injustice; anything is permissible. However, once these contracts are in place, society becomes possible, and people can be expected to keep their promises, cooperate, and interact peacefully. The social contract is the foundation of everything good that allows for a well-lived life. Our choice, then, is either to follow the terms of the contract or return to the chaos of the State of Nature—a condition Hobbes argues no rational person would ever choose.

#### **2.2.5.1 Attributes of Sovereignty**

The attributes of sovereignty, according to Hobbes, are what one would expect from someone who views the creation of sovereignty as an all-or-nothing act. Either individuals choose to live under a sovereign with full authority, or they risk quickly reverting to the chaos of the State of Nature. There is no point, Hobbes argues, in debating the powers of the sovereign—either the sovereign holds all power, or society collapses.

Hobbes bases the attributes of sovereignty on the idea of its establishment through an “institution,” where rational individuals in the State of Nature would willingly grant the sovereign these powers. In fact, these would be the same powers any absolute sovereign would naturally assume if given the opportunity. Hobbes outlines eleven attributes of sovereignty, which are the rights and powers a rational society would grant to their ruler for their own preservation. He also contends that these attributes apply equally to a sovereign who acquires power by force, as the nature of sovereignty remains unchanged regardless of how it is established.

Hobbes is aware that the claims of absolute power made by contemporary kings often provoked anger among their liberty-loving subjects. However, he provocatively argues that if these subjects thought rationally, they would voluntarily establish a sovereign with even greater absolutist powers than those claimed by the most autocratic monarchs of his time. Hobbes’s argument is especially relevant to societies that have fallen into disorder and seek to rebuild. For those who advocate limiting sovereign power, Hobbes argues they must either concede that true sovereignty is absolute by nature or admit that their thinking is confused and inconsistent.

We will get more clarity if we go through the following 11 attributes that Hobbes articulated regarding the sovereignty and sovereign power:

1. The first attribute of sovereignty, according to Hobbes, is that the social contract establishing it nullifies all previous contracts. This is necessary because agreements made in the chaotic State of Nature would be inherently unreliable due to the lack of trust and a law-enforcing authority. In a civil society attempting to rebuild itself, challenges could arise if people believe they have made prior agreements with God, as these would take precedence over earthly contracts. Hobbes is critical of such divine covenants, arguing that they are ineffective without an earthly judge, who must be the sovereign. Establishing any other judge would create a rival authority, leading to civil war and a return to the State of Nature. Any valid contracts with God must be made by the sovereign, not the people, as only the sovereign represents the collective will. Furthermore, there’s no guarantee that those claiming divine covenants are truthful, as there’s no way to verify if God agreed or even listened.
2. The second attribute of sovereignty, according to Hobbes, is that the Sovereign can never lose his right to rule. This is because the social contract itself grants the Sovereign absolute authority, making him an agent of the people, acting with their will and authority. Since the Sovereign’s actions are considered the people’s actions, he cannot be accused of acting against their will, and to challenge him would be equivalent to challenging oneself. The Sovereign, therefore, cannot forfeit his power, as there is no higher authority to judge him. Any attempt to establish a mechanism to judge or limit

the Sovereign would result in chaos, civil war, and a return to the State of Nature. For Hobbes, multiplying judges is tantamount to multiplying sovereigns, which undermines the stability of society.

3. Hobbes argues that a social contract is valid if a majority agree to it, even if some dissent. He believes that by participating in discussions about the social contract, dissenters implicitly agree to be bound by the majority decision. If dissenters refuse to join, they remain in the State of Nature, where the Sovereign—who also remains outside the contract—can exercise his unlimited Right of Nature over them. This means the Sovereign can compel them to join Civil Society or kill them if they pose a threat. In the State of Nature, dissenters are in a more dangerous position than before, as they now face a powerful Sovereign rather than equal fellow men. Consequently, prudence would push dissenters to join Civil Society under the same terms as the majority.
4. Hobbes acknowledges that people will sometimes be dissatisfied with their Sovereign, believing they've been wronged. Men will be inclined to believe that they suffer injuries at the Sovereign's hands. Hobbes argues that the Sovereign, despite appearances, is incapable of injuring anybody. Hobbes distinguishes between "iniquity" (wickedness) and "injury" (unlawful actions). While a Sovereign, as a human, can act wickedly, Hobbes argues that he cannot commit an injury because injuries are defined by the laws of Civil Society, and the Sovereign, as the lawgiver, cannot break his own laws. Since the social contract authorizes all of the Sovereign's actions, any perceived injury is something one has essentially done to oneself, making it illogical to claim the Sovereign has wronged them.
5. Hobbes, following the logic in point 4, argues that subjects can never justly execute their Sovereign because doing so would be punishing the Sovereign for actions authorized by the subjects themselves. Since the Sovereign acts on their behalf, no legal principle could justify punishing him for their own deeds.
6. The Sovereign undertakes all measures for maintaining internal peace, including censoring opinions, particularly political and religious ones, as diverse views can disrupt order. The Sovereign has the authority to define key terms like "just" and "unjust," as justice is shaped by the laws he creates. However, the concepts of "right" and "wrong" remain under God's authority.
7. A key responsibility of the Sovereign is to regulate religious opinions and dictate forms of public worship, especially during times of religious conflict. While Hobbes acknowledges that inner beliefs cannot be forcibly changed, the Sovereign can impose public worship practices. In an era of intense religious disputes, such control was crucial for peace. (Hobbes himself was likely an atheist privately.)
8. Decisions in the ordinary courts of the realm must be the Sovereign's. All courts will be his courts, just as all law will be his law. Different kinds of courts which might make different kinds of judgements would lead to confusion. Uncertainty about how the law actually worked would lead to a sense of insecurity, and it was for some measure of security that men quitted the State of Nature for Civil Society in the first place. The State of Nature was insecure because it was lawless. There was no machinery of justice in the State of Nature so it would be foolish to incorporate uncertainty and therefore insecurity into the machinery of justice in Civil Society.
9. The Sovereign's authority includes not just maintaining internal order but also managing matters of war. "The sword of Justice is also the sword of war". When individuals enter into the social contract, they entrust the Sovereign with the power to protect them from both internal conflict and external threats. Since many sovereignties arise from conquest, and war is inherently harsh, the ability to

decide on war and peace is central to sovereignty. To deny the Sovereign this power would be to undermine the essence of sovereignty itself.

10. The Sovereign cannot personally handle all aspects of governance. Although all government actions are carried out in the Sovereign's name, the Sovereign must rely on agents to manage affairs. These agents might be chosen based on various sources of advice, whether from a parliamentary body, a few trusted advisors, or a single favourite. However, no one has a right to demand that the Sovereign follow their advice; it remains at the Sovereign's discretion. The appointment and dismissal of royal servants are therefore entirely the Sovereign's prerogative.
11. The Sovereign has the exclusive right to bestow titles of nobility and can even demote individuals if necessary. This power of ennoblement is exercised solely by the Sovereign, who is not accountable to anyone else for how it is used. In societies where aristocracies are typically hereditary, the Sovereign has the authority to create or reshape the aristocracy according to his will.

After going through the above, you must have understood that Hobbes's concept of sovereignty is extensive and comprehensive. He derives all attributes of sovereignty from the initial voluntary social contract and then extends these attributes to sovereignty acquired through conquest. Although Hobbes's arguments in *Leviathan* are presented at a high level of abstraction, the work can be interpreted as a philosophical commentary on contemporary European and English history.

## **2.2.6 INDIVIDUALISM AND ABSOLUTISM IN HOBBS'S POLITICAL THOUGHT**

Absolutism and individualism are key political concepts within Hobbes's framework. On one hand, Hobbes's theory of sovereignty establishes the Sovereign as absolute in all respects, a radical departure from thinkers like Bodin who had imposed certain limitations on sovereign power. Hobbes's sovereign is envisioned as all-encompassing, unrestrained, and supreme. While this theory was revolutionary and controversial, it is often misunderstood; critics overlook that Hobbes's concept of absolutism is rooted in his individualism.

Hobbes begins and ends with the individual. The security of the individual is central to his political ideas. His entire political philosophy, whether before or after the establishment of civil society, revolves around the individual—focused on their security and interests. Critics often miss this deeper connection and perceive absolutism as the core of his system, whereas, in fact, absolutism is a supporting concept that derives its significance from individualism. Without the need for individual self-preservation, Hobbes might not have needed to justify such absolute sovereignty.

In terms of Hobbes's influence on later political thought, his individualism has proven more impactful than his absolutism. His individualistic ideas contributed to the laissez-faire theory, which was embraced by utilitarian thinkers like Bentham in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, emphasizing self-interest as a central motive. Meanwhile, his theory of absolutism faded from prominence once the revolutionary upheavals subsided, leading to a misconception that Hobbes was solely an absolutist due to his Royalist alignment.

Sabine is correct when he says, "the absolute power of the sovereign – a theory with which Hobbes's name is more generally associated – was really the necessary complement of his individualism." Prof. Dunning says in the same vein: "But notwithstanding his exaltation of the power of the state his theory was, in its foundation, wholly individualistic and rested on as complete recognition of the natural equality of all men as was ever asserted by Milton or any other of the revolutionary theorists." Even a commentator like Vaughan, who is otherwise very critical of Hobbes says: "While Hobbes's theory sovereignty resulted in absolutism, it was nevertheless based on the doctrine that all men are equal naturally and upon the belief in the desirability of a large number of individual freedom." Prof. Wayper says that "the *Leviathan* is not merely a forceful

enunciation of the doctrine of sovereignty... it is also a powerful statement of individualism.” A different place and in a different context Prof. Vaughan goes to the extent of saying, “ By a strange irony, it was reserved for the deadliest enemy of individualism to give the first formal statement of the theory upon which in the hey-day of its power individualism was universally held to rest. The whole work of Hobbes breathes the bitterest hatred not only of individualism as a theory, but even of those elementary rights which none but the most backward nations now deny to the individual in practice. Yet this preposterous system is itself based, consciously or unconsciously on assumptions representing an extreme form of individualism, an individualism is more uncompromising than that of Locke himself.”

Hobbes inherited and advanced the doctrine of nominalism, which asserts that “the reality of a thing is its individuality.” It’s important to clarify that Hobbes’s concept of individualism is not aligned with the democratic or liberal doctrine that emphasizes the fundamental rights and sanctity of the individual. Unlike liberals or democrats, Hobbes does not regard individualism as a matter of valuing individual rights or personalities. Instead, he views individualism from a more fundamental perspective: he believes that the world is composed solely of individual entities, without any overarching concept of “people,” “common will,” or “general good,” as seen in the theories of democratic thinkers like Rousseau. For Hobbes, the essence of reality lies in the existence and interests of separate individuals, and his individualism is rooted in the belief that the world is fundamentally made up of individual substances.

There is a misconception that “Hobbes starts as an individualist and ends as an absolutist”. This kind of notions points out Hobbes transitions from an individualist to an absolutist, with the creation of the sovereign supposedly undermining individualism. This view is mistaken. Hobbes creates an absolute sovereign not to eradicate individualism but to address the practical need for security and order. He argues that, despite his pessimistic view of human nature, people in the state of nature can rationally unite, form a social contract, and establish a sovereign to ensure mutual protection. This contract is with each other, not with the sovereign, creating a powerful authority that cannot be resisted. For Hobbes, civil society and positive law arise from human necessity and convention, not divine or eternal principles. The sovereign’s absolute power is justified by its role in maintaining peace and security, with its authority grounded in the practical need to preserve individual safety. Hobbes’s philosophy asserts that even a tyrannical government is preferable to no government at all, emphasizing that law, morality, and religious truth derive from the sovereign’s will, rather than from tradition or supernatural sources.

It becomes clear that Hobbes’s absolutism does not eliminate individualism. Here are some key points to clarify this:

1. Hobbes’s pessimistic view of human nature necessitates the establishment of an absolute sovereign with powerful, coercive authority to control anti-social tendencies and maintain order.
2. The absolute sovereign is a means to an end, not an end in itself. Its purpose is to ensure the security of individuals’ lives.
3. The sovereign attains absolute powers through the explicit consent of the individuals.
4. Even with the creation of an absolute sovereign, individuals retain their freedom to act within the bounds of the law. They are free to do anything that is not explicitly prohibited.
5. Hobbes’s individualism is evident in the right of individuals to resist the sovereign if it fails to protect their lives or threatens their safety. This right preserves individual autonomy.
6. The Hobbesian contract does not incorporate a collective or general will, meaning individuals maintain

their individuality even after the establishment of an absolute sovereign.

7. Lastly, Professor Oakeshott presents a compelling argument on this matter. He asserts that Hobbes's *Leviathan* was not designed to undermine individualism but rather to establish the minimal conditions necessary for a stable, civilized society. Oakeshott explains that the sovereign is absolute in two key respects that do not destroy individuality: first, the surrender of natural rights is absolute and the sovereign's authority is permanent and exclusive; second, there is no appeal against the sovereign's commands. According to Oakeshott, Hobbes's refusal to allow any compromise on the surrender of rights was not due to an inherent commitment to absolutism but rather to basic logical principles. Even with the absolute authority granted to the sovereign and no right to appeal except in life-threatening situations, Hobbes remains a staunch individualist.

Thus, we can conclude that Hobbes is indeed an individualist. His work, *Leviathan*, can be seen as a democratic critique of democracy itself. While Hobbes is neither a democrat nor a liberal, he is a profound individualist. Hobbes's government can be said to be "the government of the individual, for the individual and by the individual but it cannot be said to be the government of the people, for the people and by the people, rather it is the anti-thesis of democratic government".

## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 2

**NOTE:** Use the space given below for your answers. Use separate sheet if space is not sufficient.

- 1 What do you understand by Hobbes views on Law of Nature?

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- 2 Write a short note on Hobbes Social Contract?

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- 3 How Hobbes can be seen as an individualist. Comment?

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## 2.2.7 LET US SUM UP

Thomas Hobbes's philosophy emerged during a time of intense conflict between Catholics and Protestants following the Reformation. Convinced that religion should not be the foundation of government, Hobbes argued that while individuals should be free to hold their own religious beliefs, a strong governing authority is necessary to maintain order.

Hobbes viewed the "state of nature" as a condition of constant conflict and competition for power, which he believed would lead to a "war of all against all." To avoid this, he proposed the social contract, where individuals agree to surrender some of their freedom to a sovereign authority that ensures peace and security. Although Hobbes supported monarchy, he asserted that any form of government could be legitimate if it

effectively provided security.

As an absolutist, Hobbes believed that dividing governmental powers would weaken the state. Despite his endorsement of a strong, centralized power, he acknowledged the right of individuals to resist the state in defence of their lives or honour, which critics argue could justify revolution in the face of state abuse.

Hobbes's work can be seen as a precursor to Enlightenment thought, which later emphasized reason and science in governance. His ideas laid the groundwork for subsequent political philosophy, influencing debates on the state of nature, social contracts, and the roles of religion and government in society.

### **2.2.8 EXERCISES**

- 1 Critically examine Hobbes views on Human nature?
- 2 Discuss in detail the Hobbes views on law of nature and state of nature?
- 3 Briefly examine the Hobbes Social Contract and theory of state?
- 4 Hobbes was an individualist or absolutist. Comment?

### **2.2.9 SUGGESTED READINGS**

- Nelson, Brian, *Western Political Thought*, Second Edition, Pearson: New Delhi, 2021
- Sabine, G.H, & Thomas T.L, *A History of Political Theory*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, New Delhi: OUP, 1973
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- Gauba, O.P, *Western Political Thought*, Macmillan Publications India Ltd, 2011
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## **2.3 LOCKE’S TWO TREATISE OF GOVERNMENT: THEORY OF STATE, KNOWLEDGE, NATURAL RIGHTS AND LIBERALISM**

**- Dr. Rajnish Saryal**

### **STRUCTURE**

#### **2.2.0 Objectives**

#### **2.2.1 Introduction**

#### **2.2.2 The Political Philosophy/knowledge of Locke**

#### **2.2.3 Locke’s Conception of Human Nature**

#### **2.2.4 The State of Nature**

#### **2.2.5 Natural Rights and Property**

#### **2.2.6 Locke’s Theory of State**

##### **2.3.6.1 The Social Contract**

##### **2.3.6.2 Locke on the Form of Government**

#### **2.2.7 Liberalism in Locke’s Political Thought**

#### **2.2.8 Let Us Sum Up**

#### **2.2.9 Exercises**

#### **2.2.10 Suggested Readings**

### **2.3.0 OBJECTIVES**

**After going through this lesson you will be able to know:**

- key texts written Locke and his political philosophy
- Locke’s conception of Human Nature and State of Nature
- Locke’s views on natural rights, property and forms of government
- Locke’s theory of social contract
- Locke’s place as liberal thinker in political thought

### **2.3.1 INTRODUCTION**

John Locke, widely recognized as the father of philosophical Liberalism and proponent of Rights, was born in Wrington, Somersetshire, in 1632. His life unfolded during a tumultuous period marked by significant political upheaval and revolution. In an era when much of Europe was still dominated by absolute monarchies that ruthlessly suppressed the emerging ideals of liberalism and liberty, Locke witnessed a profound shift in thinking. The era saw a move away from theological and ecclesiastical arguments toward the principles of toleration and democracy, challenging the Divine Right of kings.

Amidst the rise of wealth and mercantile influence, there was increasing emphasis on property rights and

individual business freedom, reflected strongly in Locke's work. He articulated the sentiments of an age weary of the English Civil War's conflicts and eager to embrace the prosperity that seemed to lie ahead in the eighteenth century.

John Locke (1632-1704) stands out as a significant figure in political philosophy, renowned for his profound and influential ideas. Locke's innovative political theory is grounded in the principles of self-ownership and property rights, famously asserting that individuals acquire ownership over resources by mixing their labor with them. He argued that government should be limited to protecting the life and property of its citizens, proposing that a minimal state is necessary to address the insecurities of an ideal, anarchic state of nature.

Locke is also celebrated for his advocacy of toleration, championing the right to freedom of conscience and religion, though he did not extend this right to intolerant religions. His critique of hereditary monarchy and patriarchal authority further shaped his legacy. After his death, Locke's mature political philosophy influenced the British Whig party, the Age of Enlightenment, and the development of the separation of Church and State in the American Constitution. His ideas also contributed to the emergence of human rights theories in the Twentieth Century.

John Locke (1632-1704) presents an intriguing figure in the history of political philosophy whose brilliance of exposition and breadth of scholarly activity remains profoundly influential. Locke proposed a radical conception of political philosophy deduced from the principle of self-ownership and the corollary right to own property, which in turn is based on his famous claim that a man earns ownership over a resource when he mixes his labour with it. Government, he argued, should be limited to securing the life and property of its citizens, and is only necessary because in an ideal, anarchic state of nature, various problems arise that would make life more insecure than under the protection of a minimal state. Locke is also renowned for his writings on toleration in which he espoused the right to freedom of conscience and religion (except when religion was deemed intolerant!), and for his cogent criticism of hereditary monarchy and patriarchal. After his death, his mature political philosophy lent support to the British Whig party and its principles, to the Age of Enlightenment, and to the development of the separation of the State and Church in the American Constitution as well as to the rise of human rights theories in the Twentieth Century.

The most important works of John Locke were published in the decade following the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Locke wrote his *Two Treatises of Government* almost immediately after the glorious revolution of 1688 in which a corrupt, absolutist Monarch was replaced by William and Mary in a bloodless coup that established a constitutional monarchy. Before that, Locke's career had taken him from an established and respectable country family in Somerset, to studentship in medicine at Christ Church, Oxford, to the household of the Whig politician and Exclusionist agitator Anthony Ashley Cooper, first Earl of Shaftesbury, and eventually into subversive intrigue and hastily exile in Holland during the reigns of James II. Though a couple of early works are known from his Oxford days- *Essays on the Law of Nature* (1660) and *An Essay on Toleration* (1667) - Locke's mature political theory was developed during his time with Shaftesbury. His *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* established him as the greatest philosopher of the age, and embroiled him in scientific disputes with Issac Newton, and others, as well as providing a basis for his work on education. Locke's *Two Treatise of Government* was published anonymously in 1689. Locke's *Two Treatise of Government* was divided into two parts. The first was titled subtitled *An Essay Concerning False Principles* and was a refutation of Sir Robert Filmer's argument in favour of the 'Divine Rights of the Kings'. The argument in this treatise forms an important context for Locke's own political thought that find its expression in the *Second Treatise* or *An Essay Concerning the True Original, Extent and End of Civil Government*. Locke's *Second Treatise* had a clear and profound influence on the American Revolution. Locke's greatest contributions to the American philosophy of government can be found in his elaboration of the parliamentary

ideals of mixed government and separation of powers. Locke's challenge to the traditional absolutism arises in part from the Protestant notion that each individual has a direct relation to the god. The *Two Treatise* espoused and defended freedom, consent and property as cardinal principles of legitimate political power. His religious views, never orthodox, also embroiled him in dispute, both as a result of his work on toleration and in regard to his late work *On the Reasonableness of Christianity*, which defended a rather minimalist characterization of Christian belief.

### **Key Texts of Locke**

*A Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689)

*Two Treatises of Government* (1689)

*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690)

*Thoughts on Education* (1693)

*On the Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695)

### **2.3.2 THE POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY/KNOWLEDGE OF LOCKE**

Locke's political philosophy can be accurately described as the embodiment of 17th-century Enlightenment ideals of freedom. Rationality is both the guiding principle of his life and the core objective of his intellectual inquiries. John Locke is often credited with the true beginning of liberalism, advocating for the organization of society according to its own principles and rejecting the dogmatic and autocratic tendencies of his time. In a journal entry from May 1681, Locke wrote, "The three great things that govern mankind are Reason, Passion, and Superstition; the first governs a few, while the latter two control the majority of people, often alternating in their dominance; but superstition is the most potent and causes the greatest harm." Locke argued that rational judgment is based on probabilities derived from experience rather than rigid dogma, and that claims to absolute truth in empirical matters are likely to be false. He also believed that humans have an inherent drive for freedom and a right, in an uncertain world, to liberty in thought and expression, enabling them to seek truth in their own way. According to Locke, the authority of civil government over individuals derives from the prior consent of free individuals who collectively form a civil society and, through majority rule, authorize the government to act on their behalf. A government based solely on such consent is truly free, while any other form is despotic. Locke systematically and rationally developed his arguments into a coherent system of thought, with various threads of his philosophy worth exploring further.

### **2.3.3 LOCKE'S CONCEPTION OF HUMAN NATURE**

Locke's conception of human nature is summed up in his '*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*'. Like Hobbes, he does not adopt a cynical view of human nature. Locke believed that man was rational as reason was the dominant factor in individual and social life. He held that men are naturally endowed with social instinct; they are basically decent, orderly social minded, and quite capable of ruling themselves. They are not quarrelsome. They are essentially peace loving. Human beings according to him are basically moral and rational creatures. They are not always selfish, but sometimes altruistic also.

Locke optimistically saw each individual as capable of seeking the truth of one's self. For Locke, these most basic truths began from the claim that individuals are essentially conscious beings in a world of physical matter, with which they are constantly interacting. It is through these interactions, of which the most important are our perceptions of the world, that we acquired knowledge or probable beliefs about it. An individual's conscious experience is at the root of having ideas. Locke rejected innate ideas as sources of knowledge. Locke further argued that knowledge is not innate, but is acquired by experience. At the time of birth of a

person, mind is like a 'tabula rasa', a clean slate, a blank tablet without any imprints, a piece of white paper on which nothing has been written. Whatever the human mind acquires, it is through the five sense organs. The outer world creates sensations on human mind which give birth to reflection and experience and memory.

Locke is also convinced that "naturally and innately men are more or less equal". As he writes in the pages of his 'Civil Government': "All men are naturally in a state of equality, wherein all the power and jurisdiction is reciprocal no one having more than another; there being nothing more evident than that creatures of the same species and rank, promiscuously born to all the same advantages of nature, and the use of the same faculties, should also be equal one amongst another without subordination or subjection. The natural liberty of man is to be free from any superior power on earth, and not to be under the will or legislative authority of man, but to have only the law of nature for his rule." It is obvious from the above that "every individual counts for one and is, therefore, normally, the equal of every other, that he has rights which belong to him simply as a human being and not because of his pre eminence in strength, wealth or position, and which all other individuals ought to recognise, just as he ought to recognize theirs."

Locke argued that every individual has certain innate and natural rights which belong to him simply as a human being, and not because of his pre-eminence in strength, wealth or position. Every individual has the rights to life, liberty and property. These rights, according to him, belong to, and can be exercised and respected by only rational human beings. Locke's individuals are really human beings moved by human altruistic considerations.

Locke, however is willing to admit that some men are a little wiser, or a little stronger, or a little more industrious than others, but to him the differences between men are far less striking and far less important than their similarities. He is certain that many of the differences which seem to exist between men were arbitrary and artificial rather than natural. It is thus clear the Locke was a strong environmentalist in the sense that he believed that a man's mental and moral ability were largely the result of the experiences, the sensations, or the education to which he is exposed.

According to Locke men are not only rational, orderly, decent and social, they were essentially utilitarian also. According to Locke, the object of all human action was to substitute pleasure for pain. "This is the view of human nature which was copied by Bentham, which was later worked out more thoroughly and called 'psychological' egoistic hedonism." In the words of Locke, "What has an aptness to produce pleasure in us is what we call good, and what is apt to produce pain in us we call evil." This pleasure or utility, in the case of Locke, can be explained as one of the bases of the covenant. The covenant gives peace and harmony to individuals and ensures protection of their rights which makes their life worth living and worth enjoying.

The factor which influenced the Locke's conception of human nature was the events of the Glorious revolution of 1688. In 1688, the people in effect dismissed one sovereign for incompetence and, with a minimum of disturbance, elected another who, as they believed, would perform his proper functions efficiently and whom they could trust to recognize the rights and privileges which they claimed for themselves. The accession of William and Mary was thus a triumph for the thesis that sovereign rule by consent and for the benefit of their subjects. It seemed to Locke to vindicate his belief in the ability of the people to rule themselves. Human beings to Locke, thus, appear to be reasonable cooperative, social and sympathetic. Human nature, to him, is marked with love, sympathy, kindness and goodwill. It is with these qualities that men, according to Locke, lived in the state of nature prior to the entrance in the civil society.

### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 1**

**NOTE:** Use the space given below for your answers. Use separate sheet if space is not sufficient.

1. Highlight the main theme of Lock's text "Two Treaties of Government".

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2 Write a short note on Lock's conception of Human Nature?

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### 2.3.4 THE STATE OF NATURE

Locke's view of human nature is articulated in his work, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Unlike Hobbes, Locke does not adopt a cynical perspective. He believed that humans are fundamentally rational, with reason being the dominant force in both individual and social life. Locke argued that people are naturally endowed with a social instinct, making them inherently decent, orderly, and capable of self-governance. He saw humans as essentially peace-loving and moral, possessing both rational and occasionally altruistic qualities.

Locke optimistically viewed each individual as capable of discovering personal truths. For him, the most basic truths start with the idea that individuals are conscious beings interacting with the physical world. It is through these interactions—primarily our perceptions—that we gain knowledge or probable beliefs. Locke rejected the notion of innate ideas, positing instead that knowledge is acquired through experience. At birth, he argued, the mind is like a "tabula rasa" or a blank slate. All knowledge comes from the senses, which create sensations that lead to reflection, experience, and memory.

Locke also believed that people are naturally equal. In his work *Civil Government*, he stated, "All men are naturally in a state of equality, wherein all the power and jurisdiction is reciprocal, no one having more than another." He asserted that individuals, being born with equal natural advantages and faculties, should remain equal without subordination. Natural liberty, according to Locke, means freedom from any superior earthly power and being subject only to the law of nature.

He argued that every person possesses innate and natural rights—such as life, liberty, and property—that are not dependent on strength, wealth, or position but are inherent to all rational beings. Locke's view was that individuals are driven by altruistic considerations and that the differences among people are less significant than their similarities. He believed that many apparent differences were arbitrary and artificial, reflecting his strong environmentalist perspective. According to Locke, a person's mental and moral abilities are largely shaped by experiences, sensations, and education.

In addition to being rational and social, Locke saw humans as utilitarian. He posited that the goal of human action is to maximize pleasure and minimize pain. This perspective, which influenced later thinkers like Bentham, reflects what Locke described as the basis of the social covenant. This covenant promotes peace, harmony, and the protection of rights, making life enjoyable and fulfilling.

Locke's conception of human nature was also shaped by the events of the Glorious Revolution of 1688, which he saw as a vindication of his belief in people's ability to govern themselves. The relatively smooth transition of power to William and Mary demonstrated the effectiveness of sovereign rule by consent, reinforcing Locke's view of humans as reasonable, cooperative, and sympathetic. He believed that such

qualities—love, sympathy, kindness, and goodwill—characterized human nature, both in the state of nature and in civil society.

### **2.3.5 NATURAL RIGHTS AND PROPERTY**

The concept of natural rights and the theory of property represent a crucial theme in Locke's political philosophy. For Locke, natural rights are entitlements granted under Natural Law, which he views as divine law. He believed that God did not create the world and its inhabitants for no purpose; rather, God intended for humans to sustain themselves and live as long as He willed. Locke's sophisticated theory of natural rights, particularly regarding property, is central to his thought. He posited that God's law, as revealed in the Ten Commandments or discerned through human reason, implies a set of corresponding rights. Locke identified three fundamental natural rights: life, liberty, and property. According to Locke, since God intends for individuals to live according to His will, no one has the right to take another's life except in self-defense. Similarly, because God commands individuals to labor for their sustenance, they have the liberty to do so. Moreover, Locke argued that the natural right to property originates from the command to labor: the land one cultivates and its products rightfully belong to the laborer.

Locke noted that both human reason and revelation indicate that the earth and its resources ultimately belong to God, who has given them to humans in common. He rejected Filmer's claim that God had exclusively granted the earth and its resources to Adam and his heirs. Locke further argued that human labour differentiates private property from common property. By mixing one's labor with a piece of land, an individual acquires a right to what they produce from that land. This labor makes the distinction between private property and common property, and no consent from others in the state of nature is needed for this acquisition, as waiting for such consent could result in starvation. Locke used the example of a man drawing water from a river: the water in his pitcher is his due to his labour, even though the river itself remains a common resource. Similarly, game in the wild belongs to all until a hunter marks it for the chase, at which point it becomes his property.

Locke addressed potential objections concerning the accumulation of resources, arguing that any such accumulation should be balanced by leaving enough and as good for others. He insisted that God intended humans to improve the world through entrepreneurship, hard work, and reason. Locke emphasized that humans are trustees of the earth, expected to be industrious and creative without wasting resources. He also noted that natural reason reveals that everyone has the same rights, and that rights come with duties. Rational individuals naturally understand that claiming rights involves respecting the rights of others, which underpins social interaction in the State of Nature. Locke believed that if everyone recognized these universal natural rights, society could function without government, thus defining the State of Nature as a state of liberty rather than license.

In the State of Nature, Locke argued that appropriation is limited to meeting one's needs and leaving sufficient resources for others. An individual may claim only what they have personally laboured over. Labour not only creates property but also establishes its value, transforming the world by increasing productivity and creating conveniences. Locke assumed that scarcity is not an issue because there is enough to satisfy everyone's needs, setting aside the problem of limited resources versus unlimited desires.

Locke asserted that individuals in the State of Nature have perfect freedom to manage their possessions and themselves as they see fit, within the bounds of natural law. Since property rights are derived from natural law, they precede government. Individuals have the right to act as they wish, as long as their actions do not harm themselves or others.

The introduction of money disrupts the natural limits on property accumulation. Money, unlike perishable resources, allows individuals to accumulate wealth without constraint, leading to inequality. The circulation

of money, such as gold, enables people to store their wealth and accumulate it without it spoiling, thus overcoming natural limitations on property. Locke's view on the emerging commercial society reflects this ambivalence: while he supports the benefits of money and trade, he struggles with reconciling these practices with the natural law's emphasis on property equality.

### **2.3.6 LOCKE'S THEORY OF STATE**

Locke posited that a dynamic economy and civil society existed even before the establishment of any government. This perspective underscores that civil society operates independently of political authority, with economic activity being more fundamental than politics. It also highlights the need to distinguish between the private and public spheres.

In his discussion on property, Locke argued that property represents human entitlements, asserting that "the primary purpose of people coming together to form a commonwealth and submit to government is the preservation" and protection of their property. He believed that the main role of government is to safeguard these entitlements and ensure the security of lives, liberties, and material possessions. Locke's emphasis on property being tied to society, rather than the political order, reflects the idea that property is a societal construct.

This social dimension of property allowed Locke to advocate for a minimal state with limited government intervention and to oppose hereditary principles of governance. He stressed that no government has the right to deprive an individual of their property without consent. According to Locke, political power exists to protect the entitlements bestowed upon individuals by God. Citizens enter into a social contract to ensure that their rights are recognized and codified by the government, primarily to safeguard their liberties and property.

#### **2.3.6.1 The Social Contract**

Locke argued that while the state of nature began with an abundance of land, this eventually turned into scarcity, not due to population growth but because of greed and the invention of money. This shift led to increased disputes, making the state of nature increasingly problematic. As a result, even for Locke, the State of Nature eventually becomes intolerable. To escape this state of inconvenience, people agree to form a civil society. The motivation for establishing a civil society is to safeguard and enhance freedom. The political community formed through this agreement aims to address the three major inconveniences of the State of Nature and to protect individual rights. As Locke puts it, "The reason why men give up the state of nature for civil society is the mutual preservation of their lives, liberties, and estates, which I call by the general name, property." Thus, Locke views property as preceding society, state, and government. This agreement is between all individuals collectively. According to Professor Sabine, Locke envisions two contracts: one among individuals to form the community, and another between the community and its government. The first contract creates the civil society, while the second establishes the government. This governmental contract sets up a trust, where the government acts as a fiduciary power with defined limits. The community, as the creator of the trust, does not make a separate contract with the trustee; rather, the government, upon accepting the trust, agrees to operate within these limits.

Central to Locke's concept of this contract is consent. He argues that community formation begins with consent, which must be majority consent since universal consent is unattainable. Through this contract, individuals agree to submit to majority rule and organize themselves into a civil society. They relinquish certain rights specifically related to enforcing natural laws but retain others. Without consent, there can be no political community. Locke distinguishes between two types of consent: express and tacit. Express consent is an explicit agreement at the formation of the commonwealth. In the absence of explicit consent, tacit

consent is inferred from an individual's acceptance of benefits from the government. Locke defines tacit consent as: "Every man who enjoys any part of the dominions of any government, does thereby give his tacit consent and is obliged to obey its laws as long as he enjoys those benefits, whether he resides permanently or temporarily, or simply travels within its territory." Obedience to the government is contingent upon its use of power for "peace, safety, and the public good." Individuals do not surrender more power than they originally possessed in the State of Nature, ensuring that their rights to life and property are preserved. Locke's individuals are bound by a rational and limited agreement, which guarantees obedience for the protection and enhancement of life, liberty, and property. The validity of the contract hinges on the government's continued protection of these benefits.

Furthermore, Locke's contract ensures that individuals do not forfeit all their rights from the State of Nature. Instead, they agree to transfer specific rights, particularly the power to punish, to those appointed by the community under agreed-upon rules. Thus, the contract is not a tool of subjugation but a means to safeguard individual freedoms. It provides security for individuals to freely exercise their remaining rights without falling under despotic control.

Another important aspect of Locke's contract is the right of revolution. Locke asserts that governments can be legitimately altered, amended, or dissolved under certain conditions, including:

1. When a ruler imposes their will over laws.
2. When the ruler prevents the legislature from meeting or acting freely.
3. When the ruler alters elections or election processes without consent and against the common interest.
4. When the ruler or legislature subjects the people to foreign power.
5. When the executive neglects or fails to enforce existing laws.

Locke contends that all true states are founded on consent and assumes that a minority will accept majority rule. A government must operate within general laws that apply to all, maintaining the natural moral equality of individuals. People may only use force against unjust and unlawful authority and should resort to revolution only when it promises a better social order, not for minor grievances. Locke emphasizes that a government based on consent, combined with the right of resistance, acts as a safeguard against rebellion. He believes that increased free communication and transparency will reduce the need for revolution. Locke supports religious toleration and pluralism, assigning the civil magistrate the role of protecting the "life, liberty, and security" of all members of the commonwealth, though he excludes atheists and groups that deny others the right to their beliefs.

Locke's view on political authority is that it is a trust from God. Therefore, no one has an inherent right to control another's life, and rulers can only act within the bounds of public good. Political authority gains legitimacy through practical service to its subjects, with rulers acting as trustees rather than owners.

### **2.3.6.2 Locke on the Form of Government**

In Locke's theory, any government that safeguards Natural Rights, particularly property, is considered legitimate. However, this raises the question of which form of government is most effective in practice for protecting these rights. Locke was firmly opposed to absolute monarchy and supported the liberal principle that rulers derive their authority from the people. According to Locke, the state is established through a social pact created by the people. Once a civil society is formed, individuals set up a government to act as a "fiduciary power" tasked with achieving specific goals. Decisions within the community are made by majority rule, although Locke acknowledged that achieving a majority could sometimes be challenging. While the

community appoints the legislative body, it retains ultimate power, meaning the people have the right to evaluate and potentially change the legislature if its performance is unsatisfactory. As Locke states, “The Legislative being only a Fiduciary power to act for certain ends, there remains still in the people a supreme power to remove or alter the legislative, when they find the legislative act contrary to the trust reposed in them.”

Within the government, the legislative power is supreme because it represents the people and is responsible for making laws. However, this power must not be absolute or arbitrary; it should be limited to the powers individuals had in the state of nature and must serve the public good. The legislature “can never have a right to destroy, enslave, or deliberately impoverish the subjects.” Laws must adhere to natural law, and any exercise of arbitrary or absolute power, or operation without established laws, would result in a condition worse than the state of nature. “For then Mankind will be in a far worse condition than in the State of Nature, if they shall have armed one or a few Men with the joint power of a Multitude.” Governments cannot seize a person’s property without consent, and since they need taxes to function, they can only do so with the governed’s agreement. Therefore, it is incorrect to assume that the “Supreme or Legislative Power of any Commonwealth” can act arbitrarily or dispose of the subjects’ estates at will.

Besides the legislature, there is an executive, usually a single individual responsible for enforcing the law. This executive, which includes judicial functions, must always be in session. While the legislature does not need to be in constant session, the executive must remain active to ensure laws are enforced. Although the executive may use prerogative powers to facilitate legislation, it must not exceed its limits. Locke notes that even though competent rulers may stay within their boundaries, “the reigns of good princes have always been most dangerous to the liberties of their people” because of the risk of abuse of prerogative by successors. Locke’s theory also includes a federative power responsible for making treaties and managing external relations.

Locke advocated for a limited sovereign state, believing that political absolutism is untenable. He described a good state as one that exists for the benefit of the people, rather than the other way around. Locke was the first to argue that the state should only handle political matters and has no authority to interfere in purely private domains. The government cannot claim additional powers under the guise of public safety or welfare. Locke emphasized that ultimate power resides with the people, who have the inalienable right to establish and dismiss a government. Once established, the government must be periodically assessed and its actions scrutinized. Locke argued that individuals have the right to resist a tyrannical government, demonstrating that obedience is not unconditional merely because of one’s birth.

### **2.3.7 LIBERALISM IN LOCKE’S POLITICAL THOUGHT**

Liberalism as a political ideology is deeply rooted in the ideas of John Locke. His contributions to the development of the liberal order, encompassing both political and societal dimensions, have been transformative. Locke’s comprehensive vision, which integrates constitutionalism, stability, freedom, consent, property, and tolerance, has significantly shaped the orderly evolution of Western democracies. His concepts of constitutionalism, toleration, natural rights, limited, consensual, law-based authority, pluralism, and property not only impacted the English settlement of 1688 but also inspired similar liberal traditions in America, France, and Holland. The American and French revolutions, along with the U.S. Constitution, embody the spirit of Locke’s philosophy, particularly his doctrines of government by consent and individual freedom in both political and economic contexts.

Locke’s *Second Treatise of Government* is a robust defence of individual liberty and moral rights, including property rights. He advocates for limited government and outlines its legitimate functions while challenging

patriarchal and absolutist monarchy. Locke also takes steps toward promoting equal moral rights for men and women. His theological ethics, though rooted in religion, contain seeds of secular and utilitarian ethical notions. He firmly asserts that individuals only acquire political obligations through free and voluntary consent, despite acknowledging challenges to this doctrine. Locke's assertion that all humans are naturally free and equal aligns with his support for property rights, even though it allows for inequality in possessions and opportunities.

Locke's first liberal assertion concerns the naturalness of property and the sanctity of property rights, protected only by free consent, such as through taxation. Property ownership, for Locke, stems from inheritance or labour. This idea, along with his favourable view of self-made men, laid the groundwork for the alliance between aristocracy and industrial wealth that later defined the English Liberal Party.

Locke's *Letter Concerning Toleration* remains a key liberal text, advocating for the privacy of individual thought and the state's non-interference in personal beliefs. While he notably excludes Catholics and atheists from this toleration, Locke's broader appeal for religious freedom set the stage for more expansive liberal ideas, such as those found in J.S. Mill's *On Liberty*.

A hallmark of Locke's liberalism is his emphasis on rationality. In the *Second Treatise*, Locke refutes the naturalness of patriarchy, arguing that children owe obedience only to fathers who protect their natural rights. Rationality, Locke insists, is key to understanding rights and obligations. His view of punishment reflects this, as he believes those who infringe on others' natural rights fail to act rationally. Locke also stresses the importance of transparency in governance, seeing the law as something knowable and predictable, a critical condition for commerce and social stability.

Locke's vision of society is competitive and capitalist, where individuals are free to acquire wealth, creating a society with winners and losers. However, Locke does not address class explicitly, despite recognizing that social inequality would exist even in the state of nature. His draft constitution for the Carolinas suggests a democracy for property-owning elites, reflecting his alignment with aristocracy and property.

Locke's concept of government as a trust emphasizes liberal scepticism of political power. He shares Plato's belief that rulers should not seek power for its own sake but rather serve as trustees of the public good. Locke's constitutionalism stems from a distrust of power, favouring a government that protects citizens rather than dominates them. The state's role, for Locke, is limited to regulating society when necessary, not initiating action.

In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke's epistemological caution extends to his political theory. He believes that the state should not pursue lofty, transcendent goals but instead focus on ensuring peace and security. Locke's call for constant vigilance against government overreach reflects a utilitarian concern for maximizing happiness while maintaining suspicion of power itself.

Locke's social contract theory, though later surpassed by ideas of natural sociability, remains a cornerstone of liberal thought. His belief that individuals could disobey unjust laws resonates with modern ideas of civil disobedience, which align with Locke's liberal ideals without returning to a state of nature.

## **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 2**

**NOTE:** Use the space given below for your answers. Use separate sheet if space is not sufficient.

1. Discuss the Lock's views on Human Nature.

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2. Briefly state the Lock's views on State of Nature.

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3. Elaborate Lock theory of Social Contract?

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### 2.3.8 LET US SUM UP

Locke is one of the most debated and influential thinkers in the entire history of political thought. His contributions to fields such as epistemology, natural law, economics, political theory, education, toleration, and theology have had a profound impact, rivalling no other thinker since Aristotle. Locke's ideas were central to shaping the Enlightenment and the modern world. "The heirs of Locke are, first, Berkeley and Hume; second, the French philosophers who were not aligned with Rousseau; third, Bentham and the philosophical Radicals; and fourth, Marx and his followers, with significant contributions from Continental philosophy."

If we consider the core elements of the liberal worldview—individualism, freedom, limited government by consent, minimal state, constitutional authority, rule of law, majority rule, separation of powers, popular sovereignty, representative democracy, property rights, civil society, pluralism, tolerance, and the right to challenge authority—then Locke emerges as the founding father of liberal political theory. Later liberal thinkers have built upon the foundation Locke established. The ideological victory of liberalism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century over its rivals, Communism and Fascism, underscores the enduring relevance and satisfaction of Locke's ideas, first conceived in late seventeenth-century England, as the most resilient framework among competing political ideologies over the past 400 years.

### 2.3.9 EXERCISES

- 1 Explain in detail the Lock's views on Human Nature?
- 2 Critically examine the Lock's views on State of Nature?
- 3 Elaborate Lock's theory of State?

### 2.3.10 SUGGESTED READINGS

- Nelson, Brian, *Western Political Thought*, Second Edition, Pearson: New Delhi, 2021
- Sabine, G.H, & Thomas T.L, *A History of Political Theory*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, New Delhi: OUP, 1973
- Ten, C.L, *Mill on Liberty*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980
- Wayper, C L, *Teach Yourself Political Thought*; New Delhi: Surjeet Publications, 2017
- Gaubha, O.P, *Western Political Thought*, Macmillan Publications India Ltd, 2011
- Mukherjee, Subarta, *History of Political Thought: Plato to Marx*, Delhi, PHI Learning, 2019.

## **2.4 ROUSSEAU’S SOCIAL CONTRACT: THEORY OF STATE, POPULAR SOVEREIGNTY, CIVIL SOCIETY, IDEALISM AND ROMANTICISM**

**- V. Nagendra Rao**

### **STRUCTURE**

#### **2.4.0 Objectives**

#### **2.4.1 Introduction**

#### **2.4.2 Rousseau’s Political Philosophy**

#### **2.4.3 The Social Contract**

#### **2.4.4 Human Nature, State of Nature and Civil Society**

##### **2.4.4.1 Human Nature**

##### **2.4.4.2 State of Nature**

##### **2.4.4.3 Civil Society**

#### **2.4.5 Social Contract**

#### **2.4.6 Popular Sovereignty**

#### **2.4.7 Assessment of Rousseau as Political Thinker**

#### **2.4.8 Let Us Sum Up**

#### **2.4.9 Exercises**

#### **2.4.10 Suggested Readings**

#### **2.4.0 OBJECTIVES**

After going through this lesson, you will be able to know:

- Key text written by Rousseau and his political philosophy
- Rousseau conception of Human nature and State of Nature
- Rousseau views on social contract and popular sovereignty

#### **2.4.1 INTRODUCTION**

Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) was the most complex of all the philosophers of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment. European intellectual history was immensely influenced by Rousseau writings. As Walker observed, “No other eighteenth century thinker contributed the major writings in such an extensive range of subjects and forms, nor wrote with such unrelenting passion and expressiveness”. You may be aware that the greatest influence of Rousseau’s writings are on the French Revolution. As Patrick Riley mentions, Rousseau to be the greatest of all critics of inequality, the purest social contract theorist of the eighteenth century, the greatest writer on civic education.

Unlike other Social Contractualists, Hobbes and Locke, Rousseau was not formally trained in any university

rather embarked on a journey of self-learning. He was born in 1712 in Geneva, a republican city-state bordered by large monarchical kingdoms and a centre of popular agitations. Rousseau's childhood was not destined to be stable, as his mother died within a week of his birth. His father abandoned Rousseau when he was 10. Rousseau was taken care of by his paternal uncle. In order to earn his living Rousseau apprenticed to an engraver, when he was 13. At 16, Rousseau ran away from his apprenticeship, began moving from one European city to another. Hence, he had no formal education or university training. Patronized by much older and richer women like Madame de Warens, who provided him later with his pastoral retreat, Rousseau was self-taught and used his musical talents to establish himself in Paris. Rousseau left Paris settled down in a rural cottage where he wrote such masterpieces as ***Social Contract*** and ***Emile***. Both of these books were published in 1762, both were condemned by the French Parliament, causing Rousseau to flee to Switzerland. He also spent a year in England under the protection of David Hume, but he eventually returned to France in 1767 and married Thérèse Lavasseur a year later. He died at the age of 66 leading a secluded but prolific life in Ermenonville.

## 2.4.2 ROUSSEAU'S POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Rousseau remains as a significant philosopher in the history of philosophy because of his influence on later thinkers. Rousseau's main focus is how secure human freedom in a society where the humans are mutually dependent on each other to fulfilling their needs. In Rousseau's understanding, this has dual dimensions: material and psychological. He has given more importance to psychological dimension. To protect the human freedom, Rousseau proposes two ways: the first one is building of political institutions that facilitate the co-existence of free and equal citizens in a community of sovereigns; the other one is providing enlightened education to children for their well-rounded growth and development which takes them away from the destructive forms of self-interest.

In ***The Social Contract***, Rousseau answers the fundamental question of politics, the resolution of conflict between individual sovereignty and the state's authority. This reconciliation is necessary because human society has evolved to a point where individuals can no longer supply their needs through their unaided efforts, but rather must depend on the cooperation of others. However, conflict among the now-interdependent individuals creates the Hobbesian insecurity which would lead all to consent to the establishment of state authority and law. This leads to a combination of inequality and social exploitation in human relations which are backed with the state authority and law. Rousseau states that the state established in this manner is a class state directed by the rich and propertied class leading to exploitation and subordination of poor. The poor people without any property give consent to such a formation (a state of propertied class) because they fear that a Hobbesian state of war leads them to violence and insecurity. Due to this, they even fail to see the disadvantages the new state imposed on them.

Thus, ***The Social Contract*** aims to set out an alternative in which, Rousseau claims, each person will enjoy the protection of the common force whilst remaining as free as they were in the state of nature. The alternative Rousseau suggests is the idea of General Will, that is, the collective will of the citizen body taken as a whole. The general will is the source of law. Since the general will has a consent of every citizen, while obeying the law each citizen is subjecting to her/his own will, and remains free.

The ***Social Contract*** being the main source of Rousseau's political philosophy, it deserves a brief mention of its contents.

## 2.4.3 THE SOCIAL CONTRACT

***The Social Contract*** is a great work comprises of four books, each book is further divided into several

chapters. Rousseau begins his exploration of politics by pondering on the source of the legitimacy for political authority. He rejects to locate its source in nature, because such a position implies the inherent natural superiority of the rulers over the ruled, though the superiority that may exist is only sustained by force. At the same time, he argues that force is not also the basis for legitimacy while considering the idea of ‘might is right’ as absurd. Instead, legitimate political authority is based on a kind of “social contract” created between society’s members.

While answering the question why should such a contract ever be necessary in State of Nature Rousseau writes that there comes a point in the state of nature at which society must be formed in order for mankind to survive. The main purpose of the social contract is to find a way to bind the people without violating the freedom of others. In other words, what is the conditions under which the individual surrenders his freedom unconditionally to the whole community? This reconciliation is only possible when everyone enters into a Contract on equal terms without losing freedom natural freedom. Those who come together through the contract are collectively called as the ‘people’; they become the ‘citizens’ when sharing the sovereign power; and transform into ‘subjects’ when they subject to the laws of the state.

Rousseau’s conception of the state advocates the idea that society functions to protect the interests that people hold in common. Hence, the final end of state to be “the common good”. Only way to achieve this common good is to follow the general will expressed by the Sovereign. As we understand by this time, the “general will” can never coincide with a “particular will”. Such an expression of the general will only takes the shape of law.

Rousseau feels that the goal of any system of law is reducible to two ends: liberty and equality. However, equality does not mean the complete absence of differences in wealth, but the absence of such differences that would damage the balance of citizens in the state. He further adds that power must never lead to violence and shall always be exercised by virtue of rank and law; and when it comes to equality, “no citizen shall ever be wealthy enough to buy another, and none poor enough to be forced to sell himself”.

Rousseau makes an attempt to distinguish the Government from the Sovereign as he considers any confusion between the two would be dangerous. For him, the government deals with particulars (decrees) while the sovereign deals with the general (laws). As a staunch believer in public opinion, Rousseau also puts forward the establishment of a censor’s office, as the vanguard of public opinion. Since public opinion is connected to public morality and virtue, and also those who are connected to law, Rousseau argues the censor’s office helps in upholding the laws by influencing such a public opinion.

Through his masterpiece *The Social Contract*, Rousseau thus, sets out to answer the most fundamental question of politics, the resolution of the conflict between individual freedom and state authority. This reconciliation was necessary due to complexity of modern society where individuals depend on others for the fulfilment of their needs. A detailed discussion of Rousseau’s thoughts on the Human Nature, State of Nature, and Civil Society are further necessary to understand Rousseau’s philosophy.

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 1

**NOTE:** Use the space given below for your answers. Use separate sheet if space is not sufficient.

1 Highlight the main context of Rousseau political philosophy.

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## 2 Describe Rousseau views on Social Contract?

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### 2.4.4 HUMAN NATURE, STATE OF NATURE AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Even though Rousseau never formally divided human development into various stages, for our understanding, we must consider Timothy O'Hagen's seven distinct stages in Rousseau's understanding of human evolution. These are: (1) Nascent Man – The Uncontaminated State of Nature; (2) Elementary Cooperation – The Society marked by Hunting, Gathering and Fishing; (3) The 'Youth of the World' – The Stone Age; (4) Nascent Society – The Iron Age; (5) The State of War; (6) Civil Society – the Present Day Society which is infused by injustice, inequality and authoritarianism, and (7) A New Civil Society – A Future that is marked by justice and equality. The classification helps us in understanding Rousseau's views regarding Human Nature, State of Nature and Civil Society.

#### 2.4.4.1 Human Nature

For Rousseau initially humans lived solitary lives, as they did not require one another to provide for their material needs. Human interactions were episodic and casual, conducted for the purpose of a hunt, or to satisfy a sexual instinct. Early man had no fixed place of living, and no fixed social environment, and no social interaction. Man in a state of nature, wandering up and down the forests, without industry, without speech, and without home, neither standing in need of his fellow creatures, nor having any desire to hurt them, and perhaps not even distinguishing the one from another. At this stage, man, like other animals, also characterized by the two natural sentiments of self-love and pity (*amour de soi* and *pitié*). Self-love is the interest every human being has in preserving itself, and pity, or compassion is the repugnance every such being feels at the suffering of another living being.

Rousseau says that at this stage of human evolution, the goodness of human beings is simply a negative in the sense that it amounts to the absence of evil. At this stage human beings are distinguished from the other creatures only by two characteristics: freedom, and perfectibility. At this point, freedom is merely not to be governed only by appetite; perfectibility is the ability to know better means to fulfil the needs. These two qualities gave people the capacity to achieve self-consciousness, rationality, and morality. At the same time, such characteristics are more likely to take them to a social world of deception, dissimulation, dependence, oppression, and domination.

Rousseau explains, as human populations grew, simple but unstable forms of co-operation evolved around the activities like hunting. According to Rousseau, the essential transitional moment in human history came at a societal stage marked by small settled communities. At this point a change, or rather a split, took place in the natural drive humans have to care for themselves: competition among humans to attract sexual partners lead them to compare their own attractiveness to others and how that attractiveness factors with potential rivals. Rousseau associates the genesis of *amour propre* (excessive love of self, often rendered as pride or vanity) essentially with this sexual competition. This *Amour propre* in human beings awoke their need for recognition, value ascribed to such recognition and also the need to be treated with respect. Although *amour propre* has its origins in sexual competition and comparison within small societies, it did not achieve its full toxicity until it is combined with a growth in material interdependence among human beings. In the **Discourse on Inequality**, Rousseau explains the development of agriculture and metallurgy and the origin of the private property. He also discusses how the rise of private property automatically led to the inequalities between

those who own land and those who do not. Rousseau in his famous *Second Discourse and Emile* considers this excessive love for or pride astray as a negative passion and the main source of all evil. At the same time, Rousseau states that these are also helps for conducting social life and individual education.

#### **2.4.4.2 State of Nature**

In Rousseau's treatment, the 'State of Nature' is a hypothetical, prehistoric place and time where human beings' life was uncorrupted by society. Man's natural state was vastly preferable to the social or civil society. Back to nature was his cry as he admired the excellence of primitive simplicity. For Rousseau, the state of nature was ideal for criticizing wrongness in contemporary civilization, which is repressing human goodness. His theory is based on the pre-political state of nature which we have explained in the previous section. Such a state of nature facilitated human life unaffected by the restraints of authority or any artificial laws. It helped man to remain independent, contented, self-sufficient, healthy, fearless and without the need of his fellows or a desire to harm them. It was such a state, wherein, each one was able to seek and secure his happiness. In this State of Nature, man knew neither right nor wrong, and had no notion of virtue and vice. He enjoyed a pure unsophisticated innocent life of perfect freedom and equality.

Such a State of Nature is also a state of peace because people are naturally good in the sense that they have a natural pity for their fellow creatures. No normal person want to see others suffer and there are many examples of people risking their lives to prevent others from being hurt. Even the beasts as he says give perceptible signs of pity or compassion, and he gives an example of tendency of a horse to avoid trampling underfoot another living creature.

In the State of Nature, people lived in a very simple manner and the property was under joint ownership. As the institution of private property had not yet come into existence, people led a happy and carefree life. In such an unorganized society, the man was leading solitary, happy, free and independent life, without any inequality. The only inequality that exists between humans is purely physical like one person might be slightly stronger or faster than another.

This idyllic state, however, could not last for long. Conditions arose which made it difficult for men in the State of Nature to maintain their primordial freedom and equality. The growth of "Population" and the origin of "Reason" are the most important factors for the human beings to walk out of the State of Nature. The social instinct of man too compelled him to give up natural life, gradually the social institutions also developed. As it has been mentioned in the earlier section, the instinct of self love began to take shape of 'pride' and the idea of private property emerged. Thus he emphasizes that it is only with the emergence of institution of private property that pre-civil state had to be abandoned, because "The scramble for land and other private property resulted in war, murder wretchedness and horror. The capacity of individuals to own and produce, there came into existence inequality in every sphere of life". Also, the division of labour that followed economic development created a distinction between the rich and the poor which broke down the happy natural condition of mankind and made it necessary to establish a civil society. Furthermore, reason, when employed for the furtherance of private gains, created a disturbing state of affairs. Due to this, the peace in the society was disturbed.

Thus we find that Rousseau envisaging two stages of the State of Nature viz. the pre-property state and the post-property state. While the pre-property State of Nature as an ideal stage, the post-property State of Nature was wretched. In the post-property State of Nature (civil society), there are vast inequalities among human beings, and the majority of them are not physical but rather social, economic or political. One of the fundamental aspects of civil society that allows these inequalities to come about is the notion of property: a notion that is completely foreign to savage man. Rousseau's praise for the pre-property state of nature can't

be understood as his advocacy for a return to pre-property State of Nature, rather it is something like a matter of regret that we have grown civilized.

#### 2.4.4.3 Civil Society

In many of his works, mostly in *The second Discourse*, Rousseau discusses how the fall of man happened, how his nature got wasted warped and corrupted with the emergence of the civil society. Rousseau informs us how civil society, in turn, was necessitated by the rise of the institution of private property and the need to defend it by institutionalization of social inequality through law. However, we have to keep in mind a fact that Rousseau's investigations on civil society were not to be considered as historical truths, but only as mere imaginary reasoning, rather exact nature of things.

According to Rousseau, the origin of civil society and resultant creation of a political authority happened in three revolutions. In the initial phase of 'State of Nature' man was leading a solitary, happy, free and independent life. He led a simple life of happiness; there was no law, no morality and no family. But a stage came when social institutions came into being. The first revolution takes place after the institution of family evolved on a permanent basis, which Rousseau terms has the beginning of Civil Society. The establishment of family relationships creates a line of difference between 'mine' and 'thine' and leads to the superiority of some over the other laying the first step towards inequality which is an evil and vice.

The second revolution is brought by the agriculture and the discovery of metal leading towards the specialization of functions and division of labour. It was essentially the cultivation of land that led to its enclosure and this gave rise to the idea of property. This led to the emergence of Civil Society: "The first man, who having enclosed a piece of ground, he thought himself of saying 'This is mine' and found people simple enough to believe him, was the real founder of civil society". In this way, the institution of private property, which Rousseau calls a curse of civilization, comes into being to create the conditions of inequality. The creation of private property became the root cause of all troubles. In the words of Rousseau, innocence, ideal bliss and happiness disappeared with the surfacing of private property. For him, property was the only artificial right or privilege that emerged in society, and this right belonged to a few. The establishment and practicing of property rights eroded the self-sufficiency that existed in the state of nature. This brought misery to the majority.

The competition and resultant conflict for land and other private property led to war, killing and all sorts of violence. The society was divided into rich and the poor. Conflict led in turn to a demand for a system of law for the sake of order and tranquility. The rich and the poor, with their interest tried to find a solution, led to the creation of civil society with laws to protect private property and the force to implement them. The wealthy influenced the poor to join the power for which the poor accepted happily. Thus, the formation of Civil Society is accomplished through an artificial co-operation between the rich and the poor having their own motives, this coming into being of the civil society is considered as the third revolution by Rousseau.

However, to Rousseau, this origin of civil society is a curse to the civilization because, it irretrievably destroyed natural liberty, eternally fixed the laws of property and inequality, converted the clever claims into inalienable right, gave new powers to the rich. It became advantageous to a few, subjected all mankind to perpetual labour, slavery and wretchedness. People wanted to get rid of this post-property state of nature and the way out is through the **social contract**.

#### 2.4.5 SOCIAL CONTRACT

The reason for humans to come around the social contract, for Rousseau, is to build a well-organized society based on what Nature has given to humans. In the State of Nature, man enjoyed natural liberty and

free will as no one had the natural authority over his fellow men. However, in such a State of Nature, man was devoid of moral liberty because he did not develop a moral sense. This moral sense can only be born in society, we need to establish a society in which, not only we preserve the liberty of the State of Nature, but also provide the conditions for the achievement of moral freedom. In place of a society in which a few rule over the many, human beings need to set up a society guaranteeing civil and moral freedom for all. Rousseau suggests that human beings need to come together in society for the achievement of such a better life. At the same time, it is also important to organize that society on certain lines and the main problem “is to find a form of association which will defend and protect with the whole common force the person and goods of each associate, and in which each, while uniting himself with all, may still obey himself alone, and remain as free as before.”

Rousseau offers a solution to this problem in the form of a **Social Contract**, under which “each of us puts his person and all his power in common under the supreme direction for the general will, and in our corporate capacity, we receive each member as an indivisible part of the whole”. Thus, in place of the individual personality of each contracting party, this act of association creates a corporate and collective body. This public person, formed by the union of all other persons, takes the name of the **body politic**. Members would call such a body politic as “State” when passive and “Sovereign” when active, and “Power” when compared with such institutions. Those who are associated in it take collectively the name of people, called citizens as they share sovereign authority and called as subjects being subjected to the laws of the state.

In articulating in this manner, Rousseau’s intention is to locate sovereignty with all the people. While signing the hypothetical contract, the same people have become both the ‘sovereign’ as well as the ‘subjects’. The people who make the laws as ‘sovereign’ are the same who obey these laws as ‘subjects’. Contrary to the each individual’s “particular will” that tried to maximise his own interest, the ‘sovereign’ expresses the “general will” that intended for the common good. The sovereign has power only over matters that are of public concern. But this power is ‘absolute’, no one can question it. Rousseau even endorses the death penalty for the violation of the authority of the sovereign.

The general will express itself in the laws of the state formulated initially by impartial non-citizen lawgivers. These laws, expressing general will, make rules and regulations that apply to the entire population. Promoting the common good, liberty and equality of everyone is the main object of these laws. The legislator averts the influence of private interest and always prefers long-term interests rather than shorter ones. In Rousseau’s understanding, private interests are always weighed for short-term gains instead of long-term advantages.

Thus, by introducing the social contract, Rousseau wants people to lay down their natural rights to get them back from the sovereign power. The social contract is an act of confirmation that all the rights people have are given to them by sovereign power. Therefore, the rights people have are still their rights. However, their source has been changed: People no longer have them from nature but by the sovereign’s will. The rights people have are no longer given to them by natural but are derivative through the social contract. As Grimsley states, Rousseau wants people’s freedom to be the holy right which would be the basis for all the other rights, provided that this right no longer comes from nature, but from the social contract. From here, it can be concluded that for Rousseau people can have rights in political society. Sovereign power is not incompatible with the existence of rights.

The main goal of sovereign power and its general will is to re-establish the individual’s original freedom which he lost when he entered civil society. When there are no differences between the freedom in the State of Nature and the freedom in the political state, then the goal of sovereign power is attained. Rousseau attempts to transmit the State of Nature, along with its main element, freedom, into the political state. As a

result, the individual's freedom would be the element that limits sovereign power. Rousseau writes "Each man alienates, I admit, by the social contract, only such part of his powers, goods and liberty as it is important for the community to control; but it also must be granted the sovereign is sole judge of what is important". However, we can see that the sovereign power, how absolute, sacred, and inviolable as it is, does not and cannot exceed the limits of general conventions, and that every man dispose at will of such goods and liberty as these conventions leave him.

As Sabine articulates, Rousseau, at the outset, must have been an advocate of individual rights and liberties and of the strong position of the individual over community. Moreover, it follows that Rousseau was prone to setting down the limitation upon the general will whenever he noticed that the individual rights and liberties might have been endangered. It is striking here that the new freedom, which comes into being with the political state, is no longer the same as freedom from the State of Nature. We can see how ambiguous Rousseau was here. His whole debate about freedom shows us that he tried to "smuggle" freedom from the State of Nature to the political state without being noticed as changed. However, it was changed in that it is no longer the same freedom: it is the freedom put at a higher level of potency and dignified with morality. Hence, it would be false to conclude that Rousseau wanted to transmit the State of Nature into the political state. If he really had wanted to preserve natural freedom and to transmit it unchanged to the political state, he would have done it in the same or similar way as Locke. But Rousseau changed his freedom on its way from the State of Nature to the political state and, thereby, negated the State of Nature in establishing political society.

#### 2.4.6 POPULAR SOVEREIGNTY

Rousseau's concept of sovereignty is different from Hobbes and Locke. For Hobbes, people set up a sovereign and transferred all power to him. In Locke's social contract people set up a limited government for limited purposes, but Locke considers the concept of sovereignty popular or monarchical as a symbol of political absolutism. Rousseau's sovereign on the other hand, are the people, constituted as a political community through social contract.

As Sedgwick says Rousseau's concept is essentially based on three principles: a) men are by nature free and equal; b) the right of government must be based on some compact freely entered into by these equal and independent individuals; and c) as a result of compact, the individuals become an indivisible part of a body of sovereign people which has an alienable right of determining its own internal constitution and legislation.

As Rousseau considers sovereignty of the people inalienable and indivisible, the people cannot give away, or transfer to any person or body their own destiny. Unlike Hobbes ruler who is an absolute sovereign, Rousseau makes a clear distinction between sovereignty which wholly resides in the people, and government which is a temporary agent of the people. In Locke's concept, the people transfer the exercise of their sovereign authority – legislative, executive and judicial – to organs of government. Rousseau's concept of inalienable and invisible sovereignty does not permit the people to transfer their legislative function, the supreme authority in the state. When it comes to the executive and judicial functions, Rousseau wants them to be performed by separate organs of government. However, these organs function in complete subordination to the sovereign people. Rousseau, it seems, not intend to create a state with **separation or balance** of power.

Though Rousseau emphasized consent as the basis of society, however, he had always given importance to the community and the freedom of the individual. A community was created for the benefit of the individual, and Rousseau attempted to reconcile the two claims: that of community with that of the individual, and the claims of authority with those of liberty. Since laws represent the general will, the people are truly free if they follow laws. Civil liberty, for Rousseau, was parallel to Locke's understanding of freedom under civil

law. It is nothing but freedom from the domination of others. None should have great or influence in the making of the law and no one would be above the law.

Rousseau rejected the idea of total surrender of power that made the individual submission to the sovereign. For him, this will result in social peace without liberty. Liberty was quintessentially human. Rousseau's idea of sovereignty is different from the sovereignty enunciated by Hobbes and Locke. Hobbes spoke of a total surrender of power by the individuals to a third party distinct from the people, and delimited the legal theory of sovereignty. Rousseau's Sovereignty was inalienable and indivisible. However, it is visible and located in the body politic. That is why it is called as **popular sovereignty**. He ruled out the transfer of sovereign and adapted the idea that sovereign originated and stayed with the people. Rousseau's sovereign can be clearly distinguished from that of Hobbes: while Hobbes sovereign was the ruler, Rousseau's was the people, the political community, the **body politic**. It provided the foundation of public right. Locke, on the other hand, shivered the idea of sovereignty for it suggested political absolutism. His conception of limited state led him to the idea of '**people were sovereign**', but *their sovereignty* was held in abeyance when the government was in power, and within the government it was Legislature that was supreme. For Rousseau, government is an agent of the general will, the sovereign entity in the body politic. He believed that the form of government changes from one country to another; what suited for one might not be suited for another. A government had to represent the personality of a country and its people, therefore it differ from state to state. He also proposed a civil religion for cultivating the moral foundations of the state.

For Rousseau, contrary to a representative parliamentary government, participatory democracy was desirable, for it secured freedom, self-rule, equality and nature. Those were the things that justified restraints on the individual, for they would make him truly happy. Therefore, it is no surprise that Rousseau rejects the English parliamentary system of government. He states that it gave the people the illusion of freedom, however, in reality, the English people were free only at the time of elections. They don't have any control over the representative they elected.

Due to this reason, Rousseau forcefully proclaims that sovereignty rests with no one but people. The main goal of sovereign power and its general will is to re-establish the individual's original freedom; that which he lost when he entered civil society. When there are no differences between the freedom in the State of Nature and the freedom in the political state, then the goal of sovereign power is attained.

## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 2

**NOTE:** Use the space given below for your answers. Use separate sheet if space is not sufficient.

1. Describe Rousseau views on human nature.

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2. Briefly state the Rousseau views on civil society.

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3 Write a short note on Rousseau views on General Will.

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#### 2.4.7 IDEALISM AND ROMANTICISM IN ROUSSEAU'S POLITICAL THOUGHT

Due to the kind of ideas and philosophy pronounced by Rousseau, as you have studied till now, many consider Rousseau as a father of Idealism and Romanticism. He is the inventor of Romanticism which has been adopted and expanded by later philosophers of romanticism and idealism. The virulent thoughts of the past are replaced by Rousseau's idealism, particularly with his ideas of love of nature, individualism, liberty, and of freedom. In Rousseau's thought sentiments have deeply mixed with political as well as social judgments. Rousseau was ideally happy about the virtue of life of the 'noble savage'. He found the perfect state of human existence in State of Nature, which he considers as a paradise. In this phase of human history no one suffered inconvenience from maintaining his own rights and liberties against others. Since this ideal society has no private property, there is no conflict as well. Rousseau imagines a condition in which natural man satisfies "his hunger under an oak, quench his thirst at the first stream, find his bed at the foot of the same tree that furnished his meal; and therewith his needs are satisfied". Christie McDonald writes that Rousseau's state of nature was completely opposite to present-day modernity: "ideal nature is the antithesis of a corrupt society. In fact, it responds point by point to each evil in society; chaos is replaced by order, discord by harmony, and agitation by tranquility. That is to say, ideal nature is the negative counterpart of evil society".

Rousseau's attempts to address the question of how to bring justice to everyone in society led him to formulate the concept of civil society. His strong defence of civil society inspired many revolutionary movements in all over Europe during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Even in the contemporary world, many revolutionary and other social movements are influenced by Rousseau's romantic writings. He tosses out the idealistic challenge through these following words: "Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains. One thinks himself the master of others, and still remains a greater 'Slave than they.'" Thus, we find him also the champion of individual freedom.

Rousseau also preached for educational reform as the basis for reforming and founding the state. His essential idea is that education must be carried out in harmony with the development of the child's natural capacities by a process of apparently autonomous discovery. This is opposite to an education system where the teacher is a figure of authority who imparts knowledge and skills according to a pre-determined curriculum. Rousseau proposes a different education on the basis of his belief in natural goodness. His educational plan involves two things: a) the protection and development of the child's natural goodness through various stages; b) the isolation of the child from the domineering wills of others. The child is not instructed to what to do or think but is facilitated to draw her own conclusions as a result of its own explorations.

Rousseau's idealistic notions filled with romanticism influenced and inspired many scholars later on. Immanuel Kant was one of those who highly influenced by Rousseau's philosophy. A picture of Rousseau was the only image on display in Kant's house, and the only time that Kant forgot to take his daily walk was when reading Rousseau's *Emile*.

#### 2.4.8 ASSESSMENT OF ROUSSEAU AS POLITICAL THINKER

Rousseau's masterwork, *The Social Contract*, essentially attempted to spell out the social relation that a properly educated man – a free man – bears to other free men. This treatise is a difficult and subtle work of a sharp intellect fired by a great passion for humanity. The philosophical crux of *The Social Contract*, particularly the liberty and freedom it spiritedly advocates, can be understood in Rousseau's ideas on general will and popular sovereignty.

Rousseau states that government must not be equated with the sovereignty of the people or with the society which is created by the social contract. The government is only an intermediary between the people as law creators (sovereigns) and the law followers (subjects) of the state. The government is a functional organ created by collective action (general will) of the people to execute the laws created by them as sovereigns. In short, the government is to serve the people, not to act like a master. And further, the sovereignty of the people as expressed in the general will is to be found not merely in the will of the majority or in the will of all. It is the will of right and enlightened judgement.

#### **2.4.9 LET US SUM UP**

Rousseau is very clear about his understanding on government. The power people have given to the government can be taken back if the government fails to act as representative of the people, or if it is not reflecting the will of the people, or if it fails to ensure equal protection under the law, or if it ignores general wellbeing. The state was all-inclusive, and small enough for every citizen to know every other citizen. The decision-making process was open and in the knowledge of everyone with truthful discussions without any external influence or interference. It was essential in every instance that every citizen shall exercise his social conscience – or empathy – in the determination of the general will of the people.

Two and half centuries have passed since the publication of the ***Social Contract***, Rousseau still holds his place as one of the most invigorating and controversial political theorists. For Rousseau, the basic issue was how to ensure the voluntary integration of individual and social action. In the current century with its unprecedented rapid social changes, this problem is particularly acute. Both Liberals and Totalitarians, in their respective ways, are equally preoccupied with the task of helping people to identify their individual interests with collective institutions. As a brilliant pioneer in this particular field of exploration, Rousseau is still capable of throwing revealing light on the problems of current day politics. While many authoritarians consider Rousseau as an evil spirit of the modern world and a reckless libertarian whose siren voice has lured successive generations along the path of undisciplined individualism and self-indulgence, on the contrary, liberals regard him as their prophet in curtailing the excesses of totalitarian government. Mainly due to these completely opposed views, we may still continue to see Rousseau as the most controversial figures in the history of political thought in the centuries to come.

#### **2.4.10 EXERCISES**

1. Examine in detail the main context of Rousseau's political philosophy?
2. Critically examine the Rousseau views on Social Contract?
3. Discuss the Rousseau views on Popular Sovereignty?

#### **2.4.11 SUGGESTED READINGS**

- Nelson, Brian, *Western Political Thought*, Second Edition, Pearson: New Delhi, 2021
- Sabine, G.H. & Thomas T.L., *A History of Political Theory*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, New Delhi: OUP, 1973
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### 3.1 HEGEL: METHOD, IDEALISM, HISTORICISM, CIVIL SOCIETY AND STATE

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#### STRUCTURE

- 3.1.0 Objectives
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- 3.1.0 OBJECTIVES

**After going through this lesson you will be able to know:**

- Hegel's contribution to idealistic philosophy
- The significance of Hegelian dialectics
- The nuances of Hegel's Idealism
- Hegel's Historicism
- Hegel's views on State and Civil Society

#### 3.1.1 INTRODUCTION

C.L. Wayper writes in his book *Political Thought* that “The most outstanding advocate of the organic theory of the State and one of the most important and influential thinkers of modern history was Hegel.” Born in Stuttgart, Württemberg, in Southern Germany in 1770, Hegel's father was a civil servant. As a bright and exceptional student, he earned academic prizes and went on to study theology at the University of Tübingen. Captivated by the French Revolution, which he described as a ‘glorious mental dawn,’ Hegel immersed himself in Rousseau's writings. He initially worked as a private tutor, during which he wrote a biography of Jesus Christ. After several years as a tutor, he became a lecturer at the University of Jena in 1801, where Immanuel Kant had a significant influence on him, though Hegel never adopted Kantianism. The differences between Kant and Hegel are even more pronounced than those between Plato and Aristotle. When Jena was captured by Napoleon's forces in 1806, Hegel was forced to leave. He then worked as a local editor and became a school headmaster in Nuremberg. His three-volume work on the *Science of Logic* earned him considerable acclaim as a German philosopher. In 1816, at the age of forty-seven, Hegel was appointed Professor at Heidelberg University, where he authored his *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical*

*Sciences*, the most comprehensive exposition of his philosophical system.

Hegel later moved to Berlin University, where he took up the position of Chair of Philosophy. During his time in Berlin, he served as the official philosopher of Prussia, where he explored the nature of knowledge, God, the universe, and the state. His ideas had a profound impact on both theoretical and practical politics. Despite his influential position, Hegel chose not to engage directly in political conflicts. He did, however, criticize the English Parliamentary Reform movement, which led to the passage of the Reform Act of 1832. Hegel died of cholera at the age of 61 and was buried next to Fichte. His philosophical contributions are found in his major works, including *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, *Logic*, *The Philosophy of Right*, and *The Philosophy of History*. Hegel's philosophy represents the peak of German idealism in political thought. Like Kant and Fichte, Hegel's political theory was grounded in psychology, focusing on the concepts of positive and self-determining freedom. His writings integrated Montesquieu's historical perspective with the philosophical depth of Kant and Fichte, with the core of his philosophy centered on the evolution of ideas through a dialectical process.

According to George Sabine, the significance of Hegel's political thought revolves around two main points: a) the dialectic as a method and b) the idealization of the nation-state. These aspects became foundational to later political theories. Central to Hegel's political philosophy is the concept of 'Geist' (spirit), which manifests in various forms such as *Weltgeist* (World Spirit), *Volksgeist* (National Spirit), and *Zeitgeist* (Spirit of the Age). This concept was pivotal in Hegel's view of historical development. Vaughan highlights that Hegel made notable contributions by deeply understanding the connection between morals and politics, offering insights that surpassed those of his predecessors. In the 19th century, Hegel was not only recognized as the official philosopher of Prussia but also as the philosopher of his era, akin to how Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas were viewed in their times. George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel represents the peak of German Idealism in political thought, with the core of his philosophy being the evolution of ideas through a dialectical process. He elevated the concept of the national state, represented by its sovereign, to a nearly mystical status and believed in the rationality of existing institutions. His approach was historical, evolutionary, and dialectical, viewing history as a process of unfolding evolution. According to Hegel, every idea contains its own contradictions, which leads to a balancing of opposites and the emergence of new ideas. His major works include *The Science of Logic* and *The Philosophy of History*. Hegel's philosophy is based on three fundamental tenets: (1) all organic processes are dialectical, (2) reality is an organic process, and (3) reality resides in the ideal.

### **3.1.2 METHOD: HEGELIAN DIALECTICS**

In the universe, the only true reality is the idea, spirit, reason, or divine mind. The history of the world is essentially the history of the evolution of Idea or Reason. Reason represents reality and is rooted in thought. Reality is not static; it is dynamic and an organic process. All organic processes are dialectical, and dialectics accounts for the evolution of Reason within the human mind. It is the mechanism through which Reason or Idea drives itself forward and evolves, manifesting in human institutions and systems of thought that progressively develop. Dialectics is self-propelling because an Idea inherently contains its own opposite, and it is the nature of ideas or thoughts to seek a reconciliation of these opposites. This reconciliation is achievable because the contradictions between the opposites of an Idea are never absolute.

The dialectical evolution of Idea or Reason is not linear but spiral, following a threefold rhythm of change: thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. Each thesis generates its antithesis, and these are reconciled and transcended into a higher form, the synthesis, which incorporates what is true in both the thesis and the antithesis. This synthesis then becomes a new thesis, generating its own antithesis. Central to Hegel's theories of nationalism

and the philosophy of history is his concept of the dialectic. Hegel's Historical Method, crucial for interpreting world history accurately, required a special framework, which the dialectic provided. Hegel aimed to demonstrate the developmental order in which Absolute Reason unfolds through ideas and institutions across different civilizations. He placed great importance on the concept of the dialectic, claiming it was the greatest formula in the history of philosophy. The dialectic was a logical tool designed to reveal historical necessity and interpret history accurately. As a key component of the Historical Method, it was a dynamic force because it dealt with the ever-moving subject matter of Absolute Idea or Reason or Geist. According to Sabine, Hegel found that the dialectic could produce new and otherwise indemonstrable conclusions in social studies. Hegel believed that through dialectics, he had uncovered a law of synthesis inherent in both the nature of the mind and the nature of things.

### **3.1.3 HEGEL'S IDEALISM**

There are two schools of thought regarding the true nature of Ultimate Reality. One school believes that some abstract idea forms the ultimate reality. The philosophers belonging to this school believe that everything in the universe is deducted or derived from some such idea. This school of thought is generally known as Idealism. Prominent subscribers of this theory are Plato, Kant and Hegel. The other school of thought believes that matter is the ultimate reality. All the good things in life, all the institutions and all ideas are derived from the things material. In other words, our ideas are formed according to the environment and the material circumstances in which we live. Prominent thinkers belonging to this school are Marx, Lenin, Stalin and Laski.

Hegel is an Idealist in the sense that he considers Ultimate Reality to be the Absolute Idea, Reason, Self-Consciousness, or Spirit (Geist), terms he often uses interchangeably. However, Hegel does not define these concepts with precise distinction. The crucial aspect of Hegel's philosophy is that material things are considered secondary, as they are the result of the evolution stemming from the Absolute Idea. This Absolute Idea is not static but is characterized by its dynamic nature, continuously seeking self-realization. Hegel refers to this process as the unfolding of Reason. The entire universe, with all its complexity and phenomena, is the product of this unfolding of Reason. This represents the essence of Hegelian Philosophy of History or the Hegelian Historical Method, which will be explored in greater detail in the following sections.

The Absolute Idea progresses through a gradual evolutionary process. According to Hegel, the entire course of world history is pre-determined or conditioned. Echoing Aristotle's concept of Teleology, Hegel argues that the Absolute Idea, throughout its diverse historical journey, is moving toward a significant goal. There is no room for chance or accident in this scheme. Instead, the world's historical evolution unfolds according to a rational plan. The true essence of a thing is revealed only when it reaches full development. Initially, the Absolute Idea lacks knowledge, but its inherent nature drives it toward acquiring complete knowledge of everything and itself. The Absolute Idea starts moving with the set goal of getting "perfect knowledge of everything and of itself." In the words of Prof. Wayper, "History is the process," according to Hegel, "by which the Spirit (or Absolute Idea) passes from knowing nothing to full knowledge of itself. The spirit on the way of its goal makes many, experiments".

Throughout this complex historical journey, the Absolute Idea or Spirit takes on various forms, discarding old ones and adopting new ones. Each form represents a step toward complete self-fulfillment, though many more steps remain. The first stage in the evolution of the Absolute Idea is the physical or inorganic world, where physical objects perceived through our senses manifest the Absolute Idea. The second stage encompasses the world of plants and animals, which is more advanced than the physical world due to its increased complexity. The third stage involves the emergence of humans, who introduce a rational element

that distinguishes the good from the bad, adding a new level of complexity.

The fourth stage is the evolution of the Family system, which is more advanced because it incorporates both rational elements and a spirit of mutual cooperation. The fifth stage introduces Bourgeois Society or Civil Society, where economic considerations become significant in addition to the elements present in the Family. This marks further progress in the evolutionary process. The final and highest stage is the State, where the Absolute Idea achieves self-realization. The evolutionary process culminates with the emergence of the State, which represents the ultimate realization of the Absolute Idea.

For Hegel, *Geist*, or Spirit, or the Absolute Idea, provided the foundation for an ideal moral order. Over the course of history, *Geist* gradually achieved self-knowledge through its manifestation in the state, which represents the culmination of this perfect moral order. As Maxey notes, the concept of *Geist* was fundamental to Hegel's political thought and appeared in various forms, such as *Weltgeist* (World Spirit), *Volksgeist* (National Spirit), and *Zeitgeist* (Spirit of the Age). This concept underpins nearly all of Hegel's political doctrines and shapes his view of historical evolution.

According to Hegel, the state represents the form that *Geist* takes when it fully realizes itself in the world. The moral order, which develops through family and other forms of social organization, finds its ultimate expression in the state. The state, in Hegel's view, is the embodiment of ethical self-consciousness, personifying the will of *Geist* or the Absolute Idea. It is exalted by Hegel as "the march of God on Earth." It is important to distinguish between the ordinary, everyday states and the ideal state that Hegel describes. He refers to the concept of the state as derived from *Geist* through historical evolution, and as an idealist, he sees the true nature of the state as synonymous with its conceptual Ideal.

Prof. Dunning also suggests that "this exposition hardly requires the warning given by Hegel that he is dealing with the state not as a historical phenomenon, but as an intellectual concept. In the words of Hegel, "The state is organism that is, development of the idea to its destination." But it cannot be said that Hegel completely threw to winds the actual historical process, though he saw to it the historical process is shown to pass through the four-fold pre-determined process. In the words of Prof. Dunning, "Hegel's survey detects four great world historical political systems. Four systems are the oriental, the Greek, the Roman and the German. He makes the commonplace facts of familiar history fit themselves nicely into the categories and relations of his logic, and shows that mankind through all the ages is marching steadily but unconsciously, along Hegelian lines, toward the Germanic perfection of the XIX century...". Hegel stated in his book, *Philosophy of History* that *Geist* realized itself and freedom in the true sense of the term was realized only in the Ideal German State. In his own words "The Orient knew and to the present day knows only that one (i.e. the despot) is free; the- Greek and Roman worlds, that some are free; the German world knows that all are free." Such is Hegel's generalization of the world historical process and his Philosophy of History.

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 1

**NOTE:** Use the space given below for your answers. Use separate sheet if space is not sufficient.

1. Comment on Hegel's understanding on evolution of ideas through dialectical process.

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2. Hegel considers absolute idea as the ultimate reality. Explain.

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3. Explain Hegel's concept of Spirit or Geist.

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### 3.1.4 HISTORICISM

In his examination of the state's divine nature and its historical evolution through six stages and a four-fold process, Hegel played the roles of both a metaphysician and a historian. As Professor Lancaster aptly puts it, "Faced with such transcendental claims such as 'The state is the Divine Ideas it exists on Earth,' one is moved to ask whether Hegel talks about the state in General or about actual states. The answer is that he had both in mind. That history exhibits the working of Reason in the universe, is in fact, a necessary result from his basic premise that 'the actual is the rational.'" While discussing the state in general, Hegel often references his own state, Prussia. He aims to show that the unfolding of Geist or Reason has occurred through various world historical peoples, including the Orientals, Greeks, and Romans, who established states. These peoples represented the Universal Spirit or Absolute Idea partially, whereas the German people, in his view, embodied it fully.

In his interpretation of world history, Hegel emphasizes the importance of the nation rather than the individual or other forms of association. He sees world history as the record of Geist manifesting through different nations or peoples over time, reflecting the national spirit (*Volkgeist*). *Geist* expresses itself partially in earlier developmental stages such as the Inorganic World, Organic World, Human Beings, Family, and Civil Society, but achieves its full realization in the Nation State, which he considers the true creator of art, law, morals, and religion. Therefore, the history of civilization is a succession of national cultures, each contributing uniquely and timely to the collective human achievement. Hence, for him "the history of civilization is a succession of national cultures in which each nation brings its peculiar and timely contribution to the whole human achievement. It is in the national state and only in the modern history of Western Europe, that this inborn impulse of the nation to create reaches self-conscious and rational expression. The state therefore is the director and the end of national development."

Hegel made his Historical Method central to the study of political philosophy, intending to replace the empirical methods used by Locke and Hume. Renowned for his unparalleled insights into Western culture, Hegel's influence elevated subjects such as the history of religion, philosophy, and law to significant fields of study. The Historical Method, which Hegel advocated, could be applied to politics, economics, law, religion, and philosophy, aiming to supplant generalization and analysis methods and enhance empirical research. This method is teleological, suggesting that the past and future course of history are predetermined, and no human will, however powerful, can alter it.

Hegel approached his study with predetermined conclusions and used historical investigation merely as a tool to validate these conclusions. His Reason led him to align with the principle of Nationalism, asserting that only the nation-state could fulfil the *Geist's* quest for self-realization. He was committed to the modernization, unification, and nationalization of Germany, aspiring to achieve for Germany what Machiavelli did for Italy: a breakthrough towards unification and nationhood. Despite Germany being a culturally united entity at the time, it was politically fragmented by "particularism and provincialism." To achieve his goal of

transforming Germany into a powerful nation under the Prussian Monarch's leadership, Hegel employed the historical method.

As Dunning explains, "The historical method meant a philosophy of history, or the discovery of a general direction of cultural growth, by which it was hoped that a scientifically defensible line could be drawn between advanced and backward peoples, developed and primitive civilizations, progressive and retarded nations. The method assumed that, there is in nature, a single pattern or a law of development, which can be exhibited by a proper arrangement of subject-matter. This holds good for the whole evolution of society or for any of the chief phases of civilization, as well as for any sub-division of history." In the whole historical evolution of mankind and the organisation a particular order or pattern or logic could be discerned, once the facts were seen in a proper perspective". By this process he arrived at historically objective standard of values" (Sabine). Sabine also states that Hegel believed that proving social and political truths did not require self-evident moral axioms like the Laws of Nature. Instead, the logical order of historical development could be applied to social and political philosophy as a whole, and specifically to the history of national cultures.

Hegel's concept of Dialectic owes much to Plato, who employed this method in his *Republic*. The term "Dialectics" comes from the Greek word "dialeō," which means to discuss or debate. In Plato's *Republic*, Socrates used his debating skills to expose contradictions in his opponents' viewpoints, aiming to uncover the truth. Hegel also drew inspiration from later Greek thinkers who observed that historical processes often involve opposites. They believed that pushing something to its extreme tends to create its opposite, which then counters and potentially destroys it. For instance, in ancient Greece, absolute monarchies that reached the height of despotism often led to violent revolutions and the rise of democracies. Conversely, when democracies deteriorated into mob rule or license, they could be replaced by despots or dictators.

This dynamic was why Aristotle advocated avoiding extremes and proposed his theory of the "Golden Mean" and a mixed constitution. Hegel took these ideas as a starting point but reinterpreted them in his own philosophical framework. He did not adopt them verbatim but adapted their essence to develop his own version of Dialectic. Through his study of philosophy and history, Hegel concluded that contradiction is the driving force of the world. He viewed the world as an ever-moving equilibrium, where the evolution of the Absolute Idea occurs not in a straight line but in a zigzag pattern. This process involves the progression from a positive and a negative to a new idea (X) born from their interaction. The new idea (X) then becomes the positive in a new triad, continuing the cycle of progress indefinitely.

Hegel's complex formulation is often summarized as Thesis, Antithesis, and Synthesis, or Being, Non-Being, and Becoming. Below is a chart illustrating various examples of this progression in Hegel's framework:

|    | <b>Thesis</b>     | <b>Antithesis</b>        | <b>Synthesis</b>        |
|----|-------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. | Art               | Religion                 | Philosophy              |
| 2. | Family            | Civil/ Bourgeois Society | State                   |
| 3. | Despotism         | Democracy                | Constitutional Monarchy |
| 4. | Greek City        | Medieval Christian State | Modern German State     |
| 5. | Absolute Monarchy | Mobocracy                | Democracy               |
| 6. | Idea              | Nature                   | Spirit                  |
| 7. | Inorganic world   | Organic world            | Human Beings            |

One can find are numerous examples of this principle. Hegel's method was purely logical: the idea of

something inherently involves its opposite, and understanding comes from reconciling these opposites. The true nature of any concept becomes clearer when its contradictions are considered. Opposition and contrariety are fundamental aspects of both nature and thought, representing universal principles that drive historical change. Hegel viewed the world as a dynamic equilibrium, where balance is temporary and serves only to direct continuous change. Consequently, opposition is never absolute; the destruction of one position in a debate is never total. Both sides possess elements of truth and falsehood, and when these are properly assessed, a synthesis emerges that integrates the valid aspects of both. Hegel termed this driving force “contradiction.”

In Hegel’s logic, contradiction refers to the productive opposition between systems, which constitutes an objective critique of each and leads to the formation of a more comprehensive and coherent system. For example, pleasure is best understood in contrast to pain, goodness to badness, and heat to cold. Hegel generalized this tendency to apply across all aspects of life, including political philosophy and the interpretation of historical and evolutionary processes. According to him, there is an endless sequence of triads: each thesis, after interacting with its antithesis, gives rise to a synthesis, which then becomes the thesis for the next triad. This process continues indefinitely, from ancient times to the emergence of the German national and monarchical state.

When a synthesis arises from a thesis and antithesis, no essential elements of the original components are lost. Instead, their essence is preserved and integrated into the new synthesis. Thus, the core aspects of any phenomenon or civilization from earlier stages are retained in the latest synthesis. Hegel adhered to the principle observed in physical sciences, particularly chemistry, that nothing truly perishes but continues to transform in various forms. He believed that contradiction is inherent in everything except Reason or Spirit once it has achieved its goal. Nothing is lost in the ongoing evolution of Spirit. In the words of Prof. Wayper, “...dialectic is a theory which explains how it is that history is the story of the continuous development of the Spirit. Since all the former steps of the Spirit are preserved in the new ones taken, it emphasise, the-essential continuity of that story of the increasing revolution of the Spirit.”

In his theory of Dialectic, Hegel emphasizes the crucial role of contradictions, asserting that they are fundamental to our understanding of truth. He posits that every thought involves two movements: affirmative and negative. The contradictions inherent in the affirmative or thesis become explicit, and similarly, the affirmations implicit in the negative or antithesis also come to light. When these opposing elements clash, they lead to a higher level affirmation or restatement of the truth, which results in a new synthesis where the contradictions are sublimated and integrated.

Hegel introduced a novel concept of synthetic logic, which allows for the possibility that the same statement can be both true and false simultaneously. This implies that, until Spirit achieves ultimate perfection, everything in the universe contains elements of both truth and falsehood. According to Hegel, “Finite things are contradictory in themselves.” The thesis and antithesis are engaged in a dynamic struggle and opposition. Each must be developed fully before their contradictions can be resolved in the synthesis. It is not external forces that resolve these contradictions but Reason itself, which is inherent within them, driving development forward.

Contradiction, or dialectic, is thus a self-generating process that operates independently of external influences. Hegel described it as a mechanism by which thought advances, with Reason progressively manifesting itself through institutions, history, and society. In this process, no single proposition represents the complete truth; instead, each contains a portion of truth along with error. The dialectic transcends contradictions and leads to a new and more accurate assertion.

Hegel redefined the concept of contradiction, making it the driving force behind the entire evolutionary process—a departure from its traditional meaning in earlier logical theories. He claimed to have created a new logic, synthetic logic, by displacing the old system of analytic logic.

Dialectic, for Hegel, served not only as a logical method for discovering truth but also as a moral instrument for achieving the unification of Germany and establishing it as a great nation. He believed that it was not merely the sentiments or reason of individuals but the collective will of the nation that could effectuate significant transformation in institutional frameworks to achieve moral objectives. For Hegel, the moral goal for all Germans was the unification of Germany.

Dialectic addressed both historical and moral necessities. On an absolute, philosophical level, its goal was the self-realization of the Spirit, Geist, or Absolute Idea. In more practical, relative terms, however, the dialectic aimed at the unification of Germany under the leadership of the Prussian Monarch, whom Hegel regarded as his philosophical counterpart. Hegel asserted that no other dynamic concept could unite relativism and absolutism with such flexibility as Dialectic.

Hegel structured his philosophy so that his pragmatic goals could be logically derived from his absolute goals. For example, he argued that Germany's emergence as a nation-state was not merely a result of the Germans' desires but an inevitable outcome of the historical evolution of Spirit and political development. Thus, the formation of the German nation-state was seen as an unavoidable consequence, driven by the evolution of Reason or Intelligence. Dialectic, therefore, synthesized intelligence and will. In the words of Prof. Sabine, "Hegel's dialectic was in truth a curious amalgam of historical insight and realism, of moral appeal, romantic idealization, and religious mysticism." Throughout the history the Spirit has been changing shapes. Thus, as Wayper said, "Hegel's is a doctrine of change and of change constantly for the better, a promise of assured progress. Change is thus as strongly marked a characteristic of his teaching as conversation"

## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 2

**NOTE:** Use the space given below for your answers. Use separate sheet if space is not sufficient.

1. Explain Hegel's historical method.

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Hegel viewed the world as an ever-moving equilibrium. Comment.

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How does Hegel define the concept of contradiction?

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### 3.1.5 STATE AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Like Plato, Hegel was a significant system-builder in political philosophy. He began with certain foundational

premises, often referred to as self-evident truths in political discourse. One such premise was that “what is rational is real, and what is real is rational.” In everyday language, this phrase suggests that everything that exists aligns with Reason and that anything in accordance with Reason must exist. However, Hegel used these terms in a more profound and philosophical manner.

The core of Hegel’s philosophy is the theory of the gradual unfolding of the Absolute Reason, Spirit, or *Geist* through a dialectical process. According to Hegel, Reason achieves its full Self-Realization in the State, making the State inherently rational. Thus, the State embodies the eternal and necessary essence of Spirit.

Building on Aristotle, Hegel posited that the true nature of a thing, or Reality, is understood when it reaches its complete development and fulfilment. For Hegel, the State represents the complete realization of Reason and Reality. Therefore, we can demonstrate through algebraic reasoning that Real is Rational and Rational is Real. Since the State equals Rational and the State equals Real, it follows that Real equals Rational and vice versa. For Hegel, the State was both a manifestation of Rationality and Reality, treating these concepts as synonymous.

In Hegel’s view, “Real” signifies something fundamental and significant, not just something that exists empirically. In the words of Prof. Sabine, “But this was emphatically not what Hegel meant when he said that ‘Real is the Rational’, because he always distinguished between the real and that which merely exists. The Real is the permanent inner core of meaning in history in comparison with which particular events are casual, transient or apparent.... What exists is always momentary and to a large degree accidental, the mere surface manifestation of deep-lying forces which alone are real.” Hegel maintained that all states are rational, as they represent the culmination of the historical process of Reason’s unfolding. Every event in history was necessary for this process and aligned with a rational plan.

Hegel believed that the Real world is as it should be and that the actual state must be rational. Consequently, he used his logic to praise existing states as ideal and rational, deserving obedience from their citizens. He described the State with lofty epithets such as the “March of God (Absolute Reason) on earth” and the “Embodiment of Reason.”

When analyzing Hegel’s concept of the state, it is crucial to understand how the state emerges historically from the family and Civil (Bourgeois) Society. Hegel views the state as a synthesis of the family (thesis) and civil society (antithesis). According to Hegel, while the physical evolution of Reason concludes with the emergence of humanity, social evolution continues. In this framework, the Family represents unity, Civil Society represents particularity, and the State embodies universality.

Hegel’s theory of the state’s evolution from the family draws on Aristotle’s notion that humans are naturally social and cannot live in isolation. To meet basic needs such as food, sex, and protection, humans naturally form families, which represent the initial institutional embodiment of the Spirit’s quest for self-fulfilment. The family, in a limited way, represents rational and ethical order. Hegel elaborates his concept of family in the following lines: “The family, as the unmediated substantiality of mind, is specifically characterised by love, which is mind’s feeling of its own unity. Hence in a family one’s frame of mind is to have self-consciousness of one’s individuality within its unity as the absolute essence of oneself... Marriage, as the immediate type of ethical relationship, contains first the moment of physical life secondly in self-consciousness the natural sexual union purely inward or implicit... is changed into a union on the level of mind, into self-conscious love. Its (Marriage’s) objective source lies in the free consent of the person, especially in their consent to make themselves one person to renounce their individual and natural personality to this unity of one with the other. From this point of view their union is a self-restriction, but in fact it is their liberation, because in it

they attain their substantive self-consciousness. They live, therefore, in a unity of feeling, love, confidence and faith in each other ...”

The institutions of family and marriage constitute a step forward in integrating particular selfish desires with selfless universal Reason, emphasizing the sacrifice of individual particularity for the unity and universality of the family. Hegel’s view of the family is conventional and not novel. Since the family cannot address all of humanity’s complex needs, it proves insufficient. Consequently, the family, representing the rational idea of mutual love, serves as the starting point for Hegel’s analysis of the state.

However, the Family is inadequate for meeting the diverse needs and complex personality of individuals. To achieve a fuller realization of their potential, individuals naturally expand into broader organizations, such as civil society or bourgeois society, where they strive for an ethical life. Unlike the family, which is based on unity and love, civil society is founded on diversity, contractual relationships, and competitive self-interest. In civil society, a range of trades and industries develops, addressing various human needs more effectively. It also introduces mechanisms such as a police force to regulate individual rights and interests. However, according to Hegel, the state has not yet emerged at this stage.

Hegel distinguishes between the state and civil society. In the words of Prof. Dunning, “Civil society, however, appears in a new light. It is made to include those relations of individual to individual that turn upon the satisfaction of economic needs, the protection of property through the administration of justice and the care of general welfare through agencies of police and corporation”. .” Even though, civil society performs some functions similar to the state, Hegel argues that the state is distinct and superior. Civil society produces property and laws, though these laws may not always be just. In the words of Wayper, “The whole process of trade and industry in bourgeois society, becomes a new organisation for ‘the supply of human needs so that man in that society is producing for his family, satisfying his own wants and at the same time serving his fellows which makes bourgeois society take on a rational and universal significance”.

While giving an account of civil society, Hegel provides a detailed account of guilds, corporations, estates, classes, associations, and local communities within civil society. Through involvement in these institutions, individuals learn to consider not only their personal interests but also those of the larger group, thus developing social and cooperative instincts. In the words of Hegel, “But in developing itself independently to totality, the principle of particularity passes over into universality, and only there does it attain its truth and the right to which its positive actuality is entitled”. The civil society so depicted by Hegel is a state, but it is of an inferior sort. It is based on material needs of human beings “that are not wholly private and yet are primarily self-regarding ... but it is some-what less selfish than the family. Civil society, as such is a set of institutions with the function of educating the individual to the point where he sees what he needs, only by willing what all men need and imperfectly conscious of their interdependency.

The Hegelian Civil Society was The State in embryo, the state in the making, a kind of state, but not a completely developed one, as it could not embody fully what he calls Reason or Geist. Civil Society’s marked distinction is Competition, while that of the state is Co-operative Unity. The Civil Society does not represent that Organic, Universal and Rational Unity which the State Represents. In Civil Society also there are all the ingredients of the State, like the police, army, trading community, agriculturists. But they are all in such a frame of mind that they would seek their own interests in competition with others. The moment the members of the Civil Society start striving for the ‘Universal Interests’ of the community, it gets converted into the State. It is almost psychological change in the minds of the constituents that will make the state out of the civil society. As Sabine puts it, “the state is morally superior to civil society.”

This moral superiority or psychological change is brought about by a class of devoted civil servants. Prof.

Lancaster observes that “What is needed to make a real state, according to Hegel is the existence of a civil service charged with the care of the Universal Interests of the community. When a Universal Class of Civil Servants is created, civil society passes over into the state.” The moment the individuals starts to identify their interests with those of the community, the state emerges. The state becomes an organism, representing the collective will of its members and manifesting as a moral person.

Although the state is a morally superior successor to civil society, both can coexist and are mutually dependent. Even after the state’s emergence, civil society continues to manage routine tasks such as providing public services, administering laws, and handling economic interests. The state may oversee and regulate these functions, but civil society remains responsible for their execution. In turn, civil society relies on the state for intelligent supervision and moral guidance.

The state, while relying on civil society to achieve its moral objectives, operates on a different dialectical level. Unlike civil society, which serves individual needs, the state is an ultimate end, not merely a means. Hegel describes the state using exalted terms such as “March of God on Earth,” “The Divine Idea as it exists on Earth,” “Spirit personified,” and “Realized Ethical Idea.”

Key characteristics of Hegel’s concept of the state include:

- **Divine Origin:** Hegelian philosophy views the state as having a divine origin, representing the “culmination of divinely guided growth of the Absolute Idea, Reason, or *Geist*.” It is depicted as the “March of God on Earth.”
- **End in Itself:** The state is an end in itself, with all other entities, both within and outside its realm, serving as means to its objectives. Individuals do not create the state; rather, the state is the context within which individuals find their purpose. The state transforms individuals from mere members of civil society into moral citizens.
- **Greater Whole:** The state is considered a whole that surpasses the sum of its parts. The significance of individuals lies in their membership in the state, much like how organs are subordinate to the human body. Thus, individuals must be entirely subordinate to the state.
- **Creator of Morality:** The state is not bound by external moral laws but is the creator of morality itself. It shapes individuals’ moral consciousness, rendering individual conscience subordinate to state-defined ethics. The state is seen as the ultimate interpreter of the community’s traditions and customs, standing above conventional morality. According to Hegel, the state is infallible; in conflicts between the state and individuals, the state is always correct, and individual dissent is inherently wrong.
- **True Freedom and the State:** According to Hegel, the state is the true source of real freedom for individuals. He asserts that “nothing short of the state actualizes Freedom.” Real freedom, as realized through the state, manifests in three key ways: through laws, inward morality, and the entire system of social institutions that foster personality development. For Hegel, freedom is found in “complete obedience to the laws of the state.” He views the state as the embodiment of Reason, where state laws represent external expressions of this Reason. Individuals achieve freedom by aligning themselves with the Spirit or Essence of Spirit. Hegel distinguishes between two types of wills within individuals: the ‘Real Will,’ which serves the community’s interests, and the ‘Actual Will,’ which caters to personal desires. True freedom, therefore, involves subordinating the Actual Will to the Real Will, which is achieved through the state. The individual becomes free only by voluntarily identifying with and adhering to state laws, not merely out of fear of punishment. Hegel does not regard freedom in terms

of individual rights; rather, he sees the state as omnipotent and individuals as existing solely within its framework. Rights, if any, are limited to what the law permits.

- **State as Interpreter of Customs:** The state acts as the interpreter of community customs, reflecting the “collective reason of the past.” It alone creates and enforces laws, serving as the sole arbiter of social ethics and moral judgments.
- **Infallibility of the State:** Hegel holds that the state is infallible. Whatever actions the state takes are considered right, and in conflicts between the state and individuals, the state is always correct. This infallibility is a central tenet of Hegel’s philosophy.
- **State Sovereignty:** The state is not only absolute in its internal relations but also in its dealings with other states. Hegel rejects the notion of International Law, asserting that states are bound only by their own interests. The state is sovereign and self-sufficient, not constrained by external rules.
- **War as a Virtue:** For Hegel, war is not an absolute evil but a virtue that highlights noble qualities in individuals and aids moral development. Success in war validates its use, as the victorious state represents the World Spirit. War is a key instrument for the World Spirit to advance historical development according to the Dialectic, making it a sacred institution.
- **Resistance to the State:** Individuals in Hegel’s view have no right to resist state commands. They are considered products of the state, akin to organs of a body politic. Just as body parts cannot rebel against the body, individuals cannot resist the state.
- **Ideal Form of Government:** Hegel advocates for a constitutional monarchy, similar to Prussia during his time, ideally hereditary. In his model, the legislative branch represents the ‘Thesis’ (universal aspect), the administrative branch represents the ‘Antithesis’ (particular aspect), and the Monarch embodies the ‘Synthesis’ by harmonizing these aspects. Hegel believes sovereignty resides in the Monarch rather than the people. He criticizes the English Parliamentary system and favors functional representation based on class interests rather than territorial representation.
- **Ideal and Prussian State:** Hegel’s characteristics of the state apply to an ideal state that exists in theory. He identifies his ideal state with contemporary Prussia, considering it the pinnacle of human societal development according to Dialectic principles. According to Hegel, no further development beyond the Prussian state was possible or necessary.

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 3

**NOTE:** Use the space given below for your answers. Use separate sheet if space is not sufficient.

1. For Hegel, “what is rational is real, and what is real is rational.” Elucidate.

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2. Comment on Hegel views on family.

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### 3. Comment on Hegel's views on State and Civil Society

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#### 3.1.6 LET US SUM UP

Hegel's philosophy prompted English idealists of the nineteenth century to reassess liberalism, moving beyond its abstraction of the individual as merely a solitary and pleasure-seeking being. His ideas contributed to the development of sociological theories of politics by demonstrating the link between political power and the economic, social, and cultural forces within the state. Hegel placed a new emphasis on the state, enriching modern political philosophy significantly. He adeptly explored the relationship between morals and politics, offering deeper insights than his predecessors.

Prof. Sabine notes that "The philosophy of Hegel aimed at nothing less than a complete and systematic reconstruction of modern thought." He set forth a new intellectual method, the dialectic, which should bridge the gulf between reason, fact and value. In his political theory he set a value on the national state and its place in history which formed so small part of his influence. The social philosophy of Hegel had a direct and intimate relation to the national history of Germany. According to Maxey, "It will be many years before the full influence of Hegel's political thought can be measured. His contribution to the warring ideologies represented on the one side by Lenin and Stalin and on the other by Mussolini and Hitler, constitutes but one part of his significance, and is no more paradoxical than his influence in other directions. Both his view and his methodology have deeply affected the social science." Divergent streams of thought have also flowed from Hegel's subordination of the whole of civil society to the state.

#### 3.1.7 EXERCISES

1. Explain Hegel's dialecticism.
2. Explain Hegel's concept of Idealism.
3. Comment on Hegel's Historicism.
4. Hegelian Civil Society was the State in embryo. Comment.

#### 3.1.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

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## **3.2 BENTHAM: UTILITARIANISM, THEORY OF STATE, GOVERNMENT, LAW AND ETHICS**

**- Dr. Harjit Singh**

### **STRUCTURE**

#### **3.2.0 Objectives**

#### **3.2.1 Introduction**

#### **3.2.2 Bentham's utilitarianism**

#### **3.2.3 Theory of State and Government**

#### **3.2.4 Law and Ethics**

#### **3.2.5 Let Us Sum Up**

#### **3.2.6 Exercises**

#### **3.2.7 Suggested Readings**

#### **3.2.0 OBJECTIVES**

**After going through this lesson, you will be able to:**

- know Bentham's utilitarianism
- understand Bentham's theory of State and Government
- comprehend Bentham's views on Law and Ethics

#### **3.2.1 INTRODUCTION**

Jeremy Bentham, often regarded as the founder of utilitarianism, was born in London on February 15, 1748. Following in the footsteps of his father, Jeremiah Bentham, he also pursued a career in law. He gained considerable acclaim for his Greek and Latin poetry while attending Westminster School. In 1760, he entered Queen's College, Oxford, where he developed a comprehensive understanding of logic. He later moved to Lincoln's Inn in 1763 to further his legal studies; however, he found the legal profession unengaging compared to his interest in scientific experimentation, leading him to abandon his legal pursuits. From the outset, he was more concerned with the shortcomings of the legal system than with mastering its intricacies.

In 1785, Bentham traveled to Russia to visit his brother, an engineer working on the establishment of a modern agricultural and industrial colony in Ukraine. In 1792, he was granted the title of French citizen by the National Assembly of France. As a major supporter of University College London, founded in 1827, he contributed to its growth from a small college into the largest university in the Commonwealth. Bentham surrounded himself with numerous academics and disciples, with James Mill being his first disciple. Among his circle were prominent figures such as distinguished lawyer Sir Samuel Romilly, renowned economist David Ricardo, philosopher J.S. Mill, and legal scholar John Austin. He was also acquainted with influential

Whig leader Lord Shelburne, who served as Prime Minister of England from 1782 to 1783.

Bentham was a prolific writer, publishing around thirty works during his lifetime, with nearly twenty more published posthumously. His writings encompassed a wide range of topics, including law, political economy, education, religion, language, local governance, banking, social services, census, and international organization. His first book, "Fragment on Government," published in 1776, marked the beginning of philosophical radicalism. Other significant works include "Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation," "Emancipate Your Colonies," "Essay on Political Tactics," "Principles of International Law," "Manual of Political Economy," and "Church of England." He advocated for annual elections, equal electoral districts, universal suffrage, and secret ballots.

Bentham's guiding principle of utility emphasized the notion of "the greatest good for the greatest number," which he believed should be the foundation of government. In 1825 itself, Hazlitt noted that "His name is little known in England, better in Europe and best of all in the plains of Chile and the mines of Mexico. He has offered constitutions for the new world and legislated for future times....". He lived to the age of eighty-two, working diligently until the end of his life. His ambitions were significant, and according to Leslie Stephen, "he is said to have expressed the wish that he could awaken once in a century to contemplate the prospect of a world gradually adopting his principles and so making steady progress in happiness and wisdom." J.S Mill says, "A place, therefore, must be assigned to Bentham among the masters of wisdom, the great teachers and permanent intellectual ornaments of human race ...." The service of Bentham to political thought was enormous and also excellent. In the words of Doyle, "Jeremy Bentham stood out as the dominating philosopher of the radical group". He further says that "he was inductive scientist drawing conclusions from his laboriously collected data." Referring to the death of Bentham in his ripe age he remarks that he died, "Venerated by a group of disciples as a patriarch, a spiritual leader, almost a God, with James Mill as his Saint Paul."

As a key figure in the reformist movements of the 19th century, Bentham, the English utilitarian philosopher, primarily focused on legal reform, although he wrote extensively about various aspects of contemporary political life. His work in ethics and jurisprudence distinguishes him, making English society deeply indebted to his ideas and contributions.

### **3.2.2 BENTHAM'S UTILITARIANISM**

Bentham had a great capacity of reading and writing voluminous books. He gathered extensive material on topics such as political and legal issues. Bentham was in the habit of writing piece-meal and taking up new works without completing the works already initiated. Essentially owing to this habit, some of his works might not have seen the light, but for some of his friends and admirers who compiled and edited his works and published his books. Bentham is better known of his works are "Fragments on Government" and "Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation." In these two books and numerous pamphlets Bentham advocated the following political theories.

Bentham's most significant political idea is undoubtedly his theory of Utility. While Bentham did not originate this concept—having borrowed it from thinkers like Priestley and Hutcheson—he shaped and emphasized it so profoundly that it became the cornerstone of his philosophical system and a rallying cry for political movements in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In this regard it is important to mention J.W. Allen says, "It seems to me that in Bentham's ideas there was little or nothing that was original or even highly distinctive. All his ideas are derived from earlier writers. But he assimilated all of them and turned them into a movement which ruled England throughout the nineteenth century." In his work, "Introduction

to the Principles of Morals and Legislation,” Bentham elaborates on his theory of Utility, which posits that the state is valuable only insofar as it promotes “the greatest happiness of the greatest number.” This concept of “greatest happiness” is rooted in a psychological and hedonistic theory of “Pleasure and Pain.”

Bentham’s “Pleasure-Pain” theory, though intricate, is presented in a straightforward manner. He argues that humans are beings of feeling and sensibility, with reason serving merely as a tool for emotions and passions. Every experience is either pleasurable or painful, and actions are deemed good if they increase pleasure and decrease pain, and bad if they do the opposite. The measure for evaluating the morality of any action, according to Bentham, is this pleasure-pain principle. As Bentham states, “Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do.” Pleasure and the avoidance of pain are not only the driving forces behind human behaviour but also the standards by which we determine value in life.

Bentham further extends this principle to governance, asserting that what applies to individual morals also applies to statecraft. The state’s actions are good if they increase the pleasure or reduce the pain of the majority of its citizens. All actions should be assessed using this criterion: if the state promotes the greatest good for the greatest number, it is deemed good; otherwise, it is bad. As Sabine has noted, “This principle they [Utilitarians] held to be the only rational guide, both to private morals and public policy. The true function of jurisprudence is censorial, the criticism of the legal system with a view to its improvement. For such criticism, a standard of value is required, and that can be supplied only by the principle of utility.” Bentham also famously stated, “It is the greatest happiness of the greatest number which is the measure of right and wrong.” Therefore, all state actions should aim to provide the greatest good for the greatest number, implying a commitment to both individualism and democracy within the framework of utilitarianism.

Bentham’s central idea is that pleasure and pain can be quantified and measured mathematically. He believed that it is possible to compare different pleasures and pains. To facilitate this measurement, Bentham introduced his famous concept of the ‘Felicific Calculus,’ which, as Maxey notes, “his whole system of political thought was erected.” The interest of the community, according to Bentham, is the sum of the interests of its individual members. When calculating the greatest happiness, Bentham insisted that “each person is to count for one and none for more than one.” He identified several factors to be considered when measuring pleasure and pain:-

1. Intensity      2. Duration      3. Certainty or uncertainty
4. Nearness or remoteness      5. Purity      6. Extent      7. Fecundity.

The first four factors are straightforward. Purity refers to a pleasure that is unlikely to be followed by pain. Extent pertains to the number of people likely to be affected by this pleasure or pain. Fecundity relates to the productivity or likelihood that pleasure will lead to more pleasure. Bentham’s calculation method involves summing the values of all pleasures on one side and all pains on the other. The balance or surplus on either side will determine whether something is good or bad. Bentham provided a detailed explanation of such calculations and measurements. As Maxey points out, Bentham aimed to show that accuracy and objectivity were possible in assessing tendencies rooted in pleasure and pain. Bentham cataloged and analyzed the main pains and pleasures of humanity and offered guidance on how to evaluate them. Through his Felicific Calculus, Bentham attempted to make Ethics and Politics as precise as the sciences of Physics and Mathematics. It’s important to note that Bentham focused on the quantity of pleasure rather than its quality. As Wayper observes, “The doctrine of utility is a doctrine of quantitatively conceived hedonism; it recognizes no distinction between pleasures except a quantitative one.” According to Bentham’s theory, if it provides more pleasure,

it is preferable, though not necessarily better in quality. This aspect of Bentham's theory was later criticized by his disciple, J.S. Mill. As a hedonist, Bentham was more concerned with consequences than motives. If a law or government action results in the greatest happiness for the greatest number, the motive behind it is irrelevant. This is the essence of Bentham's Principle of Utility, which is based on hedonistic calculus.

### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 1**

**NOTE:** Use the space given below for your answers. Use separate sheet if space is not sufficient.

1. Explain Bentham's theory of utility.

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2. What factors Bentham considered to measure pleasure and pain?

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### **3.2.3 THEORY OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT**

Bentham's primary focus was on the concept of Utility, with his ideas about the state being secondary. He completely dismissed the Contract theory of political society's origin, considering it utterly absurd. Bentham argued that there is no reason why children should be bound by the words or agreements of their ancestors. As a practical realist, he rejected abstract theories like the theory of Natural Rights. According to Bentham, all rights are civil rights, existing within and created by the state. Therefore, the state could not have been formed at a specific time by a contract to protect so-called Natural Rights.

Bentham believed that the state is based on the selfish interests of individuals, who obey the state because it serves their self-interests, particularly their life and property. Political society exists because it is seen as promoting the happiness of its members. The state's origin lies in the interest, welfare, and happiness of individuals, and its utility to them. Bentham famously stated that "the probable mischiefs of obedience are less than the probable mischiefs of disobedience." He likened the state to a sand-heap of individuals held together by their mutual interests. The state's foundation is not a contract but human needs, and its justification lies in fulfilling those needs.

As Dunning noted, Bentham rejected all forms of contract theory, arguing that contracts, consent, or agreements do not provide a basis for political rights and duties. The reason people obey laws and governments is not that they or their ancestors promised to do so, but because it is in their best interest. The principle of utility is what binds individuals together. Utilitarians view the state as a group of individuals organized to promote and maintain the greatest happiness for the greatest number. The ultimate goal of the state is the happiness of the majority. According to Sabine, Bentham's view is that any "corporate body, such as state or society is evidently fictitious. Whatever is done in its name is done by someone, and its good, as Bentham said is the sum of the interests of the several members who compose it."

According to Bentham, the state is the sole "source of law." And its primary function is to create laws that promote the greatest happiness for the greatest number. Law, in Bentham's view, is the command of the

sovereign, and it is binding on subjects because it serves their interests. To put it in Wayper's words, "Because law is a command, it must be the command of a supreme authority. Indeed, it is only when such an authority is habitually obeyed that Bentham is prepared to admit the existence of civil society. His state, therefore, is a sovereign state. It is the hallmark of a sovereign state that nothing it does can be illegal." For Bentham, law is the only source of all individual rights, and there is no such thing as Natural Rights- there are only Civil Rights. Individuals cannot invoke Natural Law against the state. Bentham famously remarked, "Natural Rights are simple nonsense: natural and imprescriptible rights are rhetorical nonsense—nonsense upon stilts."

Political obligation, according to Bentham, is based partly on the habitual obedience of individuals to state laws and partly on their calculated self-interest. Although Bentham believed that rights cannot be upheld against the state, he did justify opposition to the state if such opposition would result in less pain than continued obedience. In Bentham's framework, liberty plays a secondary role. Liberty is not an end in itself; instead, it must serve the ultimate criterion of happiness. Wayper encapsulates this by stating, "Happiness is the only ultimate criterion, and liberty must submit to that criterion. The end of the state is the maximum happiness, not the maximum liberty." This view of the state aligns with the principles of democracy. Since direct democracy is impractical, Bentham advocated for representative democracy. Bentham's state, is one where all men have equal rights, but this concept of equality is not based on abstract notions of Natural Law. Rather, it stems from the concrete idea that each individual strives to pursue their interests to the best of their ability. All individuals have equal rights under the law, including the right to property, even though they may not be equal by nature. Bentham believed that protecting property is essential to achieving the greatest happiness. However, he also argued that the law should aim to distribute property more equally and reduce significant inequalities.

Despite Bentham's belief that the state should work to eliminate inequalities in property, he did not assign the state a positive role in the lives of individuals. He firmly believed that the state's role is negative, limited to removing obstacles to achieving the greatest happiness for the greatest number. The state should focus on increasing pleasure and reducing pain for individuals. Bentham agreed with classical economists that the state should adopt a policy of laissez-faire, meaning minimal interference in individuals' affairs. In areas such as economics, morals, personal behavior, and character, Bentham argued that the state should leave individuals as free as possible. He did not believe in a collective good or general will that supersedes individual interests. For Bentham, the state exists to serve individuals, not the other way around. In this individualistic approach, Bentham aligns more closely with Hobbes than with other political thinkers. He viewed the state primarily as a law-making entity, not as an ethical association concerned with the moral good of the people. The state's authority is limited to enacting laws that remove obstacles to individuals achieving maximum happiness.

## **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 2**

**NOTE:** Use the space given below for your answers. Use separate sheet if space is not sufficient.

1. For Bentham, the state is the sole "source of law." Elaborate.

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2. In Bentham's framework, liberty plays a secondary role. Comment.

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3. Bentham assign negative role to state. Explain.

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### 3.2.4 LAW AND ETHICS

The most distinctive feature of Bentham's political philosophy lies in his contributions to jurisprudence and reforms in criminal law and prisons. He believed that there should be no limits on the legislative power of the state, including customs and conventions. While the state could consider customs and established institutions, they should not constrain its legislative authority. As Sabine notes, "This distrust of custom and its complete subordination to legislation were among the principal characteristics of Bentham's jurisprudence."

Bentham's major achievement was his application of the principle of the greatest happiness for the greatest number to all areas of law—civil, criminal, procedural, and judicial organization. To achieve this, he proposed numerous reforms aimed at simplifying English and international law. Although, he did not focus heavily on the form of government (favouring representative democracy over monarchy or aristocracy), his "design for a utopia was a comprehensive code of law based on the principle of utility", as Maxey describes.

Bentham believed that laws should be crafted to effectively enhance individual happiness. As a jurist and legal reformer, he championed liberal reforms in British law and procedures, leaving a substantial impact on nineteenth-century English legislation. Sir Henry Maine noted, "I do not know a single law reform affected since Bentham's day which cannot be traced to his influence." Bentham proposed methods to administer justice more affordably and swiftly, emphasizing that "justice delayed is justice denied." He advocated for parliamentary acts to be written in clear, understandable language to prevent legal professionals from exploiting the public. He criticized the legal profession for its complex, rigid, obscure, capricious, and slow procedures, viewing them as a conspiracy to defraud the public.

Bentham proposed single-judge courts to avoid the shirking of responsibility seen in multi-judge courts and recommended that judges and court officials receive regular salaries rather than ad hoc fees. He also criticized the jury system and believed that punishment, while inherently an evil because it causes pain, could be justified only if it prevented a greater future evil or repaired an existing wrong. Bentham argued that punishment should be proportionate to the crime and never exceed the damage done, and he opposed the death penalty except in extremely rare cases. This position was later acknowledged by the British Parliament, which passed an Act banning the death penalty except under exceptional circumstances. Bentham also advocated for the abolition of other harsh penalties and proposed numerous reforms in prisoner treatment, investing significant resources into developing a model prison.

He argued that punishment should be corrective and preventive rather than retaliatory or vengeful, and he developed a code of scientific penology based on utilitarian principles. Bentham asserted that the state should tailor punishment to the offense to deter future crimes or prevent recidivism. His detailed proposals on various punishments influenced subsequent reforms in English legal procedures and prisons. As Sabine observed, "Bentham's work on jurisprudence provided the foundation upon which the administration of justice in England was thoroughly revised and modernized during the nineteenth century."

The other political ideas of Bentham can be easily stated. He was in favour of universal manhood suffrage. This principle is in accordance with his theory of the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Time was not yet ripe for giving franchise to women. He pleaded the cause of annual Elections of the Parliament. This idea was mooted in order to make the parliament more representative of the changing public opinion. Members of parliament should be regarded as Delegates and not as Representatives. Second Chamber of Parliament namely House of Lords was harmful, hence it should be abolished. Monarchy was the representative of the privileged classes and hence should be abolished. He preferred a republican form of government. He suggested voting by ballot system.

Bentham's political ideas can be summarized as follows. He supported universal manhood suffrage, aligning with his principle of the greatest happiness for the greatest number. At the time, he felt that extending the franchise to women was premature. Bentham advocated for annual parliamentary elections to better reflect shifting public opinion. He believed Members of Parliament should be seen as delegates rather than representatives and argued for the abolition of the House of Lords, which he deemed harmful. He also opposed the monarchy, favouring a republican form of government, and recommended using the ballot system for voting.

Bentham's political ideas, particularly his theory of utility, have faced various criticisms. His assumptions about human psychology were flawed; he over-simplified human nature, assuming people are purely pleasure-seeking in a way that does not align with reality. Humans are complex, driven by a mix of desires, reason, and intuition, not just by the pursuit of pleasure. Sabine observed that Bentham "had in fact no skill in psychological observation and no interest in it for its own sake. His effort to reduce psychology and ethics to the standard of Physics proved to be unsuccessful." Jones criticized Bentham's pleasure-pain principle, pointing out contradictions between his claims that people can only seek personal pleasure and that they should aim for the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Bentham's theory struggles to reconcile individual egoism with collective altruism.

Pleasure is subjective and cannot be quantitatively measured with precision. Bentham's felicific calculus, which aims to quantify pleasure, is criticized for being inadequate because pleasures cannot be added, subtracted, or divided like physical objects. Bentham equated pleasure with happiness, but happiness is a broader and more elusive concept that is typically pursued indirectly. His theory of the greatest happiness of the greatest number implies that the interests of a minority might be sacrificed for the majority, which conflicts with democratic principles that aim to represent all individuals. Bentham's idea that society is merely a collection of individuals bound by self-interest is also questioned. In reality, society is held together by inherent social instincts, not just calculated self-interest.

Bentham's view of the state as having only a negative role—merely removing obstacles—underestimates the state's potential for positive impact. Modern welfare states show that the state can play a constructive role in education and economic affairs, and merely removing obstacles could exacerbate inequalities. The state also has a role in improving moral standards and contributing positively to society.

Overall, Bentham is considered more of a legal reformer than a political philosopher. His system contains philosophical ambiguities and contradictions, often criticized for its over-simplification. Sabine noted that Bentham's philosophical approach lacked depth and originality, and his disregard for history and established institutions was a significant drawback. Historical institutions that have proven effective should be respected, as history offers valuable lessons for future generations.

In the words of Jones "It seems rather to be the case that there are many qualitatively different satisfactions,

which are only too often incapable of comparison simply in terms of more or less. This fact about human motivation is hidden from Bentham by his concentration upon the word ‘pleasure’.” He further, went on to say that so-called felicific calculus is simply not the method of calculating quantitatively the pleasures as Quantitative measurement of such subtle and subjective sensations like pleasures is not possible. Jones observes that Pleasure is not like an entity, a physical object which may be added to, divided, parcelled out like a plate of cakes at a tea party. Pleasures, unlike physical objects, cannot be added or subtracted or divided. Jones criticises Bentham as he identifies pleasure with happiness as happiness is a much broader term than pleasure. And it is a psychological fact that happiness is derived indirectly while doing something else and happiness is a too subtle and elusive thing to be acquired by directly aiming at it. He also criticises Bentham’s theory of the greatest happiness of the greatest number as it logically that interests of 49% people can be sacrificed for the sake of 51 % which is not a correct theory according to the democratic principle. The state should stand for the interests of practically all the individuals comprising it.

Bentham has been criticised for his concept society, wherein he considers Society as the sand heap of individuals is not correct. His view that the only adhesive that joins the individuals together is the calculated self-interest is also not considered to be correct. In fact, it is the inherent gregarious instinct, implanted in the heart of every man that keeps the society together. Society is not something artificial as regarded by Bentham. Society is a natural organization, which was born with the man.

Bentham was also criticised for assigning too negative a role to the state as the state can do and has been doing positive good to the individuals. And in Modern times, the welfare state has profitably looked after the educational and economic affairs of the individuals. If only the negative role of removing obstacles is performed by the state the richer strata of society will become still richer by exploiting more and more the poorer sections of the society. The state has to perform the positive role of raising the moral standards of its constituents. As pointed out in the beginning, Bentham was more of a legal reformer than a political philosopher. There are numerous philosophical ambiguities and contradictions in his system, some of which have been pointed out above.

Benthamism is simple, appealing and understandable at the cost of depth of vision. Over-simplification is the greatest defect of his philosophical system. As Sabine has put it “Bentham was bankrupt in philosophical reasoning ... his was an ad hoc philosophy.” He also says that “In point of fact no member of the group including Bentham himself, was in any way remarkable for philosophical originality or even for a very firm grasp of philosophical principles. His contempt of history and well-established institutions is another drawback ‘in his philosophy. Those institutions which have worked well in the past must be respected and allowed to continue. No person, howsoever brilliant and no nation howsoever resourceful can afford to start with a scratch. History has, after all, its own lessons to teach to the posterity”.

### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 3**

**NOTE:** Use the space given below for your answers. Use separate sheet if space is not sufficient.

1. Explain Bentham’s contributions to jurisprudence and reforms in criminal law and prisons.

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### 3.2.5 LET US SUM UP

Despite his philosophical ambiguities and the superficiality of his arguments, Bentham is recognized as one of the most significant political thinkers in history. His impact on the course of events in the nineteenth century was profound, shaping reforms in England and beyond in line with his ideas. As Sir Frederick Pollock aptly noted, “Every important reform of English law during the nineteenth century can be traced to the influence of Bentham.” He remains one of the most influential figures in political thought, with utilitarian principles dominating the later part of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century, and even influencing the latter half of the century.

Among Bentham’s major contributions are his advocacy for representative government and majority rule, which are foundational to modern democracy. He argued that the government must represent public opinion and work towards the greatest good for the greatest number, justifying its existence through the benefits it provides to the public. Bentham asserted that state, law, and government are created to meet fundamental human needs and must be justified by their ability to fulfill those needs. He promoted regular elections and majority rule, establishing the principle that the state exists to serve its citizens, reflecting in today’s democratic systems, albeit with some modifications.

Another significant contribution is Bentham’s development of the Analytical School of Jurisprudence, which has deeply influenced English and American legal systems. As Maxey states, “In the sphere of jurisprudence, his influence was immediate and lasting.” Bentham’s work aimed to simplify and clarify legal thinking, leading to the codification of civil, criminal, and international law. Although this school is often associated with Austin, Bentham is considered its originator. Austin systematized Bentham’s ideas, contributing to the efficiency of the British legal system and justice administration.

Bentham’s theory of punishment sparked a global movement towards penological reform, leading to significant improvements in prison administration. His principle of “each person to count for one, and no one for more than one” has influenced the concept of equality in modern voting systems, ensuring that every individual’s value is equal under the law and in representative democracy.

One of Bentham’s major achievements was applying the empirical method to legal and governmental issues, influencing figures like Marx. Despite its logical flaws, the principle of the greatest happiness for the greatest number became a key tenet of liberalism and progressive reforms, providing a standard for evaluating legislation. Bentham emphasized that the state exists to serve individuals, not the other way around, and that the state’s role is to protect and promote individual interests.

As Sabine has put it “The greatest happiness of the greatest number principle placed in the hands of the skilful legislator a practically universal instrument.” Real significance of law and institution must be judged in terms of this principle. Bentham, unlike the idealists and the collectivists emphasised the view that the state exists for a man and not man for the state. This is the correct view of the relations between the individual and the state. The interests of the individuals are primary, for whose protection the state ushers into existence. The interests of the community are the sum total of the interests of several men who compose it. The state and its interests are not something transcendental and abstract. The state is a means and not an end in itself. According to Wayper this is his greatest contribution. Maxey has rightly suggested, ‘Bentham divorced politics and ethics almost as completely as Machiavelli’. He recognized no moral right to command and no moral duty to obey, nor did he see any moral considerations in the question of revolution. “The state is based on human needs and the obligation on the part of the individuals to obey the state lasts only so long as the state continues to satisfy those needs.

In conclusion, while Bentham's system had its shortcomings and contradictions, his impact and achievements are evident in the significant influence he had on contemporary and future generations. His ideas came at a time when reforms were urgently needed, and his proposals were both enlightened and practical. Bentham's influence encouraged a belief in reform over revolution, benefiting society and demonstrating the enduring significance of his contributions despite their limitations.

### **3.2.6 EXERCISES**

1. Explain Bentham's Utilitarianism.
2. Comment on Bentham's views on state.
3. Explain Bentham's idea on law and ethics.

### **3.2.7 SUGGESTED READINGS**

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Nelson, Brian, *Western Political Thought*, Second Edition, Pearson: New Delhi, 2006.

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### **3.3 J. S. MILL: LIBERTY, WOMEN EQUALITY, REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT AND UTILITARIANISM**

**- Dr. Harjit Singh**

#### **STRUCTURE**

##### **3.3.0 Objectives**

##### **3.3.1 Introduction**

##### **3.3.2 Mill's Views on Women Equality**

##### **3.3.3 Mill's Utilitarianism**

##### **3.3.4 Mill's Ideas on Liberty**

##### **3.3.5 Representative Government and Utilitarianism**

##### **3.3.6 Let Us Sum Up**

##### **3.3.7 Exercises**

##### **3.3.8 Suggested Readings**

##### **3.3.0 OBJECTIVES**

**After going through this lesson, you will be able to:**

- know Mill's views on women equality;
- understand Mill's utilitarianism and his ideas on liberty;
- comprehend Mill's views on Representative Government and Utilitarianism.

##### **3.3.1 INTRODUCTION**

John Stuart Mill, a prominent British political thinker of the nineteenth century, was the final figure in the utilitarian tradition and a leading proponent of individualism. Born on May 20, 1805, in London, he was the eldest son of James Mill. His father had a rigorous plan for his education, aiming to raise him according to Benthamite principles. By the age of three, Mill was learning Greek, and by eight, he had begun studying Latin. His education included Greek and Latin classics such as those by Plato, Herodotus, Xenophon, Thucydides, Homer, and Polybius. He also studied algebra, geometry, and differential calculus, and delved into political economy with a focus on Adam Smith and David Ricardo. His father served as both his teacher and constant companion.

At twenty-three, Mill left the Debating Society he had founded, and by thirty-two, he had already worked as the editor of the London and Westminster Magazine. In 1823, he was appointed to a clerical position at the East India Company, eventually becoming head of his department in 1856. He held this position until 1858, when the East India Company was dissolved and its functions were taken over by the Crown.

Mill's association with Mrs. Harriet Taylor, a woman of notable character and intellect, was deeply influential. He married her in 1851, two years after the death of her husband, and credited her with significantly shaping his views. After the dissolution of the East India Company, Mill declined a government post and chose to

retire from administrative service. At fifty-nine, he entered Parliament and continued to contribute to public life until his retirement. Following his retirement, Mill spent much of his time in France with his stepdaughter, Helen Taylor. He died on May 8, 1873, in Avignon, where he is buried alongside his wife.

Mill's early literary accomplishments were notably marked by his contributions to the *Westminster Review*, which helped establish his reputation. A prolific writer, he authored numerous books, pamphlets, and articles. His 1843 work, *System of Logic*, garnered significant acclaim. In 1848, he published *Principles of Political Economy*, which achieved immediate and remarkable success. Following this, he released *Considerations on Representative Government* in 1860, *Utilitarianism* in 1861, and *The Subjection of Women* in 1869. His *Autobiography*, edited by his daughter Helen Taylor, was published posthumously in 1873, and *Three Essays on Religion*, another posthumous work, came out in 1874. Among his notable works is *On Liberty*, published in 1859. As the editor of the *London Review*, Mill contributed regularly to the journal from its inception in 1834 until 1840. Green praised him by echoing Gladstone's sentiment that Mill was a saintly figure. According to C.L. Wayper, "In the whole history of Political Philosophy, there are few more appealing characters than his."

### **3.3.2 MILL'S VIEW ON WOMEN EQUAITY**

Mill undeniably made significant contributions to advancing women's rights, both within and outside of Parliament. He believed that gender should not disqualify women from opportunities available to men. Women were often barred from public office and sidelined due to societal customs and prejudices. Mill advocated for swift and necessary action to achieve women's emancipation, leading to substantial advancements in women's rights, including the right to vote. Women globally have benefited from these changes, and they owe much of this progress to Mill's steadfast advocacy. Mrs. Taylor also played a role in this cause, and her contributions deserve recognition.

Mill's commitment to social reform was as strong as his interest in political theory. His sense of justice was deeply affected by the social and legal inequalities faced by women. During the mid-Victorian era, women in British society faced severe limitations. They were excluded from universities and higher education, barred from public life, and denied the right to vote or hold parliamentary office. Women were confined to domestic roles, and critics argued that their supposed inherent nature made them unfit for significant roles in public life. Mill countered this by asserting that women's perceived nature was a result of centuries of subjugation and missed opportunities, not an inherent deficiency. He argued that birth should not be a basis for denying women their rightful rights and that distinctions based on sex should not be used to justify inequality.

Mill was a strong advocate for women's emancipation and was the first to champion their cause in Parliament. He argued that providing women with equal opportunities would be advantageous not only for them but also for society as a whole. He believed that freedom brings happiness and that society would benefit from the intellectual contributions of women. His efforts and arguments played a significant role in advancing women's higher education, expanding opportunities for their talents, and extending voting rights and eligibility for public office to them.

### **3.3.3 MILL'S UTILITARIANISM:**

John Stuart Mill, being the son of James Mill, who was a close associate of Bentham, was immersed in Benthamism from a very young age. He was groomed by his father to carry forward the Utilitarian tradition. However, Mill did not confine his studies to Utilitarian literature alone; he also explored the works of Plato, Aristotle, Herodotus, Thucydides, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Goethe, and other prominent thinkers. For Mill, Bentham's principle of Utility was both a doctrine and a philosophy, and promoting it became his life's

mission. Following his father's death, Utilitarianism faced significant criticism for being base, degrading, materialistic, unrealistic, and fanatical. Mill began defending Benthamism through his writings, which were widely regarded as authoritative expositions of the utilitarian perspective. Yet, in his fervent defense, Mill revised and modified the core tenets of Utilitarianism so extensively that his final interpretation diverged significantly from the original doctrine. In the words of Wayper, "In his desire to safeguard Utilitarianism from the reproaches levelled against it, Mill goes far towards over throwing the whole Utilitarian position." J.S. Mill prove to be, says Dunning, the "most penetrating revisionist" of Benthamism so much so that with his passing away in 1873 there sounded the death knell of Benthamism and the latter passed away by absorption into later philosophical growths"

Mill argues that Bentham's philosophy was grounded in the notion that self-interest was the sole motivating force for individuals. According to Bentham, people were seen as rational calculators in their pursuit of selfish pleasure and happiness, without any moral duties or obligations to others. This perspective was a core aspect of Bentham's hedonism. However, as Barker notes, "In his 'Essay on Utilitarianism,' Mill abandoned the principle of self-interest in favor of the principle of self-sacrifice." Mill posited that "to serve the happiness of others through the absolute sacrifice of one's own" was, in the present very imperfect state of the world's arrangements, "the highest virtue that can be found in men." This marked a significant departure from Bentham's assertion that individuals can only pursue their own pleasure. While Mill's modification was more aligned with human experience and appeared more appealing, it also contradicted the fundamental principles of Utilitarianism.

Though Mill retained his utilitarian beliefs and radical ideas, he made considerable changes to the original theory. For example, he argued that happiness in life is achieved not by directly pursuing it but by aiming at other objectives. Happiness is thus seen as a by-product of other pursuits. Mill's approach is more practical and psychologically accurate. To address Carlyle's critique that Utilitarianism was degrading, Mill introduced the idea that some pleasures are qualitatively superior to others. Bentham had focused solely on the quantity of pleasure, neglecting its quality. Mill defended Utilitarianism by asserting that pleasures differ in both quality and quantity, with higher-quality pleasures being more desirable and valuable. He argued that it would be absurd to judge pleasures solely by quantity when all other estimations consider both quality and quantity. Mill believed that those who have experienced both higher and lower pleasures would agree that higher pleasures are preferable. For instance, he claimed that poetry is a superior source of pleasure compared to games like pushpin. As Mill stated, "It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be a Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool or the pig is of a different opinion, it is because they know only their side of the question. The other party to the comparison knows both sides."

Through these revisions, Mill attempted to preserve the essence of Benthamism while acknowledging the need for essential changes. Although Mill's adjustments better reflect human experience, they fundamentally diverge from Bentham's original tenets. A true hedonist would reject any distinction between pleasures other than a quantitative one, as recognizing the quality of pleasure introduces a criterion based on the source of pleasure rather than the pleasure itself. Mill's reinterpretation thus significantly differs from Bentham's foundational position.

Mill argued that pleasures cannot be objectively measured, as they are inherently subjective sensations felt only by the person experiencing them. He criticized the concept of 'felicific calculus' as absurd, questioning who, other than the individual experiencing pain or pleasure, could accurately gauge the intensity of these sensations. No external authority can measure such experiences, making Mill's perspective more aligned with human experience but also a significant departure from Utilitarianism.

For Mill, the ultimate goal of life is the dignity of man, rather than the mere pursuit of pleasure or avoidance of pain. He deemed the pursuit of pleasure or avoidance of pain as too trivial a goal for humanity. In his “Essay on Liberty,” Mill emphasizes higher spiritual values, such as ‘Self-Realisation,’ distinguishing humans from animals by their sense of dignity. He argues that humans should strive to realize their true selves rather than pursuing base or sensuous pleasures. Thus, the measure of an action should be its contribution to enhancing human dignity, rather than the pleasure it provides.

Mill viewed the state as a moral institution intended to promote virtue among individuals, in contrast to Bentham’s view that the state exists solely to maximize pleasure and minimize pain. Bentham believed that individuals owed allegiance to the state on purely self-interested grounds, without moral obligation. In contrast, Mill believed that individuals have public duties and responsibilities that extend beyond mere utility. He introduced the concept of a moral sense or conscience that binds individuals to the state, driven by a natural regard for the well-being of others.

Mill’s revisions to Benthamism highlight his profound interest in Liberty. Unlike Bentham, for whom Liberty was subordinate to the principle of utility, Mill viewed Liberty as fundamental—a “proper condition of a responsible human being.” In Mill’s view, Liberty is both an individual and a social good, making it an end in itself rather than a mere utility. This stance marks a complete departure from the Utilitarian framework.

Bentham dismissed the importance of history, traditions, conventions, local conditions, habits, and the historical background of a particular people. He believed that the principle of Utility had universal applicability and claimed he could legislate for any distant country using this principle. In contrast, Mill recognized the significance of a nation’s historical context. He believed that a sense of allegiance and cohesion within a state is deeply rooted in centuries of historical experience. Mill argued that no country can fully escape its past, and he criticized Bentham’s disregard for historical and institutional contexts as a shortcoming of his philosophy.

As Wayper noted, “Bentham was a Universalist and Mill an historical relativist.” Bentham sought to impose democracy universally, regardless of a country’s readiness or suitability, because he saw democracy as a direct application of the principle of Utility. Mill, while also advocating for democratic government, argued that democracy should only be implemented if the people are prepared for it. Wayper encapsulates this difference: “Whereas Bentham justifies democracy based on the nature of man, Mill justifies it based on the condition of man.” Mill’s approach, while more nuanced and contextually aware, diverges from Utilitarianism.

Mill ultimately viewed the state as a product of collective will rather than mere interest. According to Wayper, “Mill recognizes, as Bentham did not, that mechanistic theories of the state are fundamentally inadequate if they leave out the human will or they neglect the personality of individuals.” Mill believed that the foundation of the state lies in shared human empathy rather than calculated self-interest. He did not subscribe to an idealistic view of the state’s origin. T.H. Green drew inspiration from Mill’s perspective for his theory that the state is based on will rather than force.

Mill assigned some positive role to the state, whereas Bentham assigned it a negative role. Bentham limited the state’s function to removing obstacles that hindered individuals from achieving the greatest happiness. He believed the state should not interfere in personal, educational, or economic matters. In contrast, Mill advocated for the state to actively support individuals in realizing their higher selves. He wanted the state to legislate in areas such as land, industry, and education, which were dominated by a minority, to improve the lives of the masses. Mill’s approach reflects a more socialistic aspect. He supported compulsory education funded by the state, general oversight of educational curricula, and legislation on inheritance laws, factory regulations, and working hours. Mill’s endorsement of a proactive state suggests a more utilitarian stance

compared to Bentham.

Mill modified Bentham's principle of 'one person, one vote' by supporting plural voting to give more weight to the educated and intelligent classes. In attempting to defend Utilitarianism, Mill inadvertently undermined it. His modifications led to a transitional philosophy that paved the way for a shift towards Idealist thought. Maxey also says, "In this interpretation of Utilitarianism very little of Bentham remains." He has been claiming all the time that he is advocating Benthamism, but in fact his defence amounted to the complete abandonment of the same. Mill was sincere in his efforts of making Bentham palatable to its critics, but he lacked the grasp and originality "to bring about a really coherent synthesis or philosophies so widely divergent."

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 1

**NOTE:** Use the space given below for your answers. Use separate sheet if space is not sufficient.

1. Mill was a strong advocate for women's emancipation. Comment.

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2. Explain Bentham's influence on J.S. Mill.

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3. For Mill, the ultimate goal of life is the dignity of man, rather than the mere pursuit of pleasure or avoidance of pain. Comment.

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4. Mill assigned positive role to state. Illustrate.

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5. For Mill, "It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be a Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied". Comment

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### 3.3.4 MILLS IDEAS ON LIBERTY

Mill's *Essay on Liberty* is a profound exploration of freedom, particularly focusing on freedom of thought and expression. He argues that only through free discussion can truly valuable ideas emerge. Even the majority cannot force a dissenting individual to adopt their viewpoint, as the majority's perspective may be

incorrect. Suppression of dissent not only prevents the discovery of truth but also hampers the personal development of the individual. For Mill, liberty is not merely an abstract or natural right but a practical right evaluated by its utility. The key criterion for assessing liberty is its contribution to the development of individuality. There must be ample space for various types of character to flourish. Every action should contribute to personal growth, and the diversity of opinions reflects different individualities. Preserving individuality, even in the face of adversity, enhances both personal and societal well-being, as these two aspects support each other.

Liberty for Mill is the life-breath of society. At two different stages, Mill gives two different definitions of Liberty:

Mill defines liberty as “being left to oneself,” asserting that individuals are sovereign over their own actions and thoughts. He argues that “all restraint is an evil” and maintains that interference with an individual’s liberty is only justified to prevent harm to others. According to Mill, if an individual’s actions do not harm others, neither society nor the state has the right to interfere.

Mill distinguishes between two types of actions:

1. **Self-Regarding Actions:** Individuals should have complete freedom in their self-regarding actions, which are solely their own concern. Mill examines the extent to which society and the state can legitimately control these actions. For instance, he cites drunkenness as a self-regarding action unless it leads to disorder, cruelty, or neglect of family responsibilities. In such cases, where self-regarding actions do not affect others, society and the state should refrain from interference, such as enforcing prohibition or restricting the sale of alcohol. However, if self-regarding actions result in disorder or harm to others, they become other-regarding, and the state may intervene.
2. **Other-Regarding Actions:** These actions impact the interests of other members of society. Here, society and the state can legitimately intervene, but only to prevent “positive, demonstrable harm to others.” For example, compulsory education is justified as it prevents harm to society caused by lack of education. If parents fail to educate their children, the state may mandate education or provide it directly. Additionally, Mill argues that conscription is a legitimate means for individuals to contribute to society, as it ensures everyone bears their share of societal responsibilities. Wayper notes that conscription should not be seen as an undue infringement on liberty, but rather as a necessary measure.

Mill thus moves beyond the Laissez-Faire Theory and supports limited state intervention in business and industry when it is warranted.

Mill’s second definition of liberty is “Liberty consists in doing what one desires.” This definition differs significantly from the first. For example, if the state or society prevents someone from crossing a known unsafe bridge, it is justified. Although the person desires to cross the bridge, they do not desire to fall into the river. Thus, it is better to thwart their desire to cross the bridge than to let them fall into the river, which is a greater harm. This definition permits more active state involvement than the earlier one. As Wayper notes, “This definition of liberty throws the door open to any amount of interference. Mill has gone far towards admitting the extremist idealist contention that one may be forced to be free.”

Mill’s concept of liberty is not limited to a narrower interpretation. Instead, it encompasses the individual’s right to fully develop, enrich, and expand their personality. It addresses the value and nature of human freedom, including the conflicts between citizens and the state, as well as between individuals and society. For Mill, freedom of thought and expression, discussion and investigation, moral judgment, and the liberty to express and publish opinions on any subject (be it speculative, religious, scientific, theological, or literary)

are essential. These freedoms benefit both individuals and society.

Mill also acknowledges the dangers to liberty. According to him, threats to liberty arise from two sources:

- (a) The state, through laws that may restrict freedom.
- (b) The unorganized but formidable power of public opinion or societal norms.

During Mill's time, the influence of unorganized societal norms was often more oppressive than the power of the state. The demands of the state on the individual were fewer. On the other hand in many matters, "affecting his private and intellectual life, his love affairs, his views on religion, sex and science the individual found himself bound by a constricting orthodoxy... He would have to guard his words and actions with a care which he might find intolerable".

Mill was acutely aware of this public tyranny. He frequently visited Mrs. Taylor, a highly refined and intelligent woman who was five years his senior, and drew inspiration and guidance from her for his political writings. Their relationship began when Mill was 25 and continued throughout his life. Mill referred to this relationship as "the most valuable friendship of my life." After her husband's death, Mill married Mrs. Taylor, but their long association and subsequent marriage were met with severe public criticism and scandal. Although Mill saw nothing wrong with his relationship with Mrs. Taylor, society deemed his actions objectionable.

This personal experience heightened Mill's criticism of societal interference, which he found more intrusive than state power. He observed, "in our time, from the highest class to the lowest, everyone lives as under the eye of a hostile and dreaded censorship. We fear our neighbors more and the policemen less." This societal tyranny, which Mill saw as a serious threat to individual freedom, often constrained personal actions and weakened individual impulses and desires.

Mill vocally opposed these societal restraints, particularly outdated customs and practices that lacked rational justification. While he valued customs, he critiqued those that did not appeal to reason. As a political thinker, Mill believed that all irrational assumptions, rules, and practices should be evaluated by the reflective judgment of thoughtful individuals. However, he recognized that such individuals were rare. Hence, he supported the idea of plural voting for educated and intelligent classes as a way to ensure that societal opinions would be filtered through wisdom. By allowing wise individuals to scrutinize age-old customs and usages, Mill hoped to mitigate the menace of public opinion to individual liberty.

In his *Essay on Liberty*, Mill explores the concept of liberty under three main categories:

1. **The Inward Domain of Consciousness:** This includes freedom of thought and feeling, as well as the liberty to express public opinions.
2. **Liberty of Tastes and Pursuits:** This pertains to the freedom to design one's life according to personal preferences and desires.
3. **Liberty of Combination Among Individuals:** This involves the freedom to associate for any purpose, provided it does not harm others.

Mill focuses primarily on the first type of liberty—freedom of thought and expression—while briefly addressing the other two. He argues that freedom of judgment is a fundamental aspect of a morally mature individual, and a liberal society should recognize and uphold this right. Such freedom is crucial not only for personal development and self-realization but also for the overall health and vigor of society and the state. Laws and societal norms should be designed to ensure this liberty, which is vital for both individual moral character and a high level of civilization.

Mill contends that the majority is not infallible and has no right to impose its views on the minority. He was

among the first political thinkers to recognize the tyranny of the majority. As Sabine notes, “The threat to liberty which Mill chiefly feared was not government, but a majority that is intolerant of the unconventional, that looks with suspicion on divergent minorities, and is willing to use the weight of numbers to repress and regiment them..... What Mill recognised and what the older liberalism had never seen, was that behind a liberal government there must be a liberal society.”

Mill also emphasizes the third factor in realizing individual liberty: the individual’s right to not be coerced by the majority. According to Mill, “All mankind minus one is destitute of the right to coerce the single dissident.” He argues that humanity loses out if even one person is prevented from expressing their opinion. Mill’s approach to liberty of thought and expression is rational and compelling. He asserts that truth emerges through free discussion and debate, and he argues against the persecution of those with dissenting opinions. Historical examples like Socrates and Christ, who faced persecution for their views, later being vindicated by posterity, illustrate the harm of such prosecutions.

For Mill, liberty is not an abstract or natural right but a concrete right judged by its contribution to the development of individual personality. Individuality, rather than opposing society, complements it. Mill acknowledges a tension between individual freedom and social responsibility. He firmly believes that the individual’s freedom should prevail over social good when they conflict. Mill’s preference for individual freedom over social peace marks him as one of the greatest individualists in history.

After making his advocacy for freedom of thought and discussion, Mill examines the extent to which society and the state may legitimately control individual actions. He argues that in the realm of self-regarding actions—those affecting only the individual—neither society nor the state should interfere. This stance applies to intellectually mature individuals. However, for children, individuals with mental health issues, and people in independent colonies, society and the state may intervene even in self-regarding matters.

In contrast, the state can justifiably interfere in other-regarding actions—those impacting others. Examples of such actions include infringing on others’ rights, causing unjust harm or damage, deceit, unfair advantage, or neglecting to defend others against injury. These actions warrant moral condemnation by society and potential punishment by the state. Actions initially regarded as self-regarding may, if they start to affect others, be classified as other-regarding, thus justifying societal and state intervention. For instance, a person who becomes unable to fulfill debts or support their family due to irresponsibility can be justly punished for breaching duties to their family and creditors, not merely for their extravagance.

A case like attempting suicide blurs the lines between self-regarding and other-regarding actions. Mill justifies societal or state intervention in such instances by referencing his second definition of liberty— “liberty consists in doing what one desires.” The individual may not truly understand their desire to live, and society or the state may have a clearer view of their best interests, thereby justifying intervention.

Gambling, which can harm others, also warrants state regulation. In matters of thought and expression, however, individuals have an absolute right to freedom, with no interference from society or the state. Regarding freedom of action, interference is only justified if the action harms others. Personal well-being, whether physical or moral, is not sufficient cause for interference. As long as an individual’s actions do not create a nuisance for others, their freedom of action and association should remain unrestricted by society or the state.

However, the critics of Mill’s theory argue that he failed to provide a clear distinction between self-regarding and other-regarding actions. Disputes often arise over categorizing actions, and Mill’s theory struggles to reconcile individual freedom with societal order and peace effectively. Despite his significant contributions to political thought, Mill remained deeply attached to Benthamism, which limited his ability to break away

from its constraints. He began with an atomistic view of the individual, prioritizing individual freedom over social good. His attempts to defend liberty with new arguments are seen as inadequate, with Sabine noting that Mill's efforts resembled "putting new wine into old bottles." According to Sabine, "The fundamental difficulty with Mill's argument was that he never really analysed the relationship between freedom and responsibility. At times he retained the traditional view derived from Bentham that any compulsion or even any social influence is an abridgement of liberty. What Mill's theory of liberty required was a thorough going consideration of the defence of personal liberty on social and legal rights and obligations."

Although Mill occasionally spoke of social legislation and socialism, he did not fully address the balance between social good and individual liberty.

Barker has criticized Mill as the "Prophet of an empty liberty and an abstract individual." According to Barker, Mill's concept of liberty is more negative, emphasizing freedom from constraints rather than the positive freedom of realizing one's true self within a social context. Liberty, as envisioned by Mill, does not fully capture the idea that true freedom emerges from participating in and accepting social controls. Consequently, Mill's vision of liberty is seen as abstract and disconnected from the practical reality of social life. Mill's view of individuals as isolated from society fails to recognize that individuals and society are mutually dependent; individuals cannot exist without society, and vice versa. Thus, Mill's ideal of the "abstract individual" is criticized as unrealistic and detached from the interconnected nature of individuals and society.

## **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 2**

**NOTE:** Use the space given below for your answers. Use separate sheet if space is not sufficient.

1. Explain Mill's concept of liberty?

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2. Mill supported limited state intervention. Explain.

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3. According to Mill, "All mankind minus one is destitute of the right to coerce the single dissident." Elaborate.

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### **3.3.5 REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT AND UTILITARIANISM**

In his work *Representative Government*, Mill focuses on institutional reforms to enhance the representativeness and accountability of government. He advocates for positive state intervention in areas such as education, factory laws, and economic affairs. Mill emphasizes that a state must have a constitution to effectively manage its duties and powers. He defines a constitution as a mechanism for elevating the general level of intelligence and integrity within the community by leveraging the intellect and virtue of its most enlightened members. He argues that a constitution should directly impact the government and grant it more authority

than it would have under any other organizational framework.

Mill recognizes that ultimate power will always be concentrated in a single entity, whether through constitutional means or unwritten customs. In *Representative Government*, he examines two schools of thought on government reforms. The first, represented by Contractualists, views government as merely a mechanical invention. The second, held by idealists, sees governments as natural phenomena that grow organically from the lives and nature of the people, rather than being constructed or chosen.

Mill's perspective is a blend of these views. He acknowledges that while the state is a natural development, it does not grow passively like a tree; instead, it requires active engagement and care from individuals. The government, according to Mill, evolves through the people's adherence to its laws and their active participation in its functions. He emphasizes that government, shaped by local conditions, must be actively supported by ordinary citizens, not just through passive acceptance but through active involvement.

Mill identifies three essential conditions for effective government functioning:

1. The people must be willing to accept it.
2. They must be willing and able to do what is necessary to keep it standing.
3. They must be able and willing to do what it requires of them to enable it to fulfil its purposes.

Any reasonable individual would agree that these three conditions are crucial for the effective operation of any government. If any of these conditions are not met, even the most promising form of government is likely to fail. Without the willing and active cooperation of the populace, no government, however well-designed, can function effectively. Mill then explores and evaluates the ideal form of government. He aimed to introduce the best institutions into any country, concluding that the optimal form of government is a representative government. According to Mill, "despotic government, no matter how benevolent, can never be considered good," as it hampers the intellectual, moral, and political development of its subjects. There is no such thing as a beneficial despotism.

An ideal representative government must serve the collective interests of society and be supported by an active and critical citizenry. It should represent the entire community, not just a minority, and include all social classes to ensure that no class's interests are neglected. Mill viewed the British Parliament as a model of such a representative body. He advocated for the inclusion of working-class individuals and women to ensure the Parliament fully represented the populace.

According to Mill, "the first element of good government was the virtue and intelligence of the human beings composing the community." Consequently, it is the state's primary duty to nurture these qualities within its members. The sovereign power of the state should reside in the government body that represents the people. In England, Mill noted that the practical supremacy of the state lies with Parliament. He argued that the Parliament should focus on overseeing and controlling government affairs rather than managing them directly. The actual administration should be handled by the cabinet and civil servants. Mill supported representative government but acknowledged that it could not be applied uniformly to all populations. It should be implemented in societies that are sufficiently advanced and experienced in self-governance.

Wayper notes that 'Mill has been very distrustful of democracy, yet he is both a democrat and one of the greatest English writers on democracy.' Mill has ardently argued that democracy is not suitable for all peoples, but he firmly believes that where it is feasible, it is the best form of government. Mill is regarded as a leading advocate of democracy for the following reasons:

1. Individuals are best equipped to defend their own rights and interests, and state intervention

should be kept to a minimum.

2. The sovereign body of the state should, as far as possible, be genuinely representative of all societal classes.
3. Freedom is a means to prosperity, and without prosperity, there can be no happiness. Happiness is the ultimate goal of every individual's life.
4. The state exists for the benefit of the individual, not the other way around.

While Mill acknowledged the advantages of democracy, he also expressed caution, arguing that democracy can be risky if local conditions are not mature and if the populace is not yet prepared for a democratic way of life.

According to Mill, the potential drawbacks of democracy include:

- **Tyranny of the Majority:** The greatest risk in a democracy arises from the unjust dominance of the numerical majority. A majority government can become tyrannical, prioritizing only its own interests and using its concentrated power to coerce minorities into submission.
- **Collective Mediocrity:** Mill is concerned about the general ignorance and lack of capability among the majority of the population. He fears that a government representing a largely uninformed and unqualified populace will inevitably be mediocre. Although he acknowledges the potential for gradual education of the masses regarding their rights and responsibilities, this remains a significant concern.
- **Diffusion of Power:** The distribution of power among the parliament, cabinet, ministers, and civil servants can impede effective decision-making and implementation. Democratic governments often struggle with inefficiency due to this diffusion of authority.
- **True vs. False Democracy:** Mill distinguishes between True and False democracy. He considers the democracy of mere numbers—a principle where everyone counts equally without regard for individual merit—as False democracy. This approach disregards the natural differences in intelligence, virtue, and capability among individuals, suggesting that those with greater intelligence should be given more weight in decision-making.
- **Conflict of Interests:** The interests of the ruling majority may sometimes conflict with the broader interests of society. Mill argues that when such a clash occurs, the class interests of the ruling faction often take precedence over the common good. Despite the appearance of majority rule, real power may be concentrated in the hands of a few, advancing their own vested interests at the expense of the wider community.

Mill not only identified several dangers of democracy but also proposed methods to make it more effective and secure. His suggestions for safeguarding democracy include:

1. **Civic Education:** Provide individuals with education in civic responsibility and the art of citizenship. Proper education can prepare citizens to be aware of their rights and duties.
2. **Vigilance:** “Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.” An informed and watchful public is essential to prevent any government from undermining their rights or becoming despotic. Enlightened public opinion serves as a crucial defense against democratic dangers.
3. **Proportional Representation:** To counteract the rule of the uninformed, Mill advocated for giving more weight to educated and intelligent individuals in voting. He supported the

Hare System of Proportional Representation, which ensures that minorities are represented according to their numbers and that all societal elements have influence in democracy.

4. **Open Ballots:** Implement voting by open or public ballot to enhance transparency.
5. **Second Chamber:** Establish a Second Chamber to protect the interests of underrepresented groups and to check the majority party's potential excesses in the lower chamber.
6. **Unpaid MPs:** Members of Parliament should not receive a salary to ensure they are true representatives rather than merely delegates.
7. **Women's Suffrage:** Mill advocated for extending the right to vote to women. He argued for women's suffrage based on detailed physiological and psychological reasons in his "Essay on the Subjection of Women."
8. **Universal Suffrage Adjustments:** To mitigate the risks of universal suffrage:
  - o Restrict voting rights to those who are literate and numerate.
  - o Limit the franchise to those who pay a minimum amount of taxes, enhancing responsibility.
  - o Implement plural voting where more educated or capable individuals receive additional votes. The criteria should be based on occupation rather than property or education alone, with a maximum of three additional votes.
9. **Indirect Elections:** Use indirect elections to reduce the potential negatives of direct democracy. For example, the U.S. Senate was elected by state legislatures in Mill's time, and similar indirect election systems are used in India for the Rajya Sabha and the President.
10. **State-Funded Elections:** The state should cover election expenses to prevent wealthy individuals from using their financial power to win elections.
11. **Competitive Exams for Public Servants:** Public servants should be selected through competitive exams rather than popular elections to ensure merit and competence.

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 3

**NOTE:** Use the space given below for your answers. Use separate sheet if space is not sufficient.

1. What institutional reforms did Mill advocated to enhance the representativeness and accountability of government?

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2. What are the potential drawbacks of democracy according to Mill?

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3. What methods did Mill proposed for safeguarding democracy?

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### 3.3.6 LET US SUM UP

Examining Mill's ideas reveals that he was a democrat with certain reservations. He accepted democracy with caution, acknowledging its potential flaws. His recommended safeguards for democracy highlight his deep understanding of statecraft. Despite his conservatism, which led him to support established institutions like the British Cabinet system, the U.S. Senate, the U.S. Supreme Court, and Swiss and American federalism, he also introduced progressive reforms such as women's suffrage, competitive exams for civil servants, and proportional representation.

Some of Mill's safeguards against extreme democracy, like plural voting and restrictions on suffrage, have been abandoned by various nations. However, the Reforms Act of 1867 stands as a significant tribute to his influence. Mill's courage in advocating for even unpopular theories he believed to be correct is noteworthy. As Maxey observes "Contemporary liberals did not share Mill's apprehensions as to dangers of democracy. But the generations following both world wars have found in Mill much to approve. A half-century of experience with demagoguism, bossism and pressure politics has brought democratic thought face to face with reality".

### 3.3.7 EXERCISES

1. Comment on Mill's views on women equality.
2. What changes does Mill introduced to the original theory of utilitarianism?
3. Explain Mill's ideas on liberty.
4. Illustrate Mill's views on Representative Government

### 3.3.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

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### **3.4 T. H. GREEN: POSITIVE LIBERTY, POLITICAL OBLIGATION AND IDEALISM**

**- Dr. Harjit Singh**

#### **STRUCTURE**

##### **3.3.0 Objectives**

##### **3.3.1 Introduction**

##### **3.3.2 Green's Idealism**

##### **3.3.3 Positive Liberalism**

##### **3.3.4 Political Obligation**

##### **3.3.5 Let Us Sum Up**

##### **3.3.6 Exercises**

##### **3.3.7 Suggested Readings**

##### **3.4.0 OBJECTIVES**

**After going through this lesson, you will be able to:**

- know Green's Idealism;
- understand Green's ideas on positive liberalism;
- comprehend Green's views on political obligation.

##### **3.4.1 INTRODUCTION**

Thomas Hill Green was a prominent English historian, philosopher, theorist, and reformer born in 1836 in Yorkshire to a clergyman. Educated at Rugby and Balliol College, Oxford, Green became Professor of Moral Philosophy at Oxford in 1878. His interests extended beyond philosophy to include active involvement in practical politics. He was elected to the Oxford Town Council and served on the governing body of schools in Birmingham. Green believed that the foundation of sound governance lay in effective local government.

Many of Green's lectures were published posthumously following his death in 1882. Among his notable works are "Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation" (1879), "Prolegomena to Ethics," "Lectures on Liberal Legislation," "Freedom of Contract," and "Lectures on the English Revolution." His philosophical influences included Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, Kant, and Hegel. Green adopted Aristotle's view that the primary role of the state is to facilitate the common good, and he was inspired by Rousseau's concept of moral freedom.

In the metaphysical realm, Green aligned more closely with Hegel, while his ethical and political views were heavily influenced by Kant, reflecting a Kantian outlook. Green argued that the state emerges from human consciousness and that liberty—entailing rights—necessitates the state. He saw the state as an ethical institution vital for human moral development, with its primary function being the enforcement of rights. Green

emphasized that the state is grounded in “will, not force,” and asserted in his “Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation” that people obey the state because it enhances their moral lives. He posited that the government’s role is to create conditions that enable morality, which he defined as the disinterested performance of self-imposed duties. Green felt that, “the function of the government is to maintain conditions of life in which morality shall be possible, and morality consists in the disinterested performance of self-imposed duties.” Green viewed the state as neither absolute nor omnipotent, constrained both internally and externally, and championed the principle of the “Universal Brotherhood of Man,” which placed limits on state authority based on individual rights.

Green was an individualist who viewed the State not as an end in itself but as a means to achieve the ultimate goal of the full moral development of its citizens. He believed that the State’s role was to facilitate the free development of moral personality but should avoid actions that hinder this process. Green described the General Will as “the common consciousness of a common good.” His concept of freedom diverged from Hegel’s. Critics have raised several issues with Green’s theories, including his unsatisfactory notion of sovereignty based on the General Will. Additionally, he did not adequately address subconscious factors influencing human behavior or the emotional aspects of punishment. His economic views on property have also been criticized as potentially hazardous. Barker says that “Green was both a soaring idealist and a sober realist.” Thus, the ideas of Green have been criticized by many modern writers.

### **3.4.2 GREEN’S IDEALISM**

T. H. Green’s idealism distinguishes him from classical liberals concerning the foundation of the state. While thinkers like Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau believed that government is based on the consent of the governed, with states arising from a social contract in which individuals voluntarily join civil society, Green completely rejects this contractual theory. He argues that the historical and logical basis of states often lies in conquest rather than voluntary agreement. For Green, government is founded on will, not force.

This perspective is clarified when Green examines Austin’s definition of sovereignty. Austin defined sovereignty as: “If a determined human superior not in the habit of obedience to a like superior, receives habitual obedience from the bulk of a given society, that determinate superior is sovereign in that society and the society (including the superior) is a society political and independent.” Green challenges the notion that this habitual obedience is solely the result of coercive power. He argues that true obedience is grounded in the common will and reason of individuals, shaped by their social relations and shared goals. This ‘universal rational will’ influences individual inclinations and requires only occasional support from coercive force.

Green concurred with Austin that legal sovereignty must reside in a governing body composed of many individuals. However, Green posited that behind this legal sovereign is the general will, which determines the habitual obedience of the people. People tend to follow institutions that, perhaps unconsciously, embody the general will. Therefore, Green argued that ‘will, not force, is the basis of all true and lasting states.’ He offered a less metaphysical interpretation of the general will compared to Kant and Rousseau, viewing it as the common consciousness directed towards the common good rather than as a force.

Green’s view diverges from Rousseau’s in that he does not see the general will as the will of the state, which Rousseau believed emerged with the social contract. Instead, Green argues that the general will is the will for the state, not the will of the state itself. It is not the actual sovereign but the deeper, real sovereign behind it. He maintains that even before the formation of the state, family and tribal groups exhibited a sense of common good and thus possessed a form of general will. Although the general will preexists the state, it becomes the foundation of the state in its most logical and proper form.

Green asserts that allegiance to the state and its laws arises not from a contract but from the state's commitment to social good. If the laws deviate from the general will or fail to serve the community's welfare, they lose their legitimacy and the people's allegiance. Over time, people obey and support the state because they recognize, perhaps unconsciously, that it and its laws serve the common good. While force might compel temporary obedience, institutions founded solely on coercion and fear eventually collapse. Thus, even an absolute monarch can endure if it rests upon the nation's consent, garners loyalty, and inspires voluntary adherence to the law by the majority.

However, this does not imply that force is entirely absent from any state. Force is necessary to manage antisocial elements, rebels, and criminals. Yet, for the smooth and peaceful functioning of government, it must align with public opinion. In other words, it must be rooted in the collective will. While force is a criterion for maintaining order, it does not constitute the essence of the state. Green points out, "William the conqueror was able to exercise the royal power in England by force, but he and his successors were successful only, because their laws had the support of the public". Even in contemporary governments, laws are sometimes enforced through fear, but this approach is not sustainable and can erode governmental authority over time. A government succeeds when it reflects the wishes and desires of its people. Thus, Green's assertion that the foundation of the state is based on will, not force, remains valid today.

However, Green was criticized for his assertion that "Will not Force" was the foundation of the State. John Bowle argued, "by asserting that 'Will not Force' was the basis of State, Green was giving his political ideas a dynamic neo-Hegelian aspect. Will, in this context, was hardly a happy term for so instinctive a process, but Rousseau's idiom is generally misleading. To modern minds, who take for granted the Importance of the fabric of society, and the massive life which institutions spontaneously generate, this assertion of the, social frame work as against the executive will not seem startling. At the time it seemed, an innovation. The new fields which Green and his followers re-discovered through the study of Greek and German political thought were soon charted and examined by English sociologists. A part from the cardinal work of Durkheim in France, Graham Wallas and L.T. Hobhouse were later to enrich this neo-Hegelian awareness of the life of society. With the development of a more precarious situation in the twentieth century, the unconscious drives of society were to be regarded with greater distrust. But by the turn of the century, the objectives of both liberal and scientific humanists were destined to coincide. Both realized the importance of institutions for the development of personality, both desired to use them for the furtherance of good life, both desired a democratic society and the extension of humane values. They believed in the integrity, the importance and the goodness of free personality.

### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 1**

**NOTE:** Use the space given below for your answers. Use separate sheet if space is not sufficient.

1. For Green, government is founded on will, not force. Elucidate.

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2. Green's view on general will diverge from that of Rousseau's. Comment.

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### 3.4.3 POSITIVE LIBERALISM

Inspired by Kant, Hegel, Plato, and Aristotle, Green presents a logical concept of the state grounded in free moral will. His notion of the state is rooted in the idea of eternal self-consciousness, which conveys the notion of social good to human consciousness, with which it is constantly striving to align. In his work *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation*, Green posits that the state is a product of human consciousness. Barker aptly summarizes Green's position: "Human consciousness postulates liberty, liberty involves rights, and rights demand the state."

**Human Consciousness Postulates Liberty:** Green begins his political theory with the concept of liberty, viewing it as a fundamental requirement for the growth and development of human consciousness. He believes that self-consciousness distinguishes humans from lower animals. To be self-conscious, humans are driven to achieve eternal consciousness, the ultimate reality in the universe. Green argues, "In order to reach this goal, the true self of each man, which is fundamentally good, needs only favourable conditions to develop and express his goodness". Each individual's inherent goodness needs only the right conditions to flourish. He maintains that the primary role of the state is to establish, even if by force, the necessary conditions for this development, without interfering with individuals' freedom to cultivate their ideal character. Green agrees with Kant on the absolute value of goodwill and contends that the ultimate aim of human life is moral activity, achievable only through full freedom. Consequently, Green views the state's role as primarily negative, focusing on removing obstacles to activities that are worthy and beneficial.

Green, influenced by Kant and echoing Hegel's positive view of the state, navigates a middle path between these perspectives. He does not fully embrace either view but instead addresses the dilemma by developing the concept of positive freedom. For Green, positive freedom refers to "a positive power or capacity to do or enjoy something worth doing or enjoying, particularly in a way that is shared with others." He argues that a society grows in freedom when its members are empowered to contribute to the common good and realize their full potential collectively. Green's concept of freedom thus embodies two key qualities:

1. It is a positive principle, focusing on doing or enjoying things that are worthwhile and are shared with others, aiming to liberate all human capacities for the social good.
2. It is determinate, meaning it is freedom to engage in specific, meaningful activities rather than an unrestricted freedom to do anything. It is about pursuing goals that enhance one's life. As Barker notes, As Barker says, "It is a determinate freedom to do something of a definite character, something which possesses the quality of being worth doing and not any and everything."

Human consciousness inherently demands liberty, with true freedom being realized through self-fulfillment. This self-realization, however, can only be achieved through the establishment and enforcement of a system of rights. As Bhagat explains, 'Under such a system' each recognises in his fellow and each claims from his fellow that he shall recognise in him the power of pursuing ideal objects. He also each makes a claim of its recognition by all, because each is of like nature with his fellows, and the objects of all are common.'

According to Green, a right can only exist under two conditions: (i) as a member of society and (ii) within a society that acknowledges a common good. Rights cannot exist without a shared sense of common interest among members. Every moral person is entitled to rights, which involve participating in a society where the free exercise of individual powers is ensured through mutual recognition. Rights are seen as the negative

manifestation of this power, allowing individuals to claim their share of the common good. Green does allow for resistance under certain conditions. An individual may resist the state if its laws undermine the conditions necessary for a freely chosen and morally guided life. Resistance is justified when the authority behind the law is disconnected from the broader system of rights and order, such that challenging a particular law does not disrupt the overall system. For Green, rights are related to morality. Individual rights are the expression of morality and recognition is given by the moral consciousness of the community. "Rights are relative to morality, in the sense, that they are conditions for attainment of moral end. Recognition is given to him by moral consciousness because it knows that they are necessary conditions of its own satisfaction."

Every individual possesses an eternal consciousness that necessitates freedom, which can only be realized through a system of enforceable rights. Rights must be upheld and enforced because a right that is not actively protected ceases to exist. Therefore, a mechanism of power is needed to enforce these rights and address violations. According to Green, a true state is defined by its ability to exercise power in accordance with the law to maintain and protect these rights. He asserts, 'it is not the coercive power as such, but coercive power as exercised according to law, written or unwritten for the maintenance of the existing rights of the citizens from external and internal invasions that make a state.'" Green contends that the state does not create rights but rather amplifies and secures rights that already exist. The state facilitates the fuller expression and exercise of rights, which individuals, guided by the ideal of a common good, have recognized in one another. It channels this common good, which was previously acknowledged through mutual recognition, into effective governance. Despite the role of force in the formation and evolution of states, it is secondary to the fundamental ideals that underlie rights. Thus, the state is a product of human consciousness, which demands liberty. Liberty involves rights, and these rights, in turn, necessitate the existence of a state.

## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 2

**NOTE:** Use the space given below for your answers. Use separate sheet if space is not sufficient.

1. Explain Green's conception of state.

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2. Comment on Green's view on liberty?

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### 3.4.4 POLITICAL OBLIGATION

Green views the state as a natural institution essential for the moral development of individuals. To him, the state serves as a means to an end, with that end being the complete moral growth of its members. According to Wayper, Green believed that every individual possesses inherent worth and dignity, precluding their exploitation for any purpose. Green's principal work, *The Principles of Political Obligation*, aimed to illustrate, based on his moral philosophy, the ethical foundation of the state, the justification for political authority, and the moral necessity of obeying laws, as noted by Coker.

Green posits that political institutions should be evaluated based on their contribution to the moral character of citizens. For individuals to lead a life they can truly call their own, they must have certain freedoms to pursue their goals. This freedom is attainable when society collectively recognizes that such liberty benefits the common good, a recognition formalized through laws. By submitting to the authority of these institutions, individuals accept conditions that enable them to live a genuinely personal life. Thus, the role of law within the state is to aid individuals in realizing their rational self, or their ideal of self-perfection, by functioning within a social framework where each person contributes to the well-being of others.

Green acknowledges that the state is constrained both internally and externally. Internally, the state is limited by its inability to address motives, focusing instead on external actions. It can only eliminate obstacles hindering individual personality development. Under certain conditions, individuals may resist the state. Externally, the state is constrained by international law, requiring it to engage with other states and operate within a framework of universal brotherhood. Green asserts that the government's role is to create conditions where morality is possible, with morality being defined as the performance of self-imposed duties. Consequently, the state's role is largely negative—removing barriers to freedom. Barker notes that “the state has no positive moral function of making its members better; it has the negative moral function of removing obstacles which prevent them from making themselves better.”

Green argues that true moral action arises from free self-determination, driven by one's sense of duty to oneself, and thus inherently external to state action. However, Green does permit a broad range of state interventions aimed at removing obstacles to individual self-realization. For example, he advocated that the state should prevent wealthy landowners from removing land from cultivation or converting it to forest, and encourage them to divide large estates into smaller, tenant-owned farms. He supported regulating compulsory education and saw the need for the state to address various societal issues, including the closure of liquor shops, to allow individuals to fully exercise their talents. He also believed that property protection is essential for individual freedom and social benefit, as property serves as a means for realizing one's will directed towards the social good.

According to Professor Doyle, the state's primary role is to enable individuals to fully realize their personalities. The function of government, he argues, is to create conditions that make moral behavior possible, with morality consisting in the selfless performance of duties. This role is primarily negative but still moral in nature. Prof. Sabine adds, “State cannot make men moral, it can do much to create social conditions in which they are able to develop a responsible character for themselves. At the very least it can remove many hindrances to such development, as it does, for example, by recognizing that children have a right to education.” Green also advocated for state control over health and housing, viewing these areas as crucial for personal development. He described the state's negative role as primarily involving the removal of obstacles, asserting that, ultimately, the development of an individual's moral nature remains a personal endeavour.

Professor MacIver critiques Green's perspective, noting that Green focuses on what the state should do to ensure conditions for moral action but does not consider how the state interacts with other societal institutions beyond political law. MacIver suggests that had Green considered these interactions, he would have recognized not only what the state should do but also what it is permitted to do within a broader context of various powers and organizations.

Unlike critics such as Carlyle and Ruskin, who focused on the flaws of industrialism, Green accepted the new socio-economic order and sought to develop a theory of state action compatible with contemporary

conditions. He did not question the value of political democracy but emphasized that it must be accompanied by social and economic democracy, which implies substantial equality of opportunity. Despite his abstract approach to political and social issues, Green anticipated the essential concerns for a free society's endurance. His advocacy for a welfare state with positive functions suggests that he was a precursor to 20th-century concepts of the welfare state.

Green argues that individuals may have just cause to disobey the state. Unlike Hegel, who emphasized the state's divine and reverential nature and denied individuals any right to rebel, Green acknowledges the legitimacy of resistance. While Green's perspective is somewhat akin to that of Locke, who also supported the right of rebellion, there is a key difference: Locke allowed for resistance against the state, whereas Green asserts that no inherent right to disobey the state exists, as the state alone is the source of rights.

Green does not make resistance easy; he maintains that it cannot be justified merely because legislation conflicts with personal preference. His view on rebellion is cautious and deliberate. The rationale for allowing resistance lies in the conflict between natural rights and adherence to legal rules. Natural rights, according to Green, reflect conditions necessary for the free development of individuals or groups, which may not be recognized in current legal frameworks but are essential for the common good.

Natural rights are not primitive or solitary but are intrinsic to individuals living in a society. These rights may be acknowledged by social conscience even if not codified in law and may be recognized only by a minority claiming them. When there is a disconnect between natural and legal rights, the moral justification for resistance can transform into a genuine or natural right. The broader the gap between natural and legal rights, the greater the potential for conflict. Conversely, a smaller gap results in less conflict. Green believes that in a democratic society, where people might resist laws or government actions based on temporary majorities, the issue of resistance is inevitable.

As an example Green questions, whether a sympathiser with the cause of the negro slave resist the master's legal right of property over the slave in the name of the natural rights of the slave to be a free man? His reply was that the answer to the question on the law for the natural right was acknowledged, as recognized by the social consciousness. He argues that the sympathizer has no right to override the law for the sake of a single individual, as doing so would jeopardize social order and disrupt the existing system of rights by introducing a new element into it. If natural rights are already recognized by society, there would be no need for such a sacrifice. Conversely, without a shared social consciousness, the right to resist state authority does not exist.

Green acknowledges that individuals have the right to disobey the state, but he does not view this as an absolute right. He establishes several conditions under which resistance to the state is permissible:

Green advises that individuals resisting the state should be mindful of their likely error, given that the state embodies the accumulated wisdom of ages, which may surpass individual judgment. He argues that resistance cannot be justified merely because a law conflicts with personal preferences. In his view, "There can be no right to disobey or avoid any particular law on the ground that it interferes with any freedom of action, any right of managing his children or doing what he will with his own," since state actions are generally intended for the common good.

Green asserts that disobedience is not always advisable as it can lead to disorder and chaos. He questions whether it is reasonable to disobey the state over a single law when one is complying with numerous other laws.

If the state persistently fails to fulfill its moral purpose, it may forfeit its claim to the loyalty of its citizens. However, any claims against the state should be approached with caution.

For resistance to be justified, Green outlines two key conditions:

1. One must be certain that a clear social benefit will result from successful opposition.
2. One must be convinced that a significant portion of the community shares this viewpoint.

Barker suggests that instead of rebelling solely on the basis of natural rights, individuals should use propaganda to gain recognition for their cause. Green acknowledges that there are times when disobedience to state laws may be necessary, but he emphasizes that such decisions must be made by the individual alone. While one may not have an absolute right to resist, one may be justified in doing so under certain circumstances. Green underscores that disobedience should be non-violent, aligning with his principle of peaceful resistance, which later influenced Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the India.

### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 3**

**NOTE:** Use the space given below for your answers. Use separate sheet if space is not sufficient.

1. What are the constraints on state according to Green?

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2. What is the moral necessity of obeying laws, according to Green?

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3. Under what conditions according to Green, an individual can resist to state?

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### **3.4.5 LET US SUM UP**

Green's contributions to political thought include grounding liberalism on more solid principles, humanizing individualism, and moderating idealism (Gupta). He introduced a liberal political philosophy that emphasized social expediency as the guiding principle. By elevating expediency to an ideal, Green argued that it should be shaped by the moral obligation of the state to foster an environment conducive to the fullest realization of each individual's potential. He endowed rights and liberty with substantive meaning and is considered the philosophical progenitor of the "welfare state," thereby revitalizing liberalism.

As an active liberal, Green supported a representative government. He believed that the essence of citizenship was the right to a free life, though this right could be restricted by the state, which must use force to

counteract threats to freedom. Green argued that punishment's goal is not to inflict pain proportional to the criminal's guilt—an assessment he deemed impractical—or to reform the criminal, as genuine reform must come from within. Instead, the primary aim of punishment is to instill fear to prevent future crimes.

Green viewed the right to resistance as justifiable but not obligatory. He dismissed the interpretations of “Natural Law” offered by philosophers like Hobbes and Locke and rejected the concept of the State of Nature as posited by social contract theorists. For Green, the state was a “society of societies,” balancing and adjusting the rights within and between various societal systems. In his theory of state action, punishment was a response to the criminal's anti-social will, intended to deter future offenses by creating fear.

Regarding property, Green held liberal views, neither defending it unconditionally nor critiquing it entirely. He believed everyone should have the opportunity to acquire property, reflecting their ability to contribute to the common good. Due to individual differences in capacity, property ownership varied, leading to inequality. When property owners infringed on others' affairs, the state had a duty to intervene. Green advocated for small proprietors working their own land. He viewed war as a moral wrong, regardless of who the aggressor might be, and criticized the notion that wars are inevitable. In his view, wars occur not because states exist but because states fail to uphold general rights.

### **3.4.6 EXERCISES**

1. Explain Green's Idealism.
2. Comment on Green's ideas on positive liberalism.
3. Explain Green's views on political obligation.

### **3.4.7 SUGGESTED READINGS**

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## **4.1 KARL MARX I: DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM, HISTORICAL MATERIALISM AND ALIENATION**

**- Dr. Harjit Singh**

### **STRUCTURE**

#### **4.1.0 Objectives**

#### **4.1.1 Introduction**

#### **4.1.2 Marx 's Method: Dialectical Materialism**

#### **4.1.3 Historical Materialism**

#### **4.1.4 Theory of Alienation**

#### **4.1.5 Let Us Sum Up**

#### **4.1.6 Exercises**

#### **4.1.7 Suggested Readings**

#### **4.1.0 OBJECTIVES**

**After going through this lesson, you will be able to know:**

- Marx's theoretical propositions on dialectical materialism
- Marx's views on historical materialism
- Marx's concept of alienation

#### **4.1.1 INTRODUCTION**

Marxism holds immense significance in the modern world, presenting both a theory of social change and a scientific framework for understanding the laws of social development. It offers a revolutionary program aimed at liberating the exploited classes and proposes radical methods for transforming society. Marxism envisions a rational social order where "man shall not be exploited by man," creating a society where peace, harmony, comfort, and genuine freedom are ensured, allowing individuals to fully realize their potential and personality. This ideal society, termed a "Communist society" by Marxists, would be both classless and stateless. Marxism emerged as a critique of the shortcomings of liberal ideology and, over time, its revolutionary message spread across the globe, influencing many nations. As Marxism continues to hold sway in various parts of the world, it is crucial to gain a proper understanding of its philosophy. Before delving into Marxism, a brief overview of its founder, Karl Heinrich Marx, is appropriate.

Karl Marx, regarded as the father of Marxism or modern socialism, was born in Trier (Treves), in the Rhineland province of Prussia (Germany) on May 5, 1818. His father, Herschel Marx, originally Jewish, converted to Christianity in 1824 to avoid persecution. Though young Marx did not fully comprehend the significance of this change at the time, he later recognized how religion was used as a tool for oppression. Ultimately, Marx became an atheist and a staunch critic of religion. A bright child, Marx enrolled in the University of Berlin at seventeen to study law. In 1841, he earned his Doctorate in Philosophy from the

University of Jena, writing on “The Difference Between the Natural Philosophy of Democritus and Epicurus.” Two years later, he married Jenny, daughter of Freiherr Ludwig von Westphalen, with whom he had a close relationship.

From an early age, Marx displayed rebellious tendencies. His radical views made him a target of suspicion, preventing him from securing a university teaching position. Even minor jobs, such as clerical work, were denied to him due to his poor handwriting, and he was deemed unfit for military service. Eventually, Marx pursued journalism and became the editor of *Rheinische Zeitung*, though its publication was soon shut down by authorities. He later moved to Paris, where he forged a lifelong friendship with Friedrich Engels, who became his collaborator and disciple. In 1845, Marx established the “German Working Men’s Association” in Brussels, and two years later, he and Engels founded the “International Communist League.” Together, they penned the renowned *Communist Manifesto* in 1848, which remains a foundational text for communists worldwide. After settling in London in 1849, Marx lived there until his death on March 14, 1883. At Marx’s grave in Highgate Cemetery, Engels famously remarked, “His name and works will endure through the ages.”

Karl Marx was a towering intellectual and a prolific writer. Alongside Engels, he authored the *Communist Manifesto* in 1847, which political theorist Harold Laski called “one of the outstanding political documents of all time.” Bertrand Russell hailed it as “the best contribution that Karl Marx made to the history of political thought.” The manifesto offers a clear and concise summary of Marx’s theory of class struggle throughout history, the modern conflict between the bourgeoisie and proletariat, the inevitable downfall of capitalism, and a call to action for the working classes to build a classless and stateless society.

Another of Marx’s monumental works is *Das Kapital*, a three-volume treatise on political economy. The first volume was published in 1867 during Marx’s lifetime, while the second and third volumes were edited and published by Engels after Marx’s death in 1883, in 1885 and 1894, respectively. *Das Kapital* was hailed as an epoch-making event in the history of international socialism, offering a comprehensive analysis of the economic structures of modern society. It examined the processes of production, exchange, and distribution, situating them within the larger framework of class struggle. In addition to these major works, Marx produced numerous articles and pamphlets that further contributed to his revolutionary legacy.

- (1) *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847).
- (2) *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859).
- (3) *Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach* (1845).
- (4) *The Eighteenth Brummaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1894).
- (5) *Civil War and the Class Struggle in France* (1849).
- (6) *The Critique of the Gotha Programme* (1891).
- (7) *Revolution and Counter Revolution*.

Karl Marx can be described as one of the most influential thinkers of our age. Since the later half of the 13th century his ideas and ideology has been a source of revolutionary changes in human thinking and behaviour. His writings compelled both the capitalists and non-capitalist to change their relations with the workers and it impelled the workers to rise from their slumber sleep and come together for action in order to secure their rights. He became the chief architect and instrument of labour movements in almost all the societies and at

international level. He is regarded as the father of scientific socialism.

#### **4.1.2 KARL MARX METHOD: DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM**

As Plamenatz points out, “Marxism is not merely a theory about society, but an entire system of philosophy.” At the core of Marxism is the concept of dialectical materialism, which serves as the foundation of Marx’s method. The term “dialectic” refers to discussion or debate. Marx, influenced by Hegel’s ideas during his time at the University of Berlin, adopted Hegel’s dialectical method. Hegel argued that social and human evolution does not follow a straight line but moves in a zig-zag manner, marked by contrasts, negations, and contradictions. According to Hegel, each stage of human history produces its opposite, or antithesis. Through the interaction of thesis and antithesis, a new synthesis emerges, reconciling the opposing forces at a higher level. For Hegel, the ultimate reality was the “spirit,” and he saw progress as driven by the dialectical conflict of ideas through a sequence of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis.

While Marx borrowed Hegel’s dialectical method, he applied it differently. Marx argued that progress results from the conflict between opposing material forces, not ideas. He believed that ideas are a product of the material conditions in which people live. According to Marxian dialectics, opposing forces are present in every stage of society and drive historical change. In the capitalist stage, the conflict between the bourgeoisie (capitalists) and the proletariat (workers) represents this opposition. Marx predicted that the result of this class struggle would be the establishment of a classless society, free from exploitation.

Marx’s contribution was not just materialism but a specific version known as dialectical materialism, a central component of Marxist philosophy. Through a revolutionary dialectical process, matter evolves, leading to social revolutions that aim to abolish all classes and create a classless society. For Marx, matter—not spirit or ideas—was the ultimate reality. He believed that society should be organized for production in a way that eliminates the exploitation of one class by another. Marx emphasized that the world develops according to the laws of matter, and that social ideas and theories that arise throughout history merely reflect the material conditions of society.

In developing dialectical materialism, Marx adapted Hegel’s dialectical method to focus on material forces as the driving force of societal change. For Marx, matter was the ultimate reality, and changes in society stemmed from the shifts and operations of material forces. He argued that economic forces, rather than ideas or nations, are the true causes of historical development. Dialectical materialism envisions a society perfectly organized for production, without class distinctions and without exploitation.

Marx grounded his dialectical materialism in three laws of dialectics, originally proposed by Hegel.

##### **4.1.2.1 The Laws of Transformation of Quantity into Quality and vice-versa**

According to this principle, change occurs through gradual quantitative transformations until a critical point is reached, which Hegel refers to as a “node.” Beyond this point, an object or system cannot change without becoming something fundamentally different. A common example is water: it remains liquid until it reaches 100°C, when it abruptly transforms into steam, or 0°C, when it turns into ice. Similarly, societal progress happens through sudden leaps or shifts. Marx refers to these leaps as revolutions. He argues that change is inevitable in society, with monopoly capitalism representing the final stage of capitalist development. Once capitalism has fully matured, it will continue to develop quantitatively until a point is reached where a dialectical leap occurs, transforming capitalism into socialism.

#### **4.1.2.2 The Law of the Unity of the Opposites**

The second law underlying Marx's dialectical materialism is the law of the unity of opposites. Marx argues that every society contains both negative and positive forces. These opposing forces, rather than being entirely separate, are interconnected. For instance, just as a road heading east also points west, opposites are inherently linked. Science demonstrates that each unity contains polar opposites, such as the positive and negative charges of an electron, which depend on each other. Similarly, in capitalist society, there are two opposing classes: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Though they stand in opposition, they are interconnected and cannot develop independently. Marx uses these societal contradictions to explain its evolution and progress. Lenin called this idea "the salt of dialectics," highlighting its importance in Marxist thought.

#### **4.1.2.3 The Law of the Negation of the Negations**

Marx views thesis, anti-thesis, and synthesis as stages of societal evolution. A thesis collapses due to internal contradictions, paving the way for its opposite, the anti-thesis, which seeks to resolve those contradictions. However, the anti-thesis also eventually breaks down, leading to the development of a synthesis. This synthesis negates the anti-thesis, which had already negated the original thesis—what Marx terms the "negation of negations."

Marx uses these three stages to explain inevitable societal change. He sees the process of thesis, anti-thesis, and synthesis reflected in the progression from feudalism to capitalism to socialism. The contradictions within feudal society gave rise to capitalism, but capitalism, though more advanced, also contains contradictions—primarily in the form of class struggle. These contradictions lead to socialism, which Marx describes as the "negation of negation," evolving from the failures of capitalism. The core of this concept is that all things contain elements that are decaying while others are still developing, and it is the struggle between these opposites that drives societal progress.

### **4.1.3 HISTORICAL MATERIALISM**

Historical materialism extends the principles of dialectical materialism to analyze social evolution. It explains social change through permanent laws and integrates a historical study of the past with an analysis of the present, predicting future developments. Marx's approach to history is known as the materialistic or economic interpretation, where economic forces are seen as the fundamental drivers of social change. Historical materialism, a collaboration between Marx and Engels, applies dialectical materialism to society's development. As C.L. Wayper puts it, "Man's survival depends on his ability to produce what he needs from nature, making production the most important human activity."

This theory arose as a reaction to the idealist interpretation of history, which argues that ideas, rather than material conditions, shape history. Marx rejected this view, asserting that history is shaped primarily by economic factors. He claimed that every social system has an inherent unity, where the social, economic, cultural, and religious systems are all interconnected through a common economic structure. Marx differentiates between the fundamental economic base of society and the superstructure, which includes secondary elements like politics and culture. The superstructure is built upon the economic foundation, and any change in the modes or relations of production leads to changes in society as a whole, including its institutions and ideas.

The state, according to Marx, is the instrument of the dominant class, used to maintain the existing relations

of production. Society is always divided into two major classes: those who own the means of production (the “haves”) and those who do not (the “have-nots”). Conflict between these classes is inevitable, and when the economically dominant class rises to power, it alters the legal, political, and moral institutions to secure its control. Historically, every system of production has produced opposing classes, such as freemen and slaves, lords and serfs, and capitalists and workers.

Marx applies historical materialism to both explain past history and predict future societal evolution. He identifies five stages of production: the primitive communal stage, the slave stage, the feudal stage, the capitalist stage, and the socialist stage. Each stage represents a progression in the modes of production and class relations.

|                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|---------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| First: Premature communal stage:            | Means of production are socially owned.                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Second: Slave stage:                        | The slaves work for their masters.                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Third: Feudal stage:                        | Feudal lord potentially owns the serfs since the serfs can have some property.                                                                                                                                     |
| Fourth: Capitalist stage:                   | Capitalist owns the means of production but not the labour, though they are compelled to work for them.                                                                                                            |
| Fifth: Socialist Stage:<br>of productions). | Which has not come into existence (workers themselves own the means<br>This will happen when capitalism reaches its fullest development, but<br>then it would be abolished because of its inherent contradictions. |

From the perspective of production, each stage represents progress over the one before it, following the dialectical principle. By applying historical materialism to past history, Marx interprets history in a way that frames capitalists as a reactionary force and the working class as revolutionary in the current era. He argues that the downfall of the capitalist system is inevitable, just as the feudal stage was. The future, he claims, belongs to the working class, and their victory in the struggle is certain. Capitalist society will eventually be replaced by a proletarian state, leading to the establishment of a classless society, marking the final stage of dialectical history.

#### 4.1.3 SURPLUS VALUE

The Theory of Surplus Value is a major contribution of Karl Marx to political theory, extensively discussed in his work *Das Kapital*. This theory is grounded in the “labour theory of value,” which Marx expanded upon. According to Sabine, “the theory of surplus value was explicitly an extension of the labour theory of value originally presented by Ricardo and classical economists. Without the labour theory of value, there can be no theory of surplus value; it is a direct successor to it.” The theory was initially introduced by Sir William Petty in England and later developed by Adam Smith and David Ricardo.

Marx’s explanation of this theory, as summarized by Joad, is as follows: the wealth of capitalist societies is fundamentally an immense collection of commodities. These commodities have value, which is related to their ability to satisfy human wants, or their usefulness. The usefulness of an object is assessed by what it can be exchanged for, hence Marx’s term “exchange value” refers to the worth of an item in relation to other items. Although exchange values, often represented by prices, can fluctuate due to market conditions, these variations are incidental and do not affect the underlying determinant of value—the average amount of labour time required to produce the commodity. Despite superficial changes in exchange value, the labor

time necessary for production remains the true measure of value.

Human labour alone cannot create value without the use of instruments such as machinery, factories, and power sources. Due to innovations in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, these tools of value creation have greatly increased in both number and efficiency, but are owned by a relatively small class—the capitalists. The capitalist buys the labour power of workers, applies it to the machinery and raw materials they own, and produces commodities with exchange value. The value of these commodities is higher than the cost of labour and maintaining the factory. The difference between the exchange value of the commodity and the wages paid to the worker is termed ‘surplus value’. This surplus value, created by the worker’s labour but appropriated by the capitalist, is essentially the product of unpaid labour.

The appropriation of surplus value by capitalists highlights a fundamental injustice within the modern industrial system—an injustice that socialism aims to address. In essence, the capitalist system mirrors a slave society, differing only in form. Slaves created surplus value under coercion, whereas modern workers produce surplus value under a voluntary contract, albeit under duress. Workers have little choice but to sell their labour to capitalists, who, after paying minimal wages, retain the full value of the output. In summary, the theory of surplus value asserts that the true economic value of a commodity is created solely by labour, with all other factors being secondary.

#### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 1

**NOTE:** Use the space given below for your answers. Use separate sheet if space is not sufficient.

1. What are the two essential features of the ideal communist society?

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2. What according to Karl Marx was the driver of social change?

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3. List the three laws that underpin Karl Marx’s Dialectical Materialism.

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4. How does Karl Marx view the state?

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5 List the various stages in the development of society according to Karl Marx.

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#### 4.1.4 THEORY OF ALIENATION AND FREEDOM

Karl Marx developed his theory of alienation in his early writings, especially in the ***Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*** (1844). Utilizing the German terms *Entfremdung* (to estrange or alienate) and *Entäusserung* (to externalize or sell), Marx explored various ways in which individuals become estranged in their lives, particularly through the labour process. Marx argued that people experience a loss of control over their lives and the products they create, which are fundamental to societal institutions such as the state and work. This alienation leads to a sense of living in a world that feels foreign and hostile, causing individuals to perceive their lives as meaningless and unfulfilling. Ultimately, people live in a manner that is less than fully human, resulting in a form of dehumanization.

Marx's theory of alienation draws from Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's concept of alienation and Marx's critique of Hegel. Hegel viewed alienation as a process where "Spirit" (*Geist*) externalizes itself in creating reality, only to realize that the world is not separate from Spirit. Spirit, through human consciousness, gradually recognizes the world as its own creation, overcoming alienation. Marx, influenced by the "Young Hegelians" and Ludwig Feuerbach, critiqued and diverged from Hegel's idealist notion of alienation. Marx identified religious alienation, where humans project idealized features onto a created deity, giving this entity an independent existence and worshipping it. This externalization of essential human features results in a separation from our true selves.

In capitalist societies, this alienation becomes more pronounced during the labour process. For Marx, productive activity is crucial not only for subsistence but also for expressing and developing human potential. In class societies, especially under capitalism, this productive activity becomes alienating. Workers are estranged from their creations, as factory products are controlled by the owners. They are also alienated from the conditions of their labor, lacking control over production processes and tools, and often performing monotonous, repetitive tasks. Furthermore, workers are alienated from their "species-being"—their inherent human characteristics such as creativity and conscious planning. Capitalism restricts these qualities, preventing work from being a fulfilling, fully human activity.

In his later works, particularly "Capital," Marx moved away from using the term "alienation" frequently and instead expanded his concept with ideas like commodity fetishism and machine labour. This evolution of the concept reflects a world dominated by economic forces, where capitalist illusions shape human thought.

Marx's concept of alienation indicates that under capitalism, people are estranged from their species-essence in two main ways. First, productive activity fails to engage their distinctively human qualities, leading to a monotonous, animal-like form of labour. Workers often feel most human during their non-working hours. Second, this estrangement extends to how individuals view their 'species-life,' where people see themselves merely as workers and consumers, rather than members of a cooperative social system. Marx argues that our focus on individual consumption neglects the communal nature of our existence and the production processes.

For Marx, communism offers the solution to alienation. The overthrow of capitalism and the abolition of private property and the division of labour would enable de-alienation. True freedom emerges when individuals understand capitalism's alienating effects and work towards a society where production meets communal needs. Marx's concept of freedom contrasts with liberal views by emphasizing the need to overcome economic constraints and control over social forces. According to Marx, genuine freedom begins when labor is no longer driven by necessity and the pursuit of wealth, but rather by the development of human capacities. The reduction of the working day is a crucial step towards achieving this freedom.

Marx's ideas help clarify how reforming the realm of necessity could enable greater individual self-realization through self-determination, allowing people to find intrinsic value in collective production.

## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 2

**NOTE:** Use the space given below for your answers. Use separate sheet if space is not sufficient.

1. In which book did Karl Marx first develop his theory of alienation?

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2. In his *magnum opus*, *The Capital*, Karl Marx moved away from which earlier concept and substituted it with which new concept?

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3. What does Karl Marx mean by exchange value?

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### 4.1.5 LET US SUM UP

In this lesson, we explored Marx's concepts of Dialectical Materialism, Historical Materialism, and Alienation. The fundamental laws of dialectical materialism that we studied provide a framework for understanding the motion and development of the material world, revealing their origins and driving forces through internal contradictions. These laws illustrate the progressive, leap-like nature of development, showing how reality advances through the constant replacement of the old by the new.

A key aspect of Marxist philosophy, distinguishing it from earlier philosophies, is its integration of materialism with dialectics. Marxist dialectics views development as a movement from the lower to the higher, from the simple to the complex, characterized by revolutionary leaps.

Marx's concept of historical materialism is crucial to his theory of social development. By contrasting earlier idealistic views with a materialistic interpretation of history, Marx demonstrated the essential unity of social

phenomena and their material basis. His concept of socio-economic formations overturned the idealistic and metaphysical theories prevalent before Marx, emphasizing that society is not a general abstraction but a specific historical entity with its own unique characteristics.

Historical materialism examines the development of society and its laws, which are as objective and independent of human consciousness as natural laws. Unlike concrete social sciences, historical materialism focuses on the most general laws of social development. It offers a scientific, dialectical-materialist interpretation of social phenomena, addressing key issues such as the relationship between social being and social consciousness, the role of material production, and the origin and impact of social ideas and institutions. Historical materialism helps us understand the roles of individuals and classes in history, the emergence of the state, the causes and significance of social revolutions, and other broad social development issues.

Historical materialism emerged from the generalization of historical experience and social science achievements and is indispensable for the advancement of social sciences. It provides historians, economists, and other scholars with the tools to navigate complex social phenomena and assess the role of each element in social life. By recognizing that society's spiritual life depends on economic and material relations, historical materialism helps trace the origins of various theories and their historical significance.

Marx aimed to expose the exploitative nature of capitalism and demonstrate its eventual downfall due to the general laws of capital accumulation and concentration. C.L. Wayper summarizes this perspective by noting that, "Despite Marx's unsuccessful attempts to resolve the inherent contradictions in his theory, he effectively shows that the initiative, skill, and intelligence of workers are exploited solely for the benefit of capitalists, who take credit for their enterprise, foresight, and organizational abilities." Marx's theory argues that a competitive system, which treats labour power as a commodity, is inherently self-destructive. As Engels stated, the only viable solution is Socialism, which would free human labour power from being treated as a mere commodity.

#### **4.1.6 EXERCISES**

1. Critically examine Karl Marx's concept of Dialectical Materialism?
2. Describe the various stages in the development of society according to Karl Marx.
3. Discuss how, according to Karl Marx, surplus value contributes to capital accumulation?
4. What causes the alienation of the worker, according to Karl Marx, from his object of production?
5. Examine the concept of freedom in Karl Marx's thought.

#### **4.1.7 SUGGESTED READINGS**

McLellan, David. *The Thought of Karl Marx: An Introduction*. Second edition (London: Macmillan, 1980).

Ryan, Alan. *On Marx: Revolutionary and Utopian* (New York: Liveright, 2015).

Wood, Allen W. *Karl Marx*. Second edition (New York: Routledge, 2004).

## **4.2 LENIN: IMPERIALISM, PARTY, STATE AND REVOLUTION**

**- Dr. Harjit Singh**

### **STRUCTURE**

#### **4.1.0 Objectives**

##### **4.1.1 Introduction**

##### **4.1.2 Lenin's theory of Imperialism**

##### **4.1.3 State and Revolution**

##### **4.1.4 Lenin's Theory of Party Organization**

4.3.4.1 Party: A Conscious Keeper of the Working Class

##### **4.1.5 Let Us Sum Up**

##### **4.1.6 Exercises**

##### **4.1.7 Suggested Readings**

#### **4.2.0 OBJECTIVES**

**After going through this lesson, you will be able to:**

- understand Lenin's theory of Imperialism;
- comprehend Lenin's views on State and Revolution;
- know Lenin's proposition about Communist Party Organization.

#### **4.2.1 INTRODUCTION**

Lenin, who championed the cause of the proletariat and established the Communist Party's dictatorship, did not come from a working-class background. Born in 1870, he was the son of a government inspector and grew up in relative comfort. His birth name was Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov. Lenin's revolutionary fervour was ignited at the age of 17 after learning that his brother had been executed for plotting against the Czar. At the time, he was a law student at Kazan University, but he was expelled due to his revolutionary activities. Despite this setback, he completed his degree as a private student at St. Petersburg University in 1891.

Lenin's revolutionary zeal and leadership skills garnered him a significant following and enabled him to accomplish his goals. Undeterred by the challenges he faced, he worked diligently to create the conditions for revolution envisioned by Marx. His success in leading the revolution allowed him to assume government control, overcoming numerous difficulties and earning him a reputation as both a remarkable theorist and a practical politician.

Among his notable works are *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, *State and Revolution*, and *Left-Wing Communism*. Lenin's contributions to political thought were deeply influenced by his efforts to implement Marx's ideas. His greatness lies in his ability to translate Marxian theory into practice, demonstrating that Marxism was not just an abstract concept but a dynamic force. While he did not follow Marx's prescriptions exactly, Lenin adapted Marxist theory to the Russian context, showing his political acumen

and understanding of the obstacles to spreading communism.

#### 4.2.2 LENIN'S THEORY OF IMPERIALISM

One of Lenin's most significant contributions to Marxist theory is his analysis of capitalistic imperialism. He developed this theory while in exile in Switzerland, publishing *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* in 1916. In this work, Lenin expanded on Marx's argument that monopoly capitalism seeks to sustain itself by annexing foreign territories and exploiting their resources and populations.

Marx had predicted that revolution would occur in industrially advanced countries, where wealth would concentrate in fewer hands and the proletariat would grow, leading to inevitable revolutionary action. According to Marx, socialism should have emerged in Western Europe, in countries like France, Britain, and Germany. However, this did not materialize as Marx anticipated. He failed to foresee the advanced stage of capitalism that Lenin identified as imperialism. As capitalism appeared to strengthen rather than decline, and workers' conditions improved, Marx's predictions seemed to falter. The rise of socialist movements in feudal societies against Marxian expectations prompted Lenin to reassess and elaborate on Marxism, especially regarding capitalism's role in its own demise.

Lenin argued that competition had evolved into monopoly capitalism, which far surpassed the conditions Marx had described. In *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, he stated, "Competition transforms into monopoly. This results in immense progress in the socialization of production, but appropriation remains private. The general framework of free competition persists, yet the burden of monopoly on the population becomes overwhelmingly severe." In industrialized nations, the expansion of capitalism leads to monopoly capital, which controls state power and seeks new markets abroad due to saturated domestic markets. This shift compels capitalists to invest in less developed countries, improving conditions for domestic workers while exploiting foreign labor.

Prof. M. J. Harmon explains this as: "Surplus capital is exported to invest in less developed countries where labor and raw materials are cheaper, creating new production facilities. This is the essence of imperialism." Capitalism's expansion into imperialism means that capitalists exploit their colonies and, in doing so, corrupt some of their own workers, who then participate in the exploitation of workers abroad. Without imperialism, workers in advanced capitalist countries might have reached a revolutionary stage sooner, but the profits extracted from colonies have delayed this.

Lenin posited that capitalists, having exhausted their domestic markets, sought raw materials and markets in underdeveloped regions. By offering their own workers higher wages and benefits, they staved off internal discontent. Lenin thus concluded that these underdeveloped areas took on the role of the proletariat in the 20th century. Imperialism represents the highest stage of capitalist expansion, leading to international competition and eventual conflict among imperialist powers. According to Lenin, such conflicts would bring an end to capitalism and imperialism.

In summary, Lenin's theory of imperialism addresses several key issues:

- Capitalism evolves into imperialism.
- Imperialism leads to war.
- War among imperialist powers will ultimately end capitalism.
- Imperialism delays capitalism's demise.
- During the era of capitalist-imperialism, workers in capitalist countries exploit workers in colonies.

- The center of exploitation shifts to underdeveloped colonies, increasing the likelihood of socialist revolutions in these regions.

Lenin answered why capitalism persisted, why revolutionary signs were weak in advanced capitalist countries, how capitalism might be destroyed, and why revolutions were more likely in less developed regions. As Rodee, Anderson, Christo, and Green note, Lenin argued that advanced capitalist countries had postponed economic crises by exploiting underdeveloped nations. The world wars, seen as imperialist conflicts, benefited capitalist economies temporarily by distracting and appeasing the proletariat with better conditions, while maintaining false consciousness. Lenin's theory thus illustrates how capitalism's survival and imperialism's development lead to revolutionary conditions, particularly in less developed countries.

### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 1

**NOTE:** Use the space given below for your answers. Use separate sheet if space is not sufficient.

1. What according to Lenin is the highest stage of capitalism?

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2. How did Lenin view imperialism?

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3. Explain the causal mechanism which Lenin established between capitalism and war.

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### 4.2.3 STATE AND REVOLUTION

The nature of state and society during the era of dictatorship of the proletariat was explained by Lenin and adopted according to the requirements of the circumstances. According to C. L. Wayper, the dictatorship of the proletariat as a doctrine has yet another implication of the greatest importance. It necessitates a new version of Marx's teaching on the dictatorship of the proletariat. Lenin exactly did this. Stalin wrote while defining Leninism that "Leninism was the theory and tactics of the proletariat revolution in general and the theory and tactics of the dictatorship of the proletariat in particular." Indeed Lenin did not stop his task at that, as a true follower of Marx, Lenin said, that a Marxist was one who extern the acceptance of the class struggle to the acceptance of the dictatorship of the proletariat. After the proletarian revolution had been staged in Russia, Lenin portrayed the new order in his work State and Revolution-1917. He based his thesis on the model of the Paris Commune. He held that the revolution will destroy the bourgeois state and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat in its place. In simple words, Lenin accepted the Marxian principle of the dictatorship of the proletariat but he changed it to the dictatorship of the Communist Party as the Vanguard of the Proletariat.

Lenin's view of the dictatorship of the proletariat can be further discussed under two categories: (a) as the

instrument of the proletarian revolution and (b) as a form of the transitional state in which the proletariat rule over the bourgeoisie. Explaining Lenin's concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat under the first head, i.e. as the instrument of proletarian revolution, Stalin observed that the progress and the sweep and achievements of the proletarian revolution acquire flesh and bones through the dictatorship of proletariat. The dictatorship of the proletariat is the instrument of the proletarian revolution, its organ, its most important main stay, brought into being for the purpose of; firstly, crushing the resistance of the overthrown exploiters and consolidating the achievements of the proletarian revolution and secondly, carrying proletarian revolution to its completion. It means that the proletariat could liquidate the bourgeoisie and overthrow its power without dictatorship, but it may not be able to retain its victory and reap the rewards of fruits of the revolution without the dictatorship of the proletariat. In other words, the dictatorship of the proletariat would be required to consolidate the results of the revolution and vanquish the resistance and counter-revolutionary activities of the landlords and the capitalists overthrown in the proletarian revolution. Under dictatorship of proletariat Lenin advocated the organisation of state as people's republic, police as people's police, bureaucracy as people's service and army as people's army. If Lenin hadn't had adopted this approach of the dictatorship, after the successful revolution against the Kerensky government, the counter revolutionaries, assisted by the foreign powers, may have succeeded in restoring the old bourgeoisie.

As regards the second aspect of the dictatorship of the proletariat as a form of transitional state in which the proletariat rule over the bourgeoisie, certain features can be high-lighted in this connection. Firstly, it continues to be a state like the capitalist order which it replaces, but the difference between the new order and the old one is that, in the former a small minority exploits and suppresses a large majority. Opposed to this in the new order, namely the dictatorship of the proletariat, i.e. the large majority exploits and suppresses a small minority, i.e. the capitalists and the landlord class. The new state i.e. the socialist state namely the dictatorship of the proletariat, is compelled to use violence for coercion and suppression of its foes by their stubborn resistance to it. The capitalist class cannot hope to regain power even through their international connections. Lenin further observed that the proletariat would exercise force for suppressing their enemies by calling the new order as a dictatorship. Lenin defined dictatorship as power based directly on force and unrestricted by any law. In simple words, the dictatorship of the proletariat was to be power obtained, and continued or maintained by violence against bourgeoisie. It means that there was to be little place for liberties for the bourgeoisie. This type of system involved a complete liquidation of the old order and the substitution of entirely new one represented and controlled by the dictatorship of the proletariat. Lenin denounced the parliamentary practices, as they are institutions and agencies of bourgeoisie suppression and domination and therefore these were of no value to the working class. In actual practice, the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat was not the dictatorship of the proletariat, but rather dictatorship over the proletariat. The communist party was to be the sole instrument of exercise of all power society and over all classes of people and the party was to be concentrated in the hands of the selected few. It was to work on the principle of democratic centralism, which in practice results in the apparatus of the party becoming a substitute for the party. He further explains that the central committee of the party becomes a substitute for the apparatus and ultimately the dictator himself substitutes for the central committee.

Lenin on Religion and State: Like the other Marxists, Lenin was opposed religion. Religion found no place in his philosophy and thought. He denounced the philosophy of Tolstoy on this issue and described him as the "exhausted, hysterical, Russian intellectual." Lenin's attitude towards religion finds best explanation in the following extract from his writings. He says, "We, therefore, reject every attempt to impose on us any moral dogma whatsoever as an eternal, ultimate and forever immutable moral law on the pretext that the moral world too has its permanent principles which transcend history and the difference between nations.

We maintain, on the contrary, that all former moral theories are the product, in the last analysis, of the economic stage which society had reached at that particular epoch. And as society, hitherto moved in class antagonisms morality was always a class morality.” Again “But is there such a thing as communist ethics. Is there such a thing as communist morality? Of course, there is. It is frequently asserted that we have no ethics, and very frequently the bourgeoisie says that we communists deny all morality. We say that morality is wholly subordinated to the interests of the proletariat. We deduce our morality from the facts and needs of the class struggle of the proletariat. At the basis of communist morality lies the struggle for strengthening and completing communism. For us, morality is subordinated to the interests of the proletarian class struggle”

Lenin expressed the view that religion was used as a tool by the exploiters to exploit the poor people and the, working class. According to him, “Fear created the Gods. Fear of the blind forces of the capital-blind, because its action cannot be foreseen by the masses-a force which in every step in life threatens the worker and the small businessman with sudden, unexpected accidental destruction and ruin, bringing their in beggary, pauperism, prostitution and deaths from starvation-this is the tap-root of modern religion. The party of the proletariat demands, that the government shall declare religion as a private matter, but it does not for a moment regard the question of fighting against the opium of the’ people, the right against religious superstition as a private matter. We demand that religion be regarded as a private matter as far as the state is concerned, but under no circumstances can we regard it as private matter in our own party.”

Lenin’s adaptation of Marxism to Russia, it is said that one of the greatest contributions of Lenin. Lenin was a Russian, of the Russians and he had a deep understanding of the Russian realities. As a Marxist revolutionary, Lenin believed that revolution was possible in Russia only under certain conditions. The Czar must be defeated in war and there must be a group of highly disciplined and professional revolutionaries, who must be able to take over the Government of the country. Lenin held that there was going to be a war and Russia was sure to be defeated in that war but the problem was how to train revolutionaries who could take over in the event of Russia’s defeat in war. Lenin had thus to experience a very big hurdle. The Marxian view was that a revolution could take place only in a country where there was full-fledged industrial capitalism. According to Marx, there were no shortcuts to revolution. Revolutionary movements could arise spontaneously and could not outrun the underlying industrial and economic conditions which gave birth to them. However, Russia at that time was mainly an agriculturist country. In spite of this handicap Lenin came to the conclusion that a successful revolution could be led by the creation of a small disciplined and centralised party. There were genuine Marxists like Plekhanov, who did not accept the thesis of Lenin. His critics state that if there were to be no democracy within the party, the masses will not get the education which was a necessary condition of socialism. Lenin was more interested in making men carry out his policy than in justifying it theoretically.

#### **4.2.4 LENIN’S THEORY OF PARTY ORGANISATION**

Leninism is a sort of a body of theories, which involve elaboration, supplementation and modification of Marxism for taking into account the developments which took place after Marx, or the developments which Marx could not anticipate. Therefore, Lenin aimed, at adaptation of Marxism to the necessities of Russian Revolution of 1917 and the period that followed. The task was difficult but Lenin did it nicely. Marx believed that the workers could organise themselves with the development of industrial capitalism. He had stated in his programme of action that the course of historical development, as it pertains to the means of production, would lead to conditions that would make revolution inevitable. According to Marx, capitalism would lead to competition and the competition, in turn, would reduce the number of the capitalists and increase the number of proletariat. The conditions of the workers will go on worsening. But at the same time, the

workers would become concentrated in big cities due to the development of large industries and resultant large scale production. They will learn to operate the instruments of production. The workers would develop a class consciousness due to their increasing misery and hardship. As a result they will organise themselves. The workers at one place will come in contact with the workers of other place and ultimately the proletariat would lead the working class to revolt, destroy the bourgeoisie state and create their own state-the dictatorship of the proletariat under the rule of the vast majority. Marx was of the view that this type of process will be inevitable and will not be required to be artificially accelerated. But this prophecy of Marx did not come out to be true. The conditions, which developed in several western countries after Marx wrote, did not provide endorsement to the Marx's theory. The living standards in these countries improved for the working class and the workers started enjoying some success in influencing the legislative process; in getting legislation enacted in their favour. Thus the proletariat seemed to be getting less inclined towards the violent revolution than before. Therefore, some socialists tended to re-interpret Marx's ideas which could explain their inherent contradictions and give greater help to the democratic application of the principles. They accepted parliamentary activity to capture political power through peaceful and constitutional means.

Lenin did not accept fully the Marxian idea of organisation of working class. He came out strongly for the organisation of a party of workers. He did not fully agree with the account of the organisation of the proletariat and the views of the socialists of Germany and France who stood for reform and not for revolution to achieve socialism. Instead of depending on the proletariat to bring about the revolution, Lenin presented his thesis of the party organisation. He was interested in retaining and restoring the revolutionary qualities of Marxism. He was aware of the fact that the socialists of England, Germany and France and few other countries had some reason to be optimistic with regard to the opportunities offered by liberal democracy. But Lenin had a different experience. His experience was based on the oppressive Czarist regime. Therefore, he had doubts in the prospects of democracy in mitigating the harshness of the regime in the near future. These experiences influenced Lenin in forming a theory of party organization. He tried to give a new role, and different status and role for the proletariat, which set him apart from the more moderate schools of socialist thought. This added to the prestige and reputation of Lenin and he turned out to be a major leader of the revolutionary wing of Marxism.

Lenin believed that Marx was wrong in anticipating that the proletariat would develop a revolutionary class consciousness, which will lead them to conflict with the capitalists without leadership, assistance and stimulation from without. The methods of the capitalists had been more subtle than Marx had assumed. Moreover, the various concessions offered to the proletariat, by the capitalist dominated democratic governments had led them to believe wrongly, that the goal of socialism could be achieved in the same manner. Thus, the proletariat had become the victim of the circumstances of their activities. They were confined to trade unionism and they came to be contented with the improvements of wages, hours of work and other working conditions. But these types of organisations could not infuse revolutionary spirit, which was required for bringing socialism. As such, Lenin laid emphasis on the organisation of a party to be led by professional and militant persons, who could work on behalf of the proletariat. He strongly advocated the organisation of workers into a party, which was to be guided and controlled by the more conscious and committed among the workers.

According to Lenin this revolutionary body (Party) was not to follow the parliamentary methods. Its main task was to mobilize the masses and the working class for a frontal attack on the capitalist regime. Therefore, Lenin placed emphasis on leadership and discipline on the militant spirit and a strong and effective political organisation. A party organised on these lines will not tolerate any factionalism and minority had to follow the views of majority in accordance with, the principle of democratic centralism. Writing about the Lenin's

theory of party, Prof. Harmon points out, that revolutionary class consciousness must be implanted in the minds of the proletariat by the revolutionary intellectuals of the enlightened bourgeoisie. Only this group is capable of rising above the environmental restrictions created by the capitalist class. The workers themselves are too involved with the day-to-day problems of making a living. It is too much to ask that they should develop an understanding of the intricacies of historical materialism, to know the forces acting upon them, and to form the organization which will enable them to establish their own society. Only professional revolutionaries, able and willing, to devote their lives to these leaders must educate, propagandise the worker, thus creating the revolutionary spirit that characterizes the proper level of proletarian class consciousness. The revolutionary fervour of the masses may be stimulated in this manner, but even this spirit of revolt does not produce in the proletariat a sufficiently high level of socialist consciousness to permit transition from a capitalist to a communist society. This can only be accomplished during the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat; here the final elements of bourgeois mentality will be eliminated under the guidance and supervision of the intellectual leaders of the proletariat. The party programme in this conditions will be the following.

Workers to be guided by class conscious workers and intellectuals. The workers, according to Lenin, will have to be guided and prepared for the revolution by a group of intellectuals, who would form the core of the party which we can be called the communist party. It will be this leadership which will create class consciousness and direct the working class towards revolution.

Party as an organization of disciplined workers who are committed to revolution. Lenin further says that socialism can only be brought about by a party headed by a small and highly disciplined group of the professional revolutionaries. In short, he says that the working class will have to be guided by a party, which is to act as the vanguard of the proletariat. This party must be capable of working secretly. Lenin had the case of Russia in his mind, possibility of organizing the mass party to achieve socialism through the casting of ballots, was practically non-existent. According to Prof. Harmon, "Lenin's design for a party consisting of an elite corps of leaders, whose function is to guide the masses was carried over into the operation of the government after the revolution in Russia. And it became the prototype of the parties totalitarian regimes of all kinds in the twentieth century." In simple words, Lenin conceived the requirement of a party which should consist of a carefully picked body of the intellectual and moral elite. Its function would be to preserve the principles of Marxism and to provide guidance to the working class before and after revolution. The sole function of the party would be to promote the good of the working class. It will be the sole judge of what was right and in the interest of the proletariat. Summarising Lenin's conception of party, Sabine observes: "The party thus becomes the staff organisation in the struggle of the proletariat to gain power and to retain it after it has been gained. It is the "vanguard" of the proletariat, the most self-conscious and at the same time the most devoted and self-sacrificing part of the working class. Marxism is the creed that holds it together, and organisation is the principle that makes it powerful."

## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 2

**NOTE:** Use the space given below for your answers. Use separate sheet if space is not sufficient.

1. In Lenin's theory of revolution, "the dictatorship of proletariat" envisioned by Karl Marx was replaced with what?

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2. What are the premises of Lenin's conception of the transitional state?

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3. Whom does Lenin ascribe the role of the revolutionary vanguard ?

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#### **4.2.4.1 Party: A Conscience keeper of the Working Class**

From the above discussion it is evident that where as Marx held the view, that the emancipation of the proletariat would be the work of the working class itself, but opposed to this Lenin believed that the socialist class consciousness will have to be injected into the working class by a group of radical intellectuals who shall form the core of the party. He wanted the movement of workers to be entrusted to the professional revolutionaries who could work day and night for the cause of the revolution. Lenin further stood for a centralised hierarchical structure for the party. He aimed at organizing a group of selected and disciplined leaders at the top, who would be in command of the party and give directions to all other members of the party. These commands of the central leadership were to be implemented by the local organs of the party. He emphasised time and again the need of the professional revolutionaries to infuse socialist consciousness among the working class. As such, Lenin believed in a strong leader, who could guide the party and the workers. It is with this background, Leninism prepared the ground for a general secretary of the party, who could guide the entire mass of the people.

Commenting on the Lenin's theory of party Prof. M. J. Harmon writes, "Lenin's theory is more elitist and less democratic than Marx's." Marx had also believed that a few intellectuals were capable of grasping ideas, which arose outside of the capitalist frame of reference, but he had not gone so far in his elitism, as to assume the necessity of leaders to provoke and guide a revolution and the proletarian dictatorship which would follow it. To Lenin, democracy meant that the leadership should keep in touch with the masses- neither lagging too far behind nor being too far ahead of them. It did not mean ascertaining what the people wanted to be done and doing it, for the judgement of the masses of the people was seriously defective. Within the party itself an attempt was made to combine a measure of democracy with one of discipline through the formulation of the principle of democratic centralism. This principle requires, that the party members elect their own officials on all levels and that officers be accountable to those who elect them. It demands, however, strict party discipline and insists upon the absolute subordination of the minority to the majority when decisions are made, and the binding quality of decisions of the higher upon the lower levels of party organization. In practice the centralistic aspects of democratic centralism have been more in evidence than the mass democratic setup.

Lenin assigned a very important role to the party and within the party to a group of disciplined and seasoned leaders. Lenin's theory of the party was criticised by some of his contemporaries. Among them mention can be made of Leon Trotsky, Rosa Luxemburg and Plekhanov offering strong resistance to Lenin's scheme of the party. George Lichtheim observed, "The Leninist model in fact amounted to the political expropriation of the proletariat and its subjection to a dictatorial machine operated by the Bolshevik leadership, a leadership which was essentially self-contained and irremovable." Lenin believed in the revolution from above rather

than the revolution from below, which was objected to, by various thinkers. Trotsky was another critic of Lenin. He challenged Lenin's concept of the party. He denounced Lenin as a party disintegrator. In his 'Our Political Task' written in 1904 Trotsky rejected Leninist approach in the 'working of the working class movement'. He put forward the plea that Lenin's methods led to this - the apparatus of the party substitutes itself for the party, the central committee substitutes itself for the apparatus and finally a single dictator substitutes himself for the central committee." Lenin was wrong in assigning a key role to a hard core of the working class, in which supreme position was to be in the hands of the selected and militant few. Among these selected few he gave the dominant position to the single leader. Following Trotsky's line of criticism, it can be said that Lenin's thesis of the party organisation leads to one man show in the working class movement. Rosa Luxemburg, also repudiated the Leninist approach. She was a firm believer in the revolutionary initiative and drive and spontaneity of the working class. Another critic, Plekhanov advocated the formulation of a mass party on the German pattern, and not a party of the limited and selected few as advocated by Lenin. He denounced Lenin as an autocrat. He even went to the extreme of charging Lenin with the accusation of aiming at bureaucratic centralisation and transforming party members into cogwheels and screws.

#### **4.2.5 LET US SUM UP**

In spite of these attacks on Lenin's concepts the enjoys paramount importance. In his theory he depicts practical wisdom and statesmanship. He stood in favour of tactical compromises in the cause of revolution. Thus, it will not be wrong to say that he succeeded, where others failed because of the simple fact that he was not only successful in organising but also in using a highly organised and disciplined party of the workers for securing the socialist revolution in Russia. Lenin's Estimate – Lenin was a great leader of practical wisdom. As a great organizer, agitator and revolutionary he occupies a very important place in the theory and practice of socialism. He was a great thinker and had a farsighted vision to anticipate or visualize the shape of things to come. He studied society (the Russian society) its different situations, its many contradictions and conflicting ideas and provided remedies to cure those ills which had eaten into the very vitals of society. He rendered yeoman service to Marx. He made Marxism up to date in the light of certain needs and developments which Marx had not anticipated. It will not be wrong to say that without his services to Marxism it must have died a natural and inevitable death. His services to Marxism are exactly the same as rendered by J.S. Mill to Benthamism in England which could save it from decay and death.

#### **4.2.6 EXERCISES**

1. Discuss the contributions of Lenin in explaining imperialism and its linkages with capitalism.
2. Examine Lenin's contributions in the development of Marxist thought.
3. Analyse Lenin's theory of revolution.
4. Examine the role of the party in Lenin's thought.
5. Critically explore Lenin's view of religion.

#### **4.2.7 SUGGESTED READINGS**

Harding, Neil. *Lenin's Political Thought*. 2 volumes. (London: Macmillan, 1977-81).

Lane, David. "V.I. Lenin's Theory of Socialist Revolution." *Critical Sociology*, Volume 47, Issue 3(2021).

Lukács, Georg. *Lenin: A Study on the Unity of His Thought* (London: Verso, 2009).

### **4.3 LUXEMBURG: CRITIQUE OF REVISIONISM, PARTY AND SOCIALIST SOCIETY**

**- Dr. Harjit Singh**

#### **STRUCTURE**

##### **4.1.0 Objectives**

##### **4.1.1 Introduction**

##### **4.1.2 Rosa Luxemburg: Biographical Outline**

##### **4.1.3 Rosa Luxemburg: A True Marxian**

##### **4.1.4 Critique of Revisionism**

##### **4.1.5 Party and Socialist Society**

4.1.5.1 Leninist Model of Party: Luxemburg's Critical Assessment

4.1.5.2 Party and Class

4.1.5.3 Luxemburg's Socialist Ideals

4.1.5.4 Review of Bolshevism

4.1.5.5 Visualization of a Socialist Society

4.1.5.6 Socialist Democracy

4.1.5.7 The Institutions of a Socialist Democracy

##### **4.1.6 Let Us Sum Up**

##### **4.1.7 Exercises**

##### **4.1.8 Suggested Readings**

#### **4.2.0 OBJECTIVES**

**After going through this lesson, you will be able to:**

- understand Lenin's theory of Imperialism;
- comprehend Lenin's views on State and Revolution;
- know Lenin's proposition about Communist Party Organization.

##### **4.3.1 INTRODUCTION**

Rosa Luxemburg (1870-1919) was a prominent figure in the German Left and a founding member of the German Communist Party, known for her passionate advocacy of Marxist theory and her defense of democratic principles. Two key aspects defined her: her unwavering commitment to an idealized vision of Marxist revolution and her challenge to Lenin's approach, particularly in defending democratic values against the Russian communists' claims. Despite her fierce critiques, Lenin referred to her as an "eagle of the proletarian revolution" in 1922.

Luxemburg embodied the democratic tradition within revolutionary Marxism while staunchly opposing revisionism and social democracy. Her approach blended activism with theoretical work, viewing socialism as a moral and spiritual transformation rather than merely a dialectical materialist success. Unlike orthodox Marxists, Luxemburg saw Marx as a profound interpreter of reality rather than the ultimate authority. Her critique of Leninism began early in the twentieth century, aligning with Trotsky in rejecting Lenin's model of party organization. For Luxemburg, revolution was a dynamic, spontaneous process driven by popular participation, emphasizing the need for a close relationship between activists and intellectuals. She differentiated between intellectuals and bureaucrats, maintaining that intellectuals, like activists, should not oppose change. Her views were unaffected by Weberian arguments about the necessity of bureaucracy in modern capitalist structures.

#### **4.3.2 LUXEMBURG: BIOGRAPHICAL OUTLINE**

Rosa Luxemburg, born on March 5, 1871, was the youngest of five children in the Luxemburg family, which included three boys and two girls. She was born in Zamosc, a town that was first under Austrian rule until 1809 and then came under Russian control in 1815. Predominantly Jewish, Zamosc was a culturally vibrant town at the crossroads of Austria, Poland, and Russia. The Luxemburg family, however, did not practice Judaism strictly and spoke German at home. Rosa and her siblings had German names: Maximilian, Josef, and Anna. As a child, Luxemburg was quiet and an avid reader, well-versed in both German and Polish classical literature.

In 1873, the family relocated to Warsaw, where Rosa developed a hip disease that was misdiagnosed as tuberculosis and improperly treated. Confined to bed for a year, she used this time to teach herself to read and write, although the illness left her with a permanent limp. During this period, she became deeply interested in literature, translating German poems into Polish at the age of nine and writing a poem to celebrate the visit of German Emperor William I to Warsaw at thirteen.

Luxemburg attended the Second Girls' High School in Warsaw, a predominantly Russian-speaking institution, and was introduced to Marxist writings in 1887. In 1889, she moved to Zurich to study philosophy, natural sciences, and mathematics at the university, later switching to law. She earned two doctorates from the University of Zurich, one in law and one in philosophy. Her 1898 doctoral thesis, "The Industrial Development of Poland," analyzed Poland's economic dependency on Russia and influenced the Polish Social Democratic Party's political program.

During her time in Zurich, Luxemburg was actively involved in the socialist movement and worked with prominent Russian Marxists such as Plekhanov, Axelrod, and Lenin. In 1897, she married German Gustav Luebeck to avoid being classified as a foreigner, but the marriage ended quickly, and she obtained a divorce after five years. Her visits to Paris and Berlin in 1897-98 marked the beginning of a long association with German Social Democracy. Luxemburg became a leading defender of the German Left in the revisionist debate within the SPD and contributed to the theoretical journal *Neue Zeit*, as well as editing radical provincial dailies and the party's daily paper *Vorwärts*. She also taught Marxian economics at the Central Party Primary School.

Luxemburg played a significant role in the 1905 Russian Revolution, aligning briefly with Lenin in their shared view of the revolution as a bourgeois movement led by the proletariat. She provided insights into these revolutionary events for German socialists. From 1905 to 1919, as a leader of the extreme left-wing of the German Marxist movement, she opposed Germany's involvement in World War I. During the Spartacus Uprising in Germany, she was hesitant to support a coup that lacked sufficient arms and popular support.

Luxemburg chose to stay in Germany and, while in hiding for two years, attempted to rebuild the party. She

was eventually arrested alongside Karl Liebknecht and Wilhelm Pieck and was brutally murdered by Prussian officers on January 15, 1919. Although the murderers were known, they were not prosecuted. Her colleague Jogiches, who stayed behind in Berlin to seek justice, was also murdered two months later.

Luxemburg was known for her meticulous appearance and conservative tastes. Despite her reputation as 'Red Rosa,' she maintained a strong sense of personal identity and was known for her rigid moral stance. She was not fond of some of her contemporaries, including Kautsky, Wilhelm Liebknecht, Plekhanov, and Trotsky, and had a preference for intelligent individuals. Her approach to personal relationships was passionate yet touchy, and she valued privacy and classical tastes.

#### **4.3.3 ROSA LUXEMBURG: A TRUE MARXIAN**

Luxemburg was fluent in Polish, Russian, German, and French, and had a strong command of English and Italian. Despite her family's lack of socialist convictions, they supported her during her imprisonments and periods of hiding from the authorities. Her death created a significant void in the German Communist Party. She was truly one of the last great socialist leaders of her era, and perhaps a notably 'civilized voice in the cause of international socialism.'

She began her writing career and soon became a leading contributor to the influential Marxist theoretical journal *Die Neue Zeit*. Known for her independent judgment and criticism, Luxemburg remained steadfast in her views, even when faced with the considerable influence of Karl Kautsky, the journal's editor and a figure revered as the 'Pope of Marxism.'

Luxemburg devoted herself wholeheartedly to the labor movement in Germany. She frequently contributed to various socialist publications—sometimes as an editor—and actively participated in mass meetings and the broader tasks of the movement. Her speeches and articles were original and thought-provoking, aiming to expand her readers' perspectives rather than merely appealing to their emotions.

At the time, the German socialist movement was divided between reformist and revolutionary factions, with the reformist trend gaining prominence. Following the economic recovery from the 1873 slump, workers' living standards improved gradually, and trade unions and cooperatives grew stronger. However, this prosperity led to a bureaucratization of the movement and a shift away from revolutionary ideals, bolstering those advocating gradualism and reformism. Eduard Bernstein, a disciple of Engels, was a leading proponent of this trend. Between 1896 and 1898, he published a series of articles in *Die Neue Zeit* that increasingly challenged Marxist principles, sparking a long and intense debate.

Upon entering the German labor movement, Rosa Luxemburg immediately took a stand in defense of Marxism. With remarkable brilliance and vigor, she addressed the rising threat of reformism in her booklet *Social Reform or Social Revolution*. Shortly thereafter, in 1899, the French Socialist Millerand joined a coalition government with a capitalist party. Luxemburg scrutinized this development closely, analyzing it in a series of insightful articles that examined both the French labor movement and the implications of coalition governments.

The lessons drawn by Luxemburg from these experiences have proven relevant beyond their historical context, as demonstrated by the later failures of MacDonald in Britain, the Weimar Republic in Germany, the Popular Front in France during the 1930s, and post-World War II coalition governments in France.

In 1903-04, Luxemburg engaged in a polemic with Lenin, expressing her disagreements on the national question, party structure, and the relationship between the party and mass activity. In 1904, after criticizing the Kaiser, she was sentenced to three months in prison, serving one month before her release.

When the first Russian Revolution broke out in 1905, Luxemburg wrote a series of articles and pamphlets for the Polish party, developing the concept of permanent revolution—a theory also independently advanced by Trotsky but not widely accepted among Marxists at the time. Unlike the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks, who believed the Russian Revolution would be limited to a bourgeois democratic stage, Luxemburg argued that it would either progress to workers' power or end in complete defeat. Her slogan was the “revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat based on the peasantry.”

For Luxemburg, theorizing about revolution was not enough; her motto was “At the beginning was the deed.” Despite being in poor health, she smuggled herself into Russian Poland in December 1905, just as the revolution's peak had passed. Although the masses remained active, they were now cautious, and reactionary forces were gaining strength. Meetings were banned, but workers continued to gather in factories, and despite the suppression of workers' papers, Luxemburg's party paper continued to be published clandestinely.

On March 4, 1906, Luxemburg was arrested and detained for four months, initially in prison and later in a fortress. She was eventually released on medical grounds and due to her German nationality, but was expelled from the country.

#### **4.3.4 CRITIQUE OF REVISIONISM**

In her critique of revisionism and defense of orthodox Marxism, Rosa Luxemburg addressed the central issue of whether socialism could be achieved through gradual reforms or if revolutionary action was the only viable path. She firmly chose revolution over reform. Luxemburg accused social democrats of conflating reforms with revolutionary class struggle and of treating social reform as the ultimate goal, thereby deviating from the core principles of socialism.

She recognized the significance of Bernstein's views for their potential to shift away from revolutionary socialism but warned of their opportunistic nature. In her work *Social Reform or Revolution* (1899), she argued that if Bernstein's perspective were valid, socialism would lose its purpose. Luxemburg rejected Bernstein's revisionism on three main grounds: first, that trade unions were incapable of implementing structural changes; second, that social reforms alone did not empower workers to gain control of society; and third, that the capitalist class was reinforcing its dominance through tariff protection and militarism.

She believed that the ultimate goal should not merely be the conception of a future socialist state but the conquest of political power by the proletariat, which would give them a clear purpose in their struggle against capitalism. Luxemburg, like Sorel, saw the need for a myth to foster proletarian consciousness. While not opposed to reforms, she viewed them as tools for preparing the working class for revolution by providing practical experience and education on the necessity of overthrowing the capitalist state and liberating themselves from wage slavery.

Luxemburg was confident that daily reforms alone would not bring about socialism. She criticized Bernstein's equation of democracy with socialism, arguing that democracy was used by capitalists to obscure the true nature of mass exploitation. She aligned with Lenin's emphasis on spontaneity following the 1905 Russian Revolution, advocating for direct proletarian struggle against the capitalist state. Luxemburg also criticized the English trade unions for lacking the consciousness necessary to achieve socialism, asserting that their efforts to improve working-class conditions and pursue democratic reforms would only be genuinely socialistic if their ultimate aim was socialism.

In her 1913 work *The Accumulation of Capital*, Rosa Luxemburg examined the conditions for economic growth under capitalism. She argued that pure capitalism alone could not create the necessary conditions for its own development. Instead, capitalist production was sustained through expansion into non-capitalist

areas, a necessity driven by the accumulation of capital and the resulting lack of demand to absorb the increasing supply of goods. During the imperialist phase of capitalism, this issue was addressed by producing arms, which not only absorbed domestic capital but also opened new markets in the colonies. The role of state customs and tax policies was crucial in the economic development of capitalism, particularly during its imperialist phase.

Luxemburg criticized Marx for neglecting the historical conditions that influenced capital accumulation. She argued that while Marx analyzed the conditions leading to capitalism and focused on private accumulation, he overlooked the tension and international conflict arising from the relationship between capitalism and pre-capitalism. This tension contributed to a series of wars and social revolutions that initiated the decline of capitalism. Many thinkers, including Bukharin, Kautsky, and Lenin, rejected key arguments of Luxemburg's book and questioned the significance of the problems she raised. Marxists generally believed that capitalism would eventually be destroyed by its inherent contradictions, though predicting the exact circumstances of its collapse was challenging. Critics, particularly those from a Leninist perspective, were sceptical about the notion of an automatic collapse of capitalism, fearing it might lead to passivity within the proletariat and the party.

Ironically, the Keynesian revolution, which emphasized the role of insufficient purchasing power in capitalism's breakdown, later lent support to Luxemburg's thesis.

Luxemburg viewed trade unions as essential for safeguarding the working class's standard of living and protecting them from the inherent tendencies of capitalism, such as impoverishment and unemployment. However, her theoretical insights also led her to delineate the limitations of trade union struggle. She likened the efforts of trade unions to the labor of Sisyphus—a metaphor for repetitive and unrewarding work that is ultimately futile. Despite this, such efforts are crucial for workers to secure fair wages under current labour market conditions, to mitigate the capitalist wage law, and to weaken the adverse effects of economic development.

For trade unions to effectively transform into instruments for gradually reducing profits in favor of higher wages, certain social conditions would need to be met. These include halting the proletarianization of the middle classes and stopping the growth of the working class. Additionally, there would need to be a reversal of increasing labour productivity, effectively reverting to pre-capitalist conditions.

#### **4.3.5 PARTY AND SOCIALIST SOCIETY**

##### **4.3.5.1 Leninist Model of Party: Luxemburg's' critical assessment**

Luxemburg's critique of the Leninist party model centred on the concept of 'spontaneity.' For her, spontaneity was not about blind, unconsidered action but rather the organic, self-directed initiative of the masses, balanced with thoughtful leadership. She believed that a socialist revolution required a harmonious collaboration between revolutionary masses and leaders who supported, rather than imposed, their vision of political struggle. This approach emphasized a reciprocal relationship between mass spontaneity, intellectuals, and political leaders, similar to Gramsci's idea of integrating intellectuals into the proletarian struggle.

The 1905 Russian Revolution demonstrated to Luxemburg that mass strikes were an effective revolutionary tactic. However, Kautsky disagreed with her view that such disorganized strikes could provide greater insight to workers than prolonged, systematic efforts by parties and trade unions. Luxemburg was confident in the power of spontaneous worker uprisings and opposed the Leninist need for a vanguard party. She argued that a proletarian party should inspire revolutionary consciousness and desire for socialism without resorting to conspiratorial methods.

Luxemburg criticized Lenin's strong reliance on ultra-centralism, his dismissal of the working class's creative impulses, and his scepticism towards spontaneity. She feared that Lenin's future party would centralize control, dictating both to the party and the masses. Luxemburg advocated for the autonomy of the masses, valuing their spontaneity and right to make mistakes, believing that the errors of a revolutionary movement were far more valuable than the infallibility of a central committee. This critique formed the basis of her non-authoritarian, majoritarian socialism.

While she opposed Lenin's vanguard party model, she agreed with the idea that revolutionary consciousness could be brought to the workers' movement from outside. Luxemburg envisioned the party as the self-organizing proletariat, not merely organized by revolutionary functionaries. For her, Marxism was both a theory of historical processes and an expression of the emerging consciousness of the workers' movement. When this consciousness was fully realized, theory and practice would merge, with theory becoming an integral part of the revolutionary struggle.

#### **4.3.5.2 Party and Class**

Rosa Luxemburg has been accused of endorsing mechanical materialism, a view suggesting that historical development is driven solely by objective economic forces independent of human will. However, this accusation is baseless. Luxemburg, like few other major Marxists, emphasized human activity as a crucial determinant of historical outcomes. She argued that while individuals do not create history entirely of their own volition, they do shape their own historical trajectory. The proletariat's actions are influenced by the current state of social development, but social progress is not separate from the proletariat; rather, the proletariat both influences and is shaped by this development. While historical progress cannot be skipped, it can be accelerated or delayed by human actions. Luxemburg believed that the triumph of the socialist proletariat would result from strict historical laws and a series of laborious steps, but it would only be realized if the material conditions created by history are ignited by the conscious willpower of the masses. In line with Marx and Engels, Luxemburg held that a conscious understanding of socialism by the working class is essential for its realization, stating, "Without the conscious will and the conscious action of the majority of the proletariat there can be no Socialism."

In the program of the Communist Party of Germany (Spartacus), drafted by Luxemburg, it is stated that the Spartacus League does not seek to wield power over the working class or through it. Instead, the League represents the segment of the working class most committed to its cause, guiding the broader labor movement toward its historical role. At each stage of the revolution, it embodies the ultimate socialist goal and the interests of the proletarian world revolution. The Spartacus League will only assume governmental authority through the clear and unambiguous will of the German working class and their alignment with the League's views, goals, and strategies. The proletarian revolution will achieve clarity and maturity through a gradual process of struggle, experience, and both defeats and victories. The success of the Spartacus League aligns with the broader victory of the socialist proletariat. Although the working class must be aware of socialism's aims and methods, a revolutionary party is necessary to guide it. Within each sector of the workforce, more advanced workers—those with greater experience and independence from capitalist influence—must organize into a revolutionary party to lead and influence their less advanced counterparts.

Rosa Luxemburg asserted that "this mass movement of the proletariat needs the guidance of an organized and principled force." The revolutionary party, while aware of its leadership role, must avoid the error of believing it alone holds all correct ideas and actions, while viewing the working class as a passive entity without initiative. Social Democracy has significantly enhanced the class struggle by introducing a higher level of consciousness, clarifying its objectives, and establishing a permanent mass workers' organization,

which has strengthened the class struggle. However, it would be a grave mistake to assume that historical initiative now rests solely with the Social Democratic organization and that the unorganized masses have become irrelevant. On the contrary, the popular masses remain the dynamic force in world history, even with Social Democracy's presence. For Social Democracy to demonstrate its ability to achieve significant historical outcomes, there must be a vital connection between the organized core and the masses, with a shared rhythm and energy propelling both forward.

The party, therefore, should not fabricate tactics out of thin air but rather prioritize learning from the experiences of the mass movement and then generalizing from those experiences. Historical events in the working-class struggle have confirmed this approach beyond any doubt. For instance, the workers of Paris in 1871 created a new form of state—a state without a standing army or bureaucracy, where all officials were paid the average worker's wage and could be recalled—before Marx had developed his ideas on the nature and structure of a workers' state. Similarly, in 1905, the workers of Petrograd established a Soviet (workers' council) independently of the Bolshevik Party, even opposing local Bolshevik leadership and facing suspicion from Lenin himself. This historical evidence supports Rosa Luxemburg's assertion in 1904 that the tactics of Social Democracy are not "invented" but emerge from a continuous series of significant creative acts of class struggle. The workers learn not through lectures and pamphlets but through their own activity, as Luxemburg argued against Kautsky and others. She believed that the real education of the proletarian masses occurs through their own actions, not through didactic teaching. Luxemburg concluded that "the mistakes made by a genuine revolutionary labor movement are far more historically valuable than the infallibility of even the best Central Committee." While she placed great emphasis on the creative power of the working class, she may have underestimated the potential harm a conservative organization could inflict on the mass struggle. Luxemburg believed that a powerful mass upsurge would ultimately overcome conservative leadership without significantly harming the movement. In 1906, she wrote that if Germany were to experience significant political struggles, they would be accompanied by major economic struggles. The course of events would not pause to seek approval from union leaders; if those leaders opposed the movement or stood aside, they would be swept away by the tide of events, and both economic and political struggles would continue to their conclusion without them. This theme was one that Luxemburg reiterated repeatedly.

To grasp why Rosa Luxemburg might have underestimated the role of organization and overemphasized spontaneity, it's important to consider the context in which she operated. Luxemburg was battling against the opportunistic leadership of the German Social Democratic Party, which disproportionately emphasized organization and downplayed the role of mass spontaneity. Even when the possibility of a mass strike was acknowledged, the reformist leadership insisted that the conditions and timing—such as when union funds were sufficient—should be determined solely by the party and trade union leaders. They also decided the aims of such strikes, which, according to figures like Bebel, Kautsky, Hilferding, and Bernstein, were to secure reforms like the franchise or to defend parliamentary interests. This leadership doctrine dictated that workers should act only under the orders of the party and its leaders. Luxemburg's opposition to this top-down approach led her to emphasize spontaneity, possibly to an exaggerated degree.

Additionally, Luxemburg faced challenges from the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), a chauvinistic group focused on Polish national independence. The PPS lacked mass social support, with landlords and bourgeoisie detached from the national struggle, and the Polish working class, viewing Russian workers as allies, had little interest in fighting for a national state. In this context, the PPS resorted to adventurist tactics like organizing terrorist groups, prioritizing party-led actions over broader social processes. Luxemburg's critique here also highlighted the importance of spontaneity in contrast to the PPS's focus on leadership decisions.

The other significant challenge Rosa Luxemburg faced was syndicalism, a blend of anarchism (minus its individualism but with an exaggerated focus on organization) and trade unionism. Syndicalism's main base was in France, where it took root in a context of industrial stagnation and fragmentation. The movement gained momentum following the French labor movement's defeats in 1848 and 1871 and the perceived betrayal by Millerand and the Jaurès party, leading to worker distrust of political activities and organizations. Syndicalism equated the general strike with social revolution, rather than viewing it as just one crucial element of the modern revolutionary process. It posited that a general strike could be initiated by decree, leading directly to the overthrow of bourgeois rule. This approach oversimplified the revolutionary process, assuming that the voluntary actions of leaders could alone spark decisive change. In contrast, German reformists, while rejecting this voluntarism, dismissed the concept of mass strikes and revolutions altogether. Thus, while Luxemburg opposed the German form of voluntarism, she also contended with the French syndicalist approach, which she saw as a bureaucratic denial of workers' initiative and self-organization.

Luxemburg's tendency to overemphasize spontaneity and undervalue organization stemmed from her immediate struggle against reformism, where she highlighted spontaneity as a crucial initial factor in revolutions. She extrapolated this emphasis from specific instances to the broader revolutionary process. Indeed, revolutions often begin with spontaneous acts rather than organized efforts. For example, the French Revolution of July 14, 1789, started with the storming of the Bastille, an action that was neither orchestrated by a party nor led by future Jacobin leaders like Robespierre, who had not yet formed an organized opposition to the monarchy. Similarly, the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and February 1917 also began as spontaneous mass actions.

The 1905 Revolution began with a violent confrontation between the Tsar's army and police and a mass of workers, including men, women, and children, led by the priest Gapon, who was actually a Tsarist provocateur. In this instance, the workers were not guided by a cohesive leadership with a defined socialist agenda. They approached the Tsar, their "little Father," pleading for relief from their oppressors, marking the initial phase of a significant revolution. Twelve years later, in February 1917, the masses, now more experienced and including a larger number of socialists, rose again in a spontaneous uprising. However, once a revolution is sparked by such spontaneity, its progress often depends on different factors.

In France, the shift from a semi-republican government to a revolutionary one, which completely dismantled feudal property relations, was not achieved by unorganized masses alone. It required the decisive leadership of the Jacobin party. Without the Jacobins' guidance, the critical battle against the Girondists would have been unfeasible. While the people of Paris could rise against the king spontaneously, their lack of historical experience and knowledge made them unable to distinguish between revolutionary and compromise elements after only a few years of upheaval. The situation demanded a thorough fight against the party of compromise, and the Jacobin party provided the essential leadership, meticulously organizing the overthrow of the Gironde on August 10, 1792.

Similarly, the October Revolution was not a mere spontaneous act but was carefully orchestrated by the Bolsheviks, including the timing and other key details. Throughout the revolutionary period between February and October, events such as the June demonstration, the July Days, and the suppression of Kornilov's coup brought the workers and soldiers increasingly under Bolshevik influence and guidance. This leadership was crucial in advancing the revolution from its early stages to final victory.

While acknowledging that Rosa Luxemburg may have underestimated the role of such a party, it is important to recognize her significant historical contribution. In an era dominated by reformism, she highlighted the crucial power of workers' spontaneity as a force capable of breaking through conservative barriers. Her

enduring strength lay in her unwavering faith in the historical initiative of the working class.

Rosa Luxemburg's opposition to leaving the mass workers' party did not indicate any concession to reformism. At a Spartacus conference on January 7, 1917, her resolution was passed, stating that "The Opposition remains within the Party to counter and challenge the majority's policies at every step, to protect the masses from an imperialist agenda disguised as Social Democracy, and to utilize the Party as a base for the proletarian, anti-militarist class struggle." Luxemburg's hesitation to form an independent revolutionary party reflected her slow response to changing circumstances, which was a significant factor in the delayed establishment of a revolutionary party in Germany.

However, she was not alone in this regard. Luxemburg had actually assessed Kautsky and his followers more clearly and distanced herself from them long before Lenin did. For nearly two decades, Lenin considered Kautsky the foremost Marxist thinker. In 1910, during Luxemburg's debate with Kautsky over the path to power, Lenin sided with Kautsky against her. As late as February 1914, Lenin cited Kautsky as a Marxist authority in his disagreement with Luxemburg on the national question. It was only with the outbreak of World War I and Kautsky's betrayal of internationalism that Lenin's faith in him was shattered. At that point, Lenin recognized that Luxemburg had been right all along; she had understood that Kautsky was merely a time-serving theorist who served the majority of the Party and, ultimately, opportunism.

The form of organization in the socialist workers' movement, at every stage of the struggle for power, significantly shapes the development of workers' power itself. Thus, discussions about the organizational structure of the revolutionary party have implications that extend beyond the immediate application of a particular organizational model. In no country did these debates become as intense as in the Russian labor movement. This was largely due to the vast gap between the movement's ultimate goals and the autocratic, semi-feudal reality in which it emerged, which hindered the free organization of workers.

Rosa Luxemburg's views on the balance between spontaneity and organization reflected the immediate challenges faced by revolutionaries in a labour movement dominated by a conservative bureaucracy. In contrast, Lenin's early position (circa 1902-04) mirrored the fluidity of a dynamic, revolutionary movement in its initial stages under a backward, semi-feudal, and autocratic regime. Despite the historical context shaping Luxemburg's thoughts on organization, her perspectives revealed significant weaknesses during the German Revolution of 1918-19.

#### **4.3.5.3 Luxemburg's Socialist Ideas.**

The Russian Revolution of 1905 gave concrete form to Rosa Luxemburg's earlier idea that mass strikes—both political and economic—are a crucial element in the workers' struggle for power, setting socialism apart from earlier revolutions. Building on this new historical experience, she elaborated on her idea in public meetings, leading to accusations of 'inciting to violence' and resulting in a two-month prison sentence in Germany.

In 1907, Rosa Luxemburg attended the Congress of the Socialist International in Stuttgart, representing the Russian and Polish parties and articulating a consistent revolutionary stance on imperialist war and militarism. During the period between 1905 and 1910, the divide between Luxemburg and the centrist leadership of the SPD, with Kautsky as its theoretical spokesperson, deepened.

By 1907, Luxemburg had already voiced concerns that despite their professed Marxism, party leaders might shy away from decisive action when needed. The conflict reached its peak in 1910 with a complete rupture between Luxemburg and Karl Kautsky over the workers' path to power. Consequently, the SPD split into three distinct factions: the reformists, who increasingly adopted an imperialist policy; the so-called Marxist

center, led by Kautsky, whom Luxemburg criticized as the 'leader of the swamp' for its verbal radicalism and reliance on parliamentary methods; and the revolutionary wing, inspired chiefly by Rosa Luxemburg.

In 1913, Rosa Luxemburg published her seminal theoretical work, *The Accumulation of Capital: A Contribution to the Economic Explanation of Imperialism*. This book is considered one of the most original contributions to Marxist economic theory since Marx's *Capital*. Renowned for its extensive knowledge, brilliant writing, analytical depth, and intellectual independence, it has been described by Mehring (Marx's biographer) as the closest work to *Capital* within Marxist literature. The book addresses a crucial theoretical and political issue: the impact of extending capitalism into new, less developed regions on the internal contradictions of capitalism and the stability of the system.

On February 20, 1914, Luxemburg was arrested on charges of inciting soldiers to mutiny. The accusation stemmed from a speech where she declared, "If they expect us to murder our French or other foreign brothers, then let us tell them, 'No, under no circumstances.'" In court, she shifted from being a defendant to a prosecutor, and her subsequent speech, later published as *Militarism, War and the Working Class*, stands as a powerful revolutionary socialist critique of imperialism. She was sentenced to a year in prison but was not immediately detained. After leaving the courtroom, she went straight to a mass meeting where she reiterated her anti-war stance.

When World War I erupted, most leaders of the Socialist Party (SPD) were swept up by patriotic fervor. On August 3, 1914, the SPD parliamentary group decided to support war credits for the Kaiser's government. Of the 111 deputies, only 15 initially wished to vote against. When their request to do so was denied, they conformed to party discipline, and on August 4, the entire SPD group voted in favor of the credits. A few months later, on December 2, Karl Liebknecht defied party discipline to cast the lone vote against the war credits. This betrayal by the party leadership was a severe blow to Luxemburg. Nevertheless, she did not succumb to despair. On August 4, the same day the SPD deputies aligned with the Kaiser, a small group of socialists gathered at her apartment to organize resistance against the war. This group, led by Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, Franz Mehring, and Clara Zetkin, eventually formed the *Spartacus League*. Over the next four years, largely from prison, Luxemburg continued to lead, inspire, and organize revolutionaries, maintaining the banner of international socialism. Although the war isolated her from the Polish labor movement, her Polish party remained steadfast in its commitment to international socialist ideals.

The February 1917 Russian Revolution was a direct realization of Rosa Luxemburg's policy of revolutionary opposition to the war and the push to overthrow imperialist governments. From prison, she followed the events closely, analyzing them to draw lessons for future struggles. She viewed the February victory not as the end but as the beginning of the struggle, emphasizing that only workers' power could ensure peace. She repeatedly urged German workers and soldiers to follow the example of their Russian counterparts, overthrowing the Junkers and capitalists to both support the Russian Revolution and prevent their own countries from suffering under capitalist oppression. When the October Revolution erupted, Luxemburg welcomed it with enthusiasm, offering high praise while also cautioning against uncritical acceptance of Bolshevik actions. She anticipated that isolation would lead to several distortions in the revolution's development, particularly regarding democracy.

On 8 November 1918, the German Revolution released Luxemburg from prison. She plunged into the revolutionary efforts with fervor. Unfortunately, the forces of reaction were formidable, with right-wing Social Democratic leaders and former Kaiser's generals joining forces to suppress the revolutionary working class. Thousands of workers were killed; Karl Liebknecht was murdered on 15 January 1919, and the same day, Rosa Luxemburg was struck on the head by a soldier's rifle butt. Her death marked a profound loss for

the international workers' movement. As Mehring described, the movement lost "the finest brain among the scientific successors of Marx and Engels."

#### 4.3.5.4 Review of Bolshevism

Luxemburg's criticism of the Bolshevik regime was fundamentally rooted in her belief that the workers' movement should not be manipulated or constrained by the tactical decisions of party leaders. While she acknowledged the Bolshevik revolution as a major outcome of the First World War, her critique was framed by her deep-seated Marxist principles and her belief in the spontaneity of the masses, as articulated in her posthumously published work, *The Russian Revolution* (1922). Luxemburg opposed the arguments of Kautsky and the Mensheviks, who advocated for a coalition with liberals and bourgeois elements due to Russia's economic backwardness. Instead, she aligned with Lenin and Trotsky's view that the party should seize power when politically possible. She also challenged the social democratic principle of first securing a majority before considering power; she believed that revolutionary tactics should be employed to achieve a majority, rather than the other way around.

Luxemburg firmly argued that once in power, the party could not sustain itself through terror or by dismissing all forms of political freedom and representation. She viewed the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly as a critical turning point in the Russian revolution. Lenin and Trotsky's decision to abolish general elections and base their authority solely on the soviets, while dismissing the Constituent Assembly as reactionary and unnecessary, was a major issue for her. Luxemburg criticized Lenin not for neglecting rank-and-file democracy but for relying exclusively on council democracy and eliminating representative democracy entirely. She contended that while democratic institutions might be imperfect, their abolition would undermine and ultimately destroy public life. The restrictions on the press, suffrage, and assembly turned the rule of the masses into a mockery, in her view.

Socialism could not be established through administrative decrees alone; it required a dynamic historical movement. Without proper public control, governance would fall into the hands of a small clique of officials, leading to inevitable political corruption. Socialism demands a transformation of the masses' spirit, which cannot be achieved through terrorism. There must be a flourishing of democracy, including free public opinion, elections, press freedom, and the right to assemble and form associations. Without these elements, bureaucracy would become entrenched, and the soviets, which are meant to represent the working class, would become increasingly ineffective and eventually powerless. The dictatorship of the proletariat would be replaced by the dictatorship of a clique. Luxemburg argued that a fundamental error in Lenin's and Trotsky's theories, as well as Kautsky's, was the notion that democracy and dictatorship were mutually exclusive. Kautsky had supported bourgeois democracy while the Bolsheviks opted for the dictatorship of a small group. The proletariat, according to Luxemburg, should exercise its dictatorship as a class, not as a party or a clique.

Luxemburg acknowledged that the Bolsheviks came to power under conditions where full democracy was unfeasible. However, once in power, they turned this necessity into a universal principle by imposing their tactics on the entire workers' movement, making an exceptional situation a standard rule. While the Bolsheviks deserved credit for seizing power in Russia, the socialist cause was a global issue, not confined to a single country. The proletariat must not only define the goals and direction of the revolution with clarity but must also actively nurture socialism into existence through its own efforts. The essence of a socialist society lies in the working masses ceasing to be merely ruled and instead living and managing their own political and economic life with conscious, free self-determination. This requires replacing the outdated institutions of bourgeois rule—such as federal councils, parliaments, and municipal councils—with their own class-based

organs, like workers' and soldiers' councils. The proletariat must staff and oversee all positions, ensuring that all state functions align with their class interests and the goals of socialism. Only through constant, active engagement between the masses and the state can the socialist spirit be infused throughout.

The issue raised concerned the extent of democratic rights and freedoms within the dictatorship of the proletariat. Luxemburg viewed proletarian dictatorship as a more direct and expansive form of democracy, encompassing comprehensive democratic procedures and liberties such as elections, freedom of the press, freedom of opinion, and the right to assemble. She criticized the Bolshevik policy of redistributing large landholdings among peasants, arguing that it created a new class of landowners who would become enemies of socialism. Luxemburg also disapproved of the Bolsheviks' approach to nationalities, an area where Marxism had yet to provide a definitive solution. She saw the oppression of one nation by another as a consequence of capitalism and believed that a socialist revolution would resolve it by ending all forms of oppression. Until then, she argued, advocating for national independence would undermine the revolutionary cause and damage international worker solidarity. Luxemburg contended that national movements typically served the interests of particular classes. Since no class could represent the national cause on an economic basis, she felt that such movements were ultimately futile. Even on this issue, she remained disconnected from social realities. As a committed Marxist, she held the social democrats responsible for the rise of nationalism in 1914 and the subsequent collapse of the International. She did not support Polish independence or the broader right of nations to self-determination.

### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 1**

**NOTE:** Use the space given below for your answers. Use separate sheet if space is not sufficient.

1. Which strand of Bolshevism did Rosa Luxemburg subscribe to?

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2. Luxemburg diverged from Leninist orthodoxy on which key matter?

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3. Which socialist thinker did Luxemburg criticize in her book *Social Reform or Revolution*?

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### **4.3.5.5 Visualization of a Socialist Society**

In "What Does the Spartacus League Want?", Luxemburg proposed several measures to safeguard the socialist revolution, including the disarmament of the entire police force and all members, confiscation of weapons and ammunition, the formation of a workers' militia, the abolition of command authority for officers and non-commissioned officers, and the removal of officials from soldiers' councils. She advocated for replacing all political organs with workers' and soldiers' councils, establishing a revolutionary tribunal to prosecute war criminals, and the immediate confiscation of foodstuffs.

Her political and social measures encompassed the abolition of all principalities, the establishment of a United German Socialist Republic, and the elimination of parliaments and municipal councils in favour of workers' and soldiers' councils. She proposed electing workers' councils by the entire adult population, electing delegates to a central council of workers' and soldiers' councils, and having this central council elect an executive council with broad legislative and executive powers. This structure was designed to ensure constant oversight of the executive council and strong identification between the masses and the highest governmental organ. Additionally, she advocated for the right of immediate recall by local councils, the power of the executive council to appoint and dismiss officials, the abolition of rank distinctions and titles, and complete legal and social equality of the sexes.

Miliband notes that Luxemburg's proposed council structure addressed both direction and democracy by creating an executive council with significant powers, representing the dictatorship of the proletariat but not fully embodying it. The key difference between Lenin and Luxemburg lay in their views on the organization and role of the workers' party: Lenin believed in instilling class-consciousness from outside, while Luxemburg emphasized the spontaneous and creative emergence of consciousness from within.

#### **4.3.5.6 Socialist Democracy**

Like many socialists of her time, Luxemburg, following Marx, avoided systematic speculation about a post-capitalist society. She believed that the task of building socialism belonged to the workers themselves and viewed creating hypothetical blueprints of the future as a futile endeavor. Consequently, much of her writing focuses on analyzing and critiquing capitalist society. In earlier works like *Introduction to Political Economy* and *The Accumulation of Capital*, when she defines socialism, it primarily involves the abolition of private property and transitioning from capitalist to socialist production. This transition includes establishing a planned economy with social ownership of productive assets. She envisioned production being managed by a central democratic committee to meet human needs, rather than leaving investment decisions to private hands, which leads to the "anarchy of the market." She noted that capitalism is characterized by "the disappearance of any kind of authority in economic life, any organization and planning in labor, any kind of connection between the individual members."

The Russian Revolution and the subsequent rise of revolutionary activity across Europe heightened the need for a more detailed vision of the society socialists aimed to build. From 1917 onward, Luxemburg expanded her ideas on the norms and institutions necessary for transitioning to a socialist society. She moved beyond the simplistic view that capitalism equates to anarchy while socialism equals a planned economy, emphasizing instead that socialism demands a "fundamental transformation of the entire economic relations."

For Luxemburg, socialist democracy was not about abolishing or transcending democracy but about extending democratic principles throughout society, including major social institutions currently governed by non-democratic structures. Among socialist theorists of her time who supported mass socialist parties, Luxemburg was the most vocal about the democratic nature of socialism's goals. Although her views bore similarities to Karl Kautsky's advocacy for democracy and socialism, Luxemburg offered more explicit proposals for democratizing social institutions and fostering a vibrant public sphere and active citizenry.

She criticized the Bolsheviks for dismissing bourgeois democracy as a mere façade that could be discarded in the pursuit of socialism. She also took issue with Trotsky's dismissal of formal democracy. Luxemburg argued that creating a socialist democracy involved replacing bourgeois democracy rather than eliminating democracy entirely. Her concept of socialist democracy was based on "the active participation of the masses," extending democratic principles from the political realm to foster a participatory society. She believed that building socialism required more than just abolishing private property; it demanded comprehensive changes

at the level of individual factories, workshops, and other production sites. Luxemburg asserted that transforming productive assets into “the common property of the people” was merely the “first duty of a workers’ government,” with the real challenge lying in the “reconstruction of the economy on a completely new basis.”

Three key aspects of this shift are particularly noteworthy: the expansion of democratic principles to non-democratic authority structures; the transformation of labor; and the cultural shift in everyday practices and mentalities that Luxemburg believed were necessary for establishing a socialist democracy.

Firstly, Luxemburg envisioned democratizing not just the state but also extending democratic principles to other social institutions. She concurred with Marx that the political revolutions of the 18th century were only partially completed. While these revolutions succeeded in establishing executive and legislative powers through elections and universal suffrage, they fell short in transforming other significant institutions where power imbalances persisted. Luxemburg argued that institutions such as corporations, economic regulatory bodies, schools, universities, the media, cultural institutions, the civil service, and political parties needed further democratization.

The immediate demands of the Spartacus League during the German Revolution also encompassed the army, food, housing, health, education systems, municipal councils, police forces, banks, mines, smelters, large industrial and commercial enterprises, and public transportation systems. In her article “The Socialization of Society,” Luxemburg emphasized large-scale industry and agriculture as crucial areas for socialization. She considered small-scale farming and crafts less critical for immediate socialization efforts, believing that these would eventually recognize the benefits of socialism over private property and join the movement voluntarily.

Luxemburg understood that a socialist society necessitated a more profound transformation than mere top-down nationalization and rational economic planning. Her primary concern was with the institutions that played a key role in sustaining and reproducing public life. Just as democratic norms in the political sphere conferred legitimacy, Luxemburg believed that the same principles needed to be applied to economic and social life. She argued that the entire populace should participate in these social institutions.

For Luxemburg, democratizing authority structures was essential for allowing citizens to engage more actively in a self-determining society. She envisioned socialism as a means for individuals to overcome the alienation of capitalist society and regain control over social institutions through public involvement and control.

She also contended that implementing workplace democracy at the level of individual firms would transform the organization of labor. Without the threat of poverty and destitution, people would be motivated to work for the common good.

In her view, a socialist society would require reorganizing factories, workplaces, and agricultural enterprises with a new perspective. She emphasized that in such a society, the health and enthusiasm of the workforce should be prioritized. This would include shorter working hours, healthy work environments, recuperation methods, and diverse tasks to ensure enjoyment and engagement in work. Work should be structured to foster learning, growth, and initiative, with technical managers remaining but subordinate to democratic decision-making processes. Luxemburg advocated for a new sense of self-organization and discipline among workers, replacing the coercion of capitalist labor with inner self-discipline, intellectual maturity, moral commitment, dignity, and a complete inner transformation of the proletariat.

Luxemburg also recognized the need for broader cultural shifts to support the establishment of new forms of

life beyond mere changes in economic institutions. She believed that a socialist society required a shift away from the egoism and competition prevalent in capitalist culture towards an ethos of solidarity and communal spirit. For her, socialism demanded a profound spiritual transformation of the masses, who had been shaped by centuries of bourgeois rule.

In her later writings, Luxemburg underscored the necessity for widespread changes in people's established behaviors to ensure that economic reforms were supported by new social norms. She argued that revolutionary transformation required a new set of moral principles to accompany changes in the production system. She believed that the working class's emancipation depended on their mental and spiritual growth.

Luxemburg maintained that the revolutionary transformation of society had to align with the future goals of socialism. Workers needed to embody socialist principles in their actions as they transformed society, ensuring that socialism emerged through the conscious support and collective efforts of the majority. She asserted that "socialism will not and cannot be created by any government, however socialistic. Socialism must be created by the masses, by every proletarian. Only that is socialism, and only thus can socialism be created."

Luxemburg viewed democracy as a product of historical processes rather than a fundamental law of historical development, contrary to Bernstein's perspective. She dismissed democracy as superficial and a mere reflection of a specific historical stage since 1870. Luxemburg did not see an inherent link between capitalism and democracy. Unlike the reformists, she believed that parliamentarianism was in decline, serving primarily as a form of bourgeois class rule that persisted only as long as the bourgeoisie was in conflict with feudal elements.

While she acknowledged that parliamentarism could be a powerful tool for socialist propaganda and increasing the influence of socialist ideas, she argued that it should go beyond mere agitation to engage in meaningful legislative work. To remain an effective opposition force, social democracy needed to derive its strength from the proletarian masses and abandon the illusion of empowering the capitalist state through parliamentary majoritarianism.

Luxemburg critiqued revisionism by pointing out that its philosophical foundation resembled that of bourgeois economics. She argued that Bernstein's approach aimed not at achieving socialism but at reforming capitalism, which was a fundamentally different goal. This distinction between reform and revolution was central to Luxemburg's critique of evolutionary socialism, highlighting how it diverged from both bourgeois democratic ideas and bourgeois radicalism. For Luxemburg, the revolutionary goal had to be integrated into social democratic activities, as ideals were inseparable from trade union struggles and the fight for social reforms and democratic rights. Without this integration, she believed, the socialist vision would remain unattainable.

Luxemburg was sceptical of the value of reforms in themselves and mistrusted any significant successes in workers' economic struggles. She saw the English working class as having compromised with capitalism due to temporary gains. In 1899, she criticized English workers for abandoning their class perspective. Although she, like Marx, did not clarify whether capitalism would be reformed first or destroyed through revolution, her theory of accumulation supported the latter view. Luxemburg believed in the spontaneous rise of revolutionary consciousness among the proletariat rather than relying on organized party action. Throughout her life, she remained committed to a majoritarian revolution driven by the masses, independent of an elite or party.

#### **4.3.5.7 The Institutions of a Socialist Democracy**

Luxemburg's views on socialist political institutions are not extensively developed, but her writings and speeches suggest her support for a robust institutional framework that includes a pluralist political system,

the rule of law, multi-party elections, and protections for civil liberties such as freedom of speech, assembly, and association. In her vision of socialist democracy, common ownership and control over economic institutions would be complemented by a parliament elected through universal suffrage, civil and political rights, a free press, and a coercive apparatus to enforce collective decisions. This perspective contrasts with claims that her writings lack a coherent vision of institutional politics or that her ideal political system resembles a council republic.

Luxemburg's emphasis on a vibrant public sphere with institutionalized spaces for disagreement and diversity sets her apart from many other socialist theorists. She advocated for the "replacement of all political organs and authorities of the former regime by delegates of the workers' and soldiers' councils," indicating a preference for workers' councils over traditional democratic representative institutions. However, her critical remarks about the German National Assembly should be understood in the context of the specific political struggles of her time. Luxemburg opposed what she perceived as the German Social Democrats' attempt to create a "counter-revolutionary stronghold" against the revolutionary proletariat. She criticized "bourgeois parliamentarism" as a form of government where class antagonisms and domination were not abolished but made overt.

Her opposition to bourgeois democracy was directed not at democratic structures such as parliaments, multi-party elections, and civil liberties per se, but at the class domination these institutions perpetuated while masking it with abstract rights. Thus, her conception of socialist democracy does not fundamentally reject these structures but critiques their function within capitalist regimes.

In the context of the Russian Revolution, Luxemburg's criticism of the Bolshevik decision to dissolve the Constituent Assembly underscores her commitment to universal suffrage and representative government. The Bolsheviks justified the dissolution by claiming that the Assembly no longer reflected the people's will, which they argued had shifted significantly since the elections. Luxemburg contended that this action severed the essential connection between elected representatives and their electorate, eliminating any ongoing interaction between the two. Instead of dissolving the Constituent Assembly in favor of party-controlled institutions, she believed the proper response was to ensure that representatives remained attuned to current public sentiment. The Bolshevik approach, in her view, exacerbated the issue by reducing democratic participation and tightening control by the party elite. Replacing the Constituent Assembly with Bolshevik-dominated councils, which purported to represent the working class, actually hindered democratic progress by decreasing citizen involvement and control over political institutions. For Luxemburg, addressing the oligarchic tendencies within democratic institutions required not their abandonment, but rather enhancing accountability through a mobilized citizenry that could exert pressure on representatives.

She argued that the strength and vitality of democratic institutions are best gauged by the extent to which citizens can influence and direct them through political pressure. Organized citizens, she believed, act as a vital counterbalance to elite and bureaucratic dominance. In her view, a dynamic democracy is characterized by "the living fluid of the popular mood continuously flowing around the representative bodies, penetrating them, and guiding them." Her focus on representation was not to criticize political representation itself but to propose evaluative criteria for assessing how well institutions fulfill their representative role. She posited that "the more democratic the institutions, the livelier and stronger the pulse-beat of the political life of the masses, the more direct and complete is their influence."

Luxemburg's vision for a political system is reflected in her draft program for the Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania. This program called for the immediate establishment of a Constituent Assembly elected by universal suffrage, with equal rights under the law and freedoms of assembly, press,

and speech. She also proposed proportional representation for minority groups in the Assembly and the creation of separate Assemblies for each country, with autonomy to use their own language and promote their own cultural and educational systems.

In this vision, a socialist democracy provides a robust institutional framework for democratic politics while instituting common ownership over productive assets and collective economic governance. Luxemburg believed that formal democracy would become a true democracy through the democratization and socialization of major social and economic institutions. This process of democratization and socialization should be organized within new democratic entities, free from party control. However, the extent of transformation required is significant; implementing the socialist aspect of socialism would involve a profound rupture with current capitalist social relations, leading to a complete social revolution. While some institutions of liberal democracy might persist, their role and function would be fundamentally altered by the socialization of society's material basis.

In summary, Luxemburg was fundamentally a Marxist, but she maintained a unique position as an independent thinker within the Marxist tradition. She advocated for a moral vision of social revolution, not just as the application of dialectical materialism, but as a means of human liberation and progress. Her central political concept was participation. According to Nettle, "Her guiding principle was not democracy, individual freedom, or spontaneity, but participation—friction leading to revolutionary energy, and in turn, to the maturation of class-consciousness and revolution."

Luxemburg's ideas and her personality positioned her as a proponent of spontaneous revolution. She viewed socialism as the inevitable outcome of human society, something that could not be imposed or decreed but was instead a manifestation of the proletarian masses' aspirations and hopes. She often reiterated two core Marxist beliefs: that the working class must achieve its own liberation and that the proletarian revolution would be drawn-out and difficult. Arendt observed that Luxemburg's concern was more about a distorted revolution than a failed one, which distinguished her from the Bolsheviks and Lenin. Luxemburg had anticipated the moral decline in the Soviet Union without foreseeing the extreme brutality that would later undermine the revolutionary cause. Her criticisms of Lenin and her insistence on the necessity of "the most unlimited, the broadest democracy and public opinion" for salvation proved prescient. Despite her critiques, she remained a constructive critic of Bolshevism.

Luxemburg's primary theoretical limitation was her inability to fully grasp, as Bernstein did, the significant transformations occurring within capitalism and the substantial potential of democracy as a tool for advancing the working class's cause. Despite her advocacy for spontaneity and fundamental civil and political liberties, she struggled to devise an institutional framework to ensure their protection. Her theory of spontaneity was largely validated by the rapid and unforeseen worker militancy in Tsarist Russia from 1905 to 1916. This is reflected in Lenin's shift; initially pessimistic about workers' revolutionary consciousness in 1902, he came to accept, to some extent, Luxemburg and Bukharin's perspectives by 1916, as evidenced by his limited mention of the Communist Party in *The State and Revolution*. However, with the rise of Stalin and his doctrine of socialism in one country, the internationalist and libertarian dimensions of Marxism—of which Luxemburg was a prominent advocate—were overshadowed.

## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 2

**NOTE:** Use the space given below for your answers. Use separate sheet if space is not sufficient.

1. Luxemburg criticized Karl Marx's theory of capitalism on what grounds?

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2. Which concept did Luxemburg deploy to criticize Lenin's party model and why?

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3. What instrument did Luxemburg consider to be crucial in the workers' struggle for power?

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#### 4.3.6 LET'S SUM-UP

Building on Rosa Luxemburg's critique of liberal democracy and her call for expanding democracy beyond the political realm, we can develop a concept of socialist democracy that integrates pluralism, civil liberties, and parliamentary structures with an economic system based on common ownership, social equality, and citizen control over decision-making. A close examination of Luxemburg's writings and speeches reveals a crucial distinction between her critique of bourgeois parliamentarism and a complete rejection of representative democracy. This distinction can be understood by contextualizing her support for transferring power to workers' and soldiers' councils within the historical context of the German Revolution and the counter-revolutionary actions of the German Social Democrats. This perspective allows for a new interpretation of Luxemburg's revolutionary socialism, highlighting her emphasis on empowering the entire citizenry through democratic institutions. It explores how the socialization of the economy and the democratization of institutions would weaken the capitalist elites that dominate liberal democracies, thereby hindering their ability to fully realize democratic ideals. Social ownership of the means of production would foster inclusion, collective will formation, and decision-making within both economic and social spheres, while also liberating the democratic state from the constraints imposed by capital, thereby broadening the scope of decisions citizens can make.

#### 4.3.7 EXERCISES

1. Discuss the vision of socialist society that Rose Luxemburg promoted.
2. What role did spontaneity play in Luxemburg's criticism of Lenin's conception of party?
3. Discuss Luxemburg's theory of capital accumulation with emphasis on its differences with Karl Marx's theory.
4. Examine the criticisms that Rosa Luxemburg levelled on parliamentary socialism?
5. Which socialist institutions did Luxemburg envision?

#### 4.3.8 SUGGESTED READINGS

Lee, George. "Rosa Luxemburg and the Impact of Imperialism." *The Economic Journal* (1971).

Vollrath, Ernst. "Rosa Luxemburg's Theory of Revolution." *Social Research* (1973).

Wolfe, Bertram D. "Rosa Luxemburg and V. I. Lenin: The Opposite Poles of Revolutionary Socialism." *The Antioch Review* (1961).

## **4.4 MAO: PEASANTRY, THEORY OF CONTRADICTIONS, REVOLUTIONARY STRATEGY**

**- Dr. Harjit Singh**

### **STRUCTURE**

#### **4.1.0 Objectives**

#### **4.1.1 Introduction**

#### **4.1.2 Mao's Theory of Contradictions**

#### **4.1.3 Revolutionary Strategies and People's Front**

#### **4.1.4 Let us sum Up**

#### **4.1.5 Exercises**

#### **4.1.6 Suggested Readings**

#### **4.4.0 OBJECTIVES**

**After going through this lesson, you will be able to know:**

- Mao's views on peasantry;
- Mao's theory of Contradictions;
- Mao's revolutionary strategies;
- Mao's tactics and his theory of state.

#### **4.4.1 INTRODUCTION**

Mao Tse-Tung, who wielded total control over China's political landscape from 1949 to 1975, was often celebrated as the "father of the nation," a leading Marxist theorist, and a beacon for the oppressed worldwide. His nationalist movement in China was directed against both the Manchu rulers and Western imperialism. Building on existing Chinese nationalism, Mao sought to establish a Marxist-Leninist framework. While consistently reaffirming his commitment to Marxism and Leninism, he adapted these principles to address Chinese issues and guide the country towards victory. Mao successfully applied Marxist and Leninist theories to interpret Chinese history and practical problems, a pioneering achievement according to Wayper, who noted that Mao replaced Confucian orthodoxy with Marxist orthodoxy in China, aiming to reassert China's historical role as the "middle kingdom" despite conflicts with the USSR.

Born on December 26, 1893, in Shao Shan, Hunan Province, China, Mao Tse-Tung emerged as a powerful Chinese leader and statesman. His father, a small landowner and trader, was known for his harsh and domineering nature. At eight, Mao began formal education with a village teacher while continuing farm work. He completed his primary and secondary education in Changsha. Mao served in Sun Yat-sen's revolutionary army from 1911 to 1912 and later resumed his studies at the Normal School in Hunan, where he earned a degree in philosophy in 1918. That same year, he began working as an assistant in the Peking University Library, where he encountered the Communist Manifesto for the first time. By 1920, Mao had

become a committed Marxist. He participated in the founding assembly of the Chinese Communist Party in 1921 and led the Hunan Autumn Revolt in 1927. In 1934, he directed the 3,000-mile Long March from Jiangxi to Shaanxi, during which he lost his first wife. By 1935, Mao had secured control of the Communist Party. He later advocated for a united front with the Kuomintang against Japan, reorganizing the Red Army in 1937 to integrate with the Chinese national army. In 1945, Mao attempted to negotiate with Kuomintang leader Chiang Kai-shek with the help of the U.S. Ambassador to China, but these efforts were unsuccessful. Following the Allies' victory over Japan, Mao's forces resumed their fight against the nationalists. By 1949, under Mao's leadership, the Chinese Communist Party had succeeded in driving the nationalists to Taiwan. The Communists established their capital in Peking, and on October 1, 1949, Mao became Chairman of the Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China. In 1949, he visited Moscow and signed a mutual alliance treaty with the USSR. Mao served as Chairman of the People's Republic from 1949 to 1959 and remained China's undisputed leader until his death in 1975.

Mao wrote voluminously. His important works are

1. Red China (1934)
2. China and the Second Imperialist World War (1939)
3. China's New Democracy (1944)
4. On Coalition government (1945)
5. On Practice
6. On contradiction
7. The Present Position and Task Ahead
8. The People's Democratic Dictatorship (1949)
9. Mao's view on Peasantry

Mao Tse-Tung's role as a political thinker is subject to debate, but his doctrines hold significant historical and political importance as extensions of Marxist and Leninist thought. G.H. Sabine notes that while Lenin acknowledged the role of the peasantry in less industrialized societies, Mao elevated them to a central position in revolutionary strategy, suggesting that the peasantry could replace the proletariat as the revolution's vanguard—an idea considered heretical by some Marxists. Mao articulated this shift as early as March 1927 in his article "Report of an Investigation into the Peasant Movement in Hunan," where he posited that the vast number of poor peasants, making up 70% of the rural population, were crucial for overthrowing feudal forces and leading the revolution.

Mao's approach focused on mobilizing the peasantry rather than relying on the proletariat for his communist revolution in China. While communists had previously acknowledged the peasantry as an important revolutionary force, Mao was the first to demonstrate that they could lead the revolution. Unlike Marx, who viewed the peasantry as a property-oriented and conservative class, Mao believed in their revolutionary potential and emphasized their political mobilization. Mao was influenced by the peasant resistance movements he observed in Jiangsu and Zhejiang in 1926. He recognized the importance of the peasantry and used terms like "New Democratic Revolution" before 1949 and "People's Democratic Dictatorship" after assuming power.

Sabine highlights that Mao's focus on the peasantry, whether viewed as a deviation or an enlightened application of Marxist-Leninist thought, was rooted in the Chinese context. Mao's Selected Works emphasize that peasant uprisings were a driving force in China's historical development. Mao learned from past peasant

revolts, which had failed due to their lack of strong bases, and adapted his strategy to encircle cities from well-established rural bases.

Mao's strategy involved consolidating revolutionary bases in the countryside before advancing to urban areas. According to S.P. Verma, Mao's approach in areas like Jiangxi and Hunan included establishing Communist control, implementing land reforms, providing welfare, indoctrinating people in communist principles, and offering military training. This "Mao Tse-Tung line" proved successful and was applied in other regions like Yan'an and northern Shaanxi.

Mao preferred villages over cities for launching the revolution because he believed the cities were strongly controlled by imperialist and reactionary forces. By strengthening rural bases, Mao aimed to build advanced revolutionary strongholds capable of eventually overcoming the more powerful enemy entrenched in the cities. This strategy, given China's vast territory and the separation between rural and urban areas, was intended to set the stage for eventual revolutionary success from these rural strongholds.

#### **4.4.2 MAO'S THEORY OF CONTRADICTIONS**

Mao Tse-Tung is regarded as a major figure in Marxist political thought, having adapted Marxist philosophy to the Chinese context. Stuart R. remarks, "Mao Tse-Tung must be considered one of the most extraordinary and influential statesmen of modern times. As a poet, political philosopher, and strategist, known for his legendary 6,000-mile trek across China, Mao dedicated his life to China and its peasantry." Among Mao's notable contributions is his theory of contradictions. According to Sabine, "Mao is possibly the first Marxist theorist to extensively address the development of politics after Mao's revolution. Engels spoke broadly of the state withering away, and Lenin cited Engels to argue that under communism, personal governance would be replaced by the governance of things. Marxist theory often concludes with the resolution of all contradictions, as seen in the idea that class conflict drives history toward a classless society."

Mao, however, proposed an ongoing dialectical process. He explicitly described this as an open-ended, perpetually evolving process. Mao stated, "The development of the objective process is full of contradictions and conflicts, as is the development of human cognition. All dialectical movements of the external world eventually reflect in human knowledge. The processes of coming into being, development, and elimination in social practice and human knowledge are infinite." Mao also observed that "even long after the proletariat seizes power, class struggle continues as an objective law independent of human will, only differing in form from before." Mao believed that economic revolution alone was insufficient; it required comprehensive political and ideological revolution over time. He explained, "Our people's government is one that genuinely represents and serves the people, yet contradictions remain between the government and the masses, including issues between state interests, collective interests, and individual interests, as well as contradictions between democracy and centralism and bureaucratic practices."

Mao distinguished between antagonistic and non-antagonistic contradictions. "An antagonistic contradiction is one between revolutionaries (representing the people) and enemies of the people, while a non-antagonistic contradiction may exist among the people." Stalin had previously made similar distinctions between internal contradictions (within the working class) and external contradictions (between capitalist elements and proletarian dictatorship). Mao, however, argued that contradictions between the working class and the national bourgeoisie were non-antagonistic, existing within the people. He believed that contradictions within a communist society do not cease, necessitating the state's continued existence. Thus, the concept of the state "withering away" was itself dispelled by Mao's view.

In summary, Mao saw struggle and conflict as ongoing, even after the establishment of a communist society.

He believed that contradictions persist in post-revolutionary society, between progress and conservatism, advanced and backward elements, and productive forces and production conditions. Mao wrote in 1956, “Humanity is still in its youth. The road ahead will be much longer than the path already travelled. As old contradictions are resolved, new ones will arise. In addressing these contradictions, the state will need to expand its powers.”

C.L. Wayper explains Mao’s view of contradictions by noting that Maoism acknowledges persistent tensions, even under communism. Mao believed that the state would remain necessary to address these tensions, despite aiming to perfect society and humanity through revolutionary efforts. Although Mao sought to create a new type of man and society, his attempts, such as the Cultural Revolution, often led to significant costs and setbacks. Despite the challenges, Mao’s dialectics emphasize that contradictions are intrinsic to social processes and essential for progress. As Ashok Mehta observes, “For Mao, contradictions were not merely agents of change but the very essence of life, indicating that progress halts when struggle ends and that conditions of combat are required to transform social consciousness and create a new type of man.”

#### CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 1

**NOTE:** Use the space given below for your answers. Use separate sheet if space is not sufficient.

1. According to C.L. Wayper, Mao combined which two orthodoxies?

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2. Mao’s revolutionary strategy focused on which social group to effect revolution?

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3. Why did Mao emphasise villages over cities in his revolutionary programme?

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#### 4.4.3 REVOLUTIONARY STRATEGIES AND PEOPLES’ FRONT: CONCEPT OF NEW DEMOCRACY

In 1940, Mao Tse-Tung introduced the concept of ‘New Democracy’ through an 80-page book, marking one of the first significant communist writings by an author outside the Soviet Union. This work emerged during a period when China was struggling with issues of national unity and integrity. Mao’s ideas in ‘New Democracy,’ published in 1940, were later expanded in his writings on Coalition Government (1945), The Present Position and the Task Ahead (1947), and The People’s Democratic Dictatorship (1949). These ideas were shaped by the social and economic challenges faced by Chinese peasants, and Mao saw the Chinese revolution as part of the broader global revolutionary movement.

The central tenet of Mao’s New Democracy was that China should remain under this state form for a period before transitioning to a Soviet model. Unlike Western democracy, which Mao associated with capitalist rule, and Soviet democracy, which focused solely on workers’ rule, Mao’s New Democracy proposed a

‘third model’ where revolutionaries collectively governed. This model envisioned public ownership and state control over major industries and banks. New Democracy was designed to bridge the gap between capitalist and communist societies, creating a transitional period where the state would act as a revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat. This meant that the state would suppress exploiters and oppressors while advancing the interests of the majority.

Mao described New Democracy as consisting of two main elements: democracy for the people and dictatorship over reactionaries, forming what he called the people’s democratic dictatorship. He emphasized the need to strengthen state institutions, including the army, police, and courts, to safeguard national defense and protect the people’s interests. Under Communist Party leadership, Mao believed China could evolve from an agricultural society into an industrial one, and eventually into a socialist and communist society, eliminating classes and achieving universal harmony.

Mao’s definition of New Democracy was rooted in Leninist ideas of practical democracy. He outlined three stages to achieve Marxist goals in China:

1. Establishing Communist Party leadership and governance.
2. Implementing socialist policies through state mechanisms.
3. Adopting the Soviet model in Chinese society through socialist practices.

According to Mao, ‘People’s Democracy’ applied only to those classes deemed beneficial to society, while reactionary and unhealthy classes were to be suppressed. He clarified in his writings that benevolent policies did not extend to counter-revolutionary actions or individuals outside the people’s ranks. The people’s state was intended to educate and reform, eliminating domestic and foreign reactionary influences, and guiding towards socialism and eventually communism.

Mao argued that reactionary elements should be forced to work and subjected to rigorous educational efforts, similar to those imposed on captured soldiers. This was seen as a form of ‘benevolent policy,’ but it was coercively applied to enemy classes, distinct from the self-education promoted among revolutionaries.

Mao’s New Democracy was based on an alliance of the working class, peasantry, and urban petty bourgeoisie, with a focus on workers and peasants as the majority of China’s population. He stressed that democracy should be built from the people, granting freedoms only to them while maintaining dictatorship over reactionaries. The state apparatus—army, police, and judiciary—served as instruments of class oppression, necessary to suppress enemies of the people and maintain public order.

Culturally, Mao’s New Democracy embraced Marxist scientific methods and rejected traditional Chinese culture as incompatible with new socialist values. He advocated for the dismantling of old cultural elements and the establishment of a new national culture that integrated socialist and New Democracy aspects from other nations.

Mao opposed the commune system, criticizing it for disrupting family structures and social bonds. He also viewed religion as an opiate of the people, advocating for its eradication and the destruction of religious texts, monuments, and sites.

Mao imposed strict requirements on Communist Party members, emphasizing rigorous self-criticism and rectification campaigns to ensure discipline and loyalty. He believed in an uninterrupted revolution, using various tactics and campaigns to maintain high tension and promote constant reform.

Mao’s revolutionary tactics included guerrilla warfare principles such as retreating when the enemy advances, harassing when the enemy halts, attacking when the enemy tires, and pursuing when the enemy retreats. He

emphasized strategic planning and surprise, reflecting the Chinese adage that careful preparation ensures victory.

Overall, Mao's approach to New Democracy, revolution, and governance was marked by a combination of ideological commitment, strategic manoeuvrings, and practical adjustments to China's socio-political realities.

Regarding reactionary classes or groups, Mao asserted that if they refused to work, the people's state would compel them to do so. He also emphasized that the propaganda and educational efforts directed at these groups would be as meticulous and thorough as those applied to captured army officers. While this approach might be considered a form of 'benevolent policy,' it would be enforced compulsorily on those from enemy classes, differing fundamentally from the self-education encouraged among revolutionaries.

Mao defined the foundation of the people's democratic dictatorship as an alliance between the working class, peasantry, and urban petty bourgeoisie, with a primary focus on the workers and peasants, who constitute the majority of China's population. He argued that democracy must be constructed from within the ranks of the people, granting freedoms such as speech, assembly, and voting exclusively to them, while maintaining dictatorship over reactionaries. This combination of democracy for the people and dictatorship over reactionaries forms the people's democratic dictatorship. Strengthening the state apparatus—particularly the army, police, and judiciary—was crucial. These institutions serve as instruments of class oppression, with the state apparatus being used to suppress hostile classes and maintain public order. Mao emphasized that while dictatorship is necessary to control enemies of the people, it does not apply to the people themselves, who will be subject to legal penalties for law-breaking but not to oppressive measures.

Culturally, Mao's New Democracy embraced the scientific methods of Marx and Engels. He believed that New Democracy required a new culture to thrive. Mao described this culture as a "popular scientific culture of the broad masses," anti-feudal in nature, and integral to the New Democratic Republic. He envisioned this new national culture as one that, while retaining Chinese characteristics, would also integrate aspects of socialist and New Democratic cultures from other nations, contributing to a new world culture. Mao insisted on radical changes to China's old culture, which he felt was incompatible with New Democracy and the emerging socialist values. He argued that the struggle to replace old cultural elements with new ones was a life-or-death battle, essential for establishing and extending the new culture.

**Mao on Communes:** Mao was opposed to the commune system, arguing that it undermined the family unit. According to P.C. Gupta, Mao believed that communes disrupted family life by introducing mess halls for meals, separating children from their parents to place them in communal nurseries, and dividing husbands and wives during the day for labor in work brigades. Elderly individuals, who were traditionally respected and cared for, were sent to homes for the aged where they were expected to work as much as their health allowed. Additionally, peasants were required to dismantle family shrines and allow communes to cultivate grave sites. Mao saw these measures as contrary to traditional Chinese values, leading to significant disruption, generational tension, and widespread family unhappiness.

**Role of Religion in New Democracy:** Mao, like other communists, opposed religion, viewing it as an opiate for the masses. In his New Democracy, Mao stated, "Chinese communists may politically align with idealists and religious followers in an anti-imperialist front, but they cannot endorse their idealism or religious teachings." Mao believed religious leaders should be utilized to advance communist goals. He criticized Christianity for supporting capitalist structures and Confucianism for serving the ruling classes for centuries. Consequently, Mao ordered the burning of religious texts, the destruction of historical monuments, and the exhumation of graves of ancient Chinese figures like Confucius. Temples, pagodas, and mosques were also to be demolished.

**Role of Party Members in New Democracy:** Mao assigned a unique role to party members in his New Democracy. He required rigorous testing for admission to party organizations and insisted that members publicly acknowledge their own shortcomings and deviations from party principles. Senior members were tasked with identifying further flaws and deviations from Marxist ideals. This process involved intensive self-criticism, rectification campaigns, and a form of ideological “brainwashing” to ensure strict discipline and loyalty to Mao. Mao’s approach was designed to entrench his leadership by promoting a state of constant high tension alternated with periods of relaxation, creating a strategy of “uninterrupted revolution.”

Mao advocated for methods such as movements, campaigns, sudden announcements of counter-revolutionary crimes, and hate campaigns to maintain this state of high tension. His approach included economic plans, voluntary contributions of personal property, and actions against perceived enemies, including symbolic acts like killing flies, sparrows, rats, and other pests. Mao opposed colonialism and imperialism, viewing Western democracies as imperialistic and advocating for the liberation of colonies through violence and war. He sought to transform global politics into a series of revolutionary struggles, similar to those initiated in China. Mao also endorsed cooperation with the Kuomintang to combat Japanese imperialism and supported the spread of communist influence through guerrilla tactics. After gaining power, Mao argued that while the Russian Revolution served as a model for imperialist countries, the Chinese revolution offered a model for colonial and semi-colonial societies.

**Mao’s Differences with Soviet Leaders:** Mao had significant disagreements with Soviet Russia, particularly with Khrushchev, whose policies diverged more sharply from Mao’s than Stalin’s did. Mao clashed with Khrushchev over issues such as imperialism, nuclear warfare, and peaceful coexistence. While Khrushchev advocated for summit diplomacy and working through the U.N., and saw non-violence as a viable strategy for colonial liberation, Mao criticized these approaches as a revision of Leninism. In 1960, as Khrushchev pushed for peaceful coexistence and an international summit, Mao launched his own campaign, dubbed the “New Storm of Struggle,” targeting U.S. imperialism and condemning Khrushchev’s “soft and unprincipled” policies. Mao even labeled Khrushchev a foe of revolution, interpreting every disorder or conflict as evidence of Khrushchev’s flawed approach. Khrushchev had warned that local wars could escalate into a general nuclear conflict and advocated for peaceful coexistence to demonstrate the superiority of communism. Mao rejected this stance, denouncing Khrushchev as an enemy of communism and revolution, and dismissing him as a “paper tiger.” Meanwhile, Beijing became a focal point for radical political leaders from Latin America and Africa. Mao warmly welcomed and entertained these leaders, offering political support and advice on mobilizing and manipulating the masses, consistent with his slogan, “A single spark can start a prairie fire.”

**Mao’s Views on Nuclear War:** Mao was untroubled by the prospect of nuclear war, believing that Red China was unlikely to be the primary target. He argued that even if China were targeted, the destruction would be limited to major cities and around two to three hundred million people, with three to five hundred million Chinese surviving. Mao felt this surviving population would be sufficient for China to emerge as a leading power in the post-nuclear era. Conversely, he predicted that countries like the U.S., the U.S.S.R., and Britain would be severely weakened for decades, losing their dominant positions. Mao also believed that the least industrialized regions of Africa, Asia, and Latin America would suffer the least from nuclear fallout. He envisioned leading the non-white world with the support of China’s vast population.

Mao’s famous slogan, “Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun,” was articulated during a Central Committee plenary session on November 6, 1938, though it was not published at that time. He asserted that in a national war of resistance, it was essential to pursue military power. Mao emphasized that the party should control the gun, not the other way around. He believed that armed struggle was necessary for building the party’s organization, training cadres, and establishing schools, culture, and mass movements.

Mao maintained that only through armed struggle could the working class and the toiling masses defeat the bourgeoisie and landlords, and that the world could be reshaped only with the power of the gun.

Mao's doctrine significantly influenced communist parties globally, especially in underdeveloped and developing nations, leading to factional splits. His ideas also contributed to the rise of the Naxalite movement in India and militant communist factions in Africa. Mao's revolutionary strategies and slogans were central to his approach against the Kuomintang and the Japanese.

On the revolutionary and guerrilla tactics, Mao taught his followers the actual use of such like weapons and tactics, as:

“The enemy advances, we retreat

The enemy halts, we harass

The enemy tires, we attack

The enemy retreats, we pursue.”

Mao believed in the game of hide and seek and the principle of surprise, while dealing with the enemy i.e. the imperialistic class. Mao had full faith in the old Chinese saying, “A plan prepared in an army tent beforehand decides the victory to be won thousands of miles away.”

## CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 2

**NOTE:** Use the space given below for your answers. Use separate sheet if space is not sufficient.

1. On what criterion did Mao distinguish between antagonistic and non-antagonistic contradictions?

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2. Mao rejected which concept associated with Friedrich Engels?

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3. What pattern of ownership did Mao's “New Democracy” proposed?

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4. List the three stages that Mao identified for achieving Marxist goals in China.

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### 4.4.4 LET US SUM UP

Mao Tse-Tung, a peasant, poet, philosopher, guerrilla leader, visionary, and statesman, was a figure of profound wisdom and insight. He achieved remarkable success in his struggle, becoming the ruler of a

nation of seven hundred million people in October 1949. By unifying China at the age of forty-five, he not only challenged Khrushchev's orthodoxy but also asserted his leadership over the Communist world. His personality and achievements are often compared to those of Lenin. Mao transformed China from a nation plagued by opium addiction into one of patriots and revolutionaries. While his ruthlessness is sometimes criticized, it was instrumental in his success, as evidenced by the events in China from around 1923 onwards.

Mao Tse-Tung cannot be classified as a political philosopher, nor did he develop a distinct political philosophy. His ideals on class struggle align closely with those of Marx and Lenin. His concepts of basic democracy were tailored to the specific needs of Chinese society as he envisioned it. His focus on indoctrination and cultural revolution was aimed at revitalizing both the Chinese people and the nation as a whole. Mao's thoughts on warfare are particularly noteworthy, offering valuable lessons for leaders across various domains. His perspectives on contradictions, the role of the Chinese Communist Party in national struggles, youth movements, the dangers of capitulation, party work styles, organizational practices, education, production, social and moral responsibilities, and coalition government continue to be admired and debated by both supporters and critics.

#### **4.4.5 EXERCISES**

1. Critically examine Mao's theory of contradictions.
2. Analyse the revolutionary strategy proposed by Mao for China in light of its differences with other Marxist strategies of revolution.
3. Discuss the "New Democracy" proposed by Mao.
4. Discuss Mao's theory of state.

#### **4.4.6 SUGGESTED READINGS**

Bridgham, Philip. "Mao's 'Cultural Revolution': Origin and Development." *The China Quarterly* (1967).

Lee, Hong Yung. "Mao's Strategy for Revolutionary Change: A Case Study of the Cultural Revolution." *The China Quarterly* (1979).

Pye, Lucian W. "Mao Tse-tung's Leadership Style" *Political Science Quarterly* (1976).