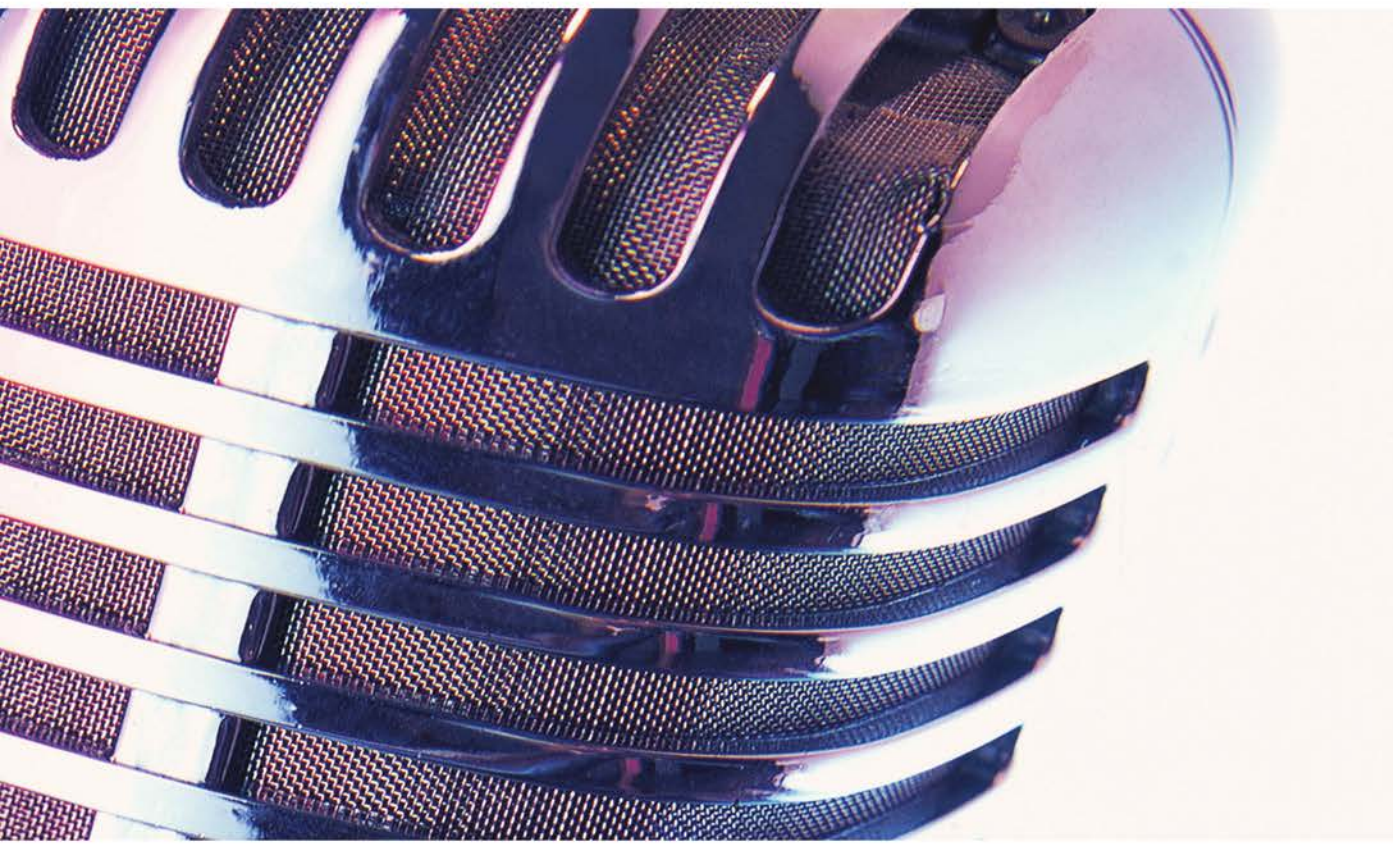
PEARSON

Political Theory

An Introduction



Edited by

Rajeev Bhargava | Ashok Acharya

CHAPTER 1

What Is Political Theory?

Rajeev Bhargava

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INTRODUCTION

A cursory glance at the newspaper brings us face-to-face with dozens of political issues. The Supreme Court pronounces that there should be no reservations in private colleges, university students demonstrate against the government to demand the proper implementation of the Rural Employment Guarantee Act (REGA), women's organizations complain bitterly about the unequal treatment of women and girls in our society, trade-union leaders condemn police brutality against workers, animal-right activists demand better protection for endangered species of tigers, the prime minister apologizes to the Sikh community for moral indifference and neglect by the Congress Government at the time of the 1984 massacre of Sikhs, the government gives up the sale of public sector units (PSUs), the Rajya Sabha passes a bill to grant Hindu women an equal right in ancestral property, the chief minister of Gujarat insists that Gujarati identity and pride is wounded by opponents of the Sardar Sarovar project.

What in your opinion makes all these issues political? Do all these issues have some one thing in common which defines them as political? Consider the examples that refer to reservations, REGA, the massacre of Sikhs, equal rights to women in ancestral property and the sale of PSUs. All these refer to some institution of the state: the judiciary, the government, the legislature, the office of the prime minister. They also refer to the decision-making power of these institutions. Does it follow that the term 'political' refers to any public agency with the power or authority to take decisions? Notice, too, that all these decisions possess the potential to have an impact on almost every member of the society in question. Even when a particular decision appears to target a specific group, it relates to and has an impact on other groups. Does the term 'political' then refer to the common power to take decisions about the common life of a society?

It would be a mistake to confine this term only to this common power of state institutions. Consider once again the example of women's organizations protesting against the exclusion or unequal treatment of women. On the understanding of 'political' arrived thus far, this action of a group of women is not political. Why so? Because women's organizations are clearly not part of the state. But, surely, on any intuitive understanding of a political act, such a protest by a women's group is political. If so, this must compel us to change or broaden our understanding of the term 'political'. This protest is political not merely because it is a collective act by a group against some continuing social practice or an earlier decision of the government but also because the very object of this protest, namely the unequal treatment of women, is part of what we understand by the term 'political'. And why is this so? Because to treat women unequally is to exercise power over them—men make women do things which, left to themselves, they may not do. This exercise of power is also part of what we mean by 'political'.

A closer look at most of the examples points to another feature of the political. The political is that domain or dimension of our collective life where we fight for our interests, make claims (including moral claims) on each other, where important and urgent issues are contested. But demands, claims, protests and complaints cannot but generate conflict. The political, it appears, is inherently conflictual. Finally, we might look at the political in a still different sense. Implicit in almost every example is a vision of a future world, one where all are equal, or where even animals are treated with some respect, or where force is replaced by deliberation and so on. The political, then, is also where new worlds are imagined. Clearly, the term 'political' has no fixed or unique meaning. It has multiple, though related meanings. One objective of these introductory chapters is to enhance our understanding of the political and to draw the attention of the reader to its multiple meanings.

Our second task is to understand what we mean by the term 'theory'. Though not easy, it is important that this be done so that eventually we can put the terms 'political' and 'theory' together and have a better grasp over what is meant by political theory. Consider once again the examples in the first paragraph. Many of us have an opinion on most of these issues. Some of us are interested in seeking an explanation of the actions of the police, the Supreme Court and the government. Are there any motives behind the actions of these agencies? Do their actions serve the interest of the entire community or the narrow interests of a class or perhaps a tiny political elite? For instance, some might argue that the issue of a 'Gujarati' identity is used to further the interests of rich peasants. Others may claim that identity is a non-issue, that the real motive underlying every public action is class interest. The academically minded amongst us may claim that there exist structural reasons underlying these actions. For example, the slow implementation of REGA might be due to systemic institutional biases hidden from the consciousness of power wielders.

Is doing political theory the same, then, as explaining an act, practice, event or process? This does not appear to be so. Although explaining is part of political theory, surely, it is not the whole of it. And this, for two different reasons. First, because an explanatory statement does not on its own constitute a theory. If I say that I fell down because I stumbled unknowingly upon a stone, I have offered an explanation of why I fell down, but have I offered a theory of what has happened? Or, if I said that the United States has invaded Iraq in order to have easy access to oil, I would have offered some explanation of why the United States government acted the way it did. But is this the same as articulating a theory of it? No. Why so? Second, although explaining may be part of theorizing, it is not the whole of it. There are other functions of theory. For example, theories offer justifications of actions. Take the examples of the first paragraph again. Some of us might silently condemn equal rights to women in ancestral property or justify police brutality. Others may disagree. They might denounce police action as violative of the most basic human rights or rejoice that equality now covers an important gender issue that had hitherto been neglected. These justificatory statements do not constitute theory but they may be its crucial components. Moreover, in denouncing police action, we are necessarily evaluating it negatively. All justifications presuppose evaluation. Behind these evaluative judgments are deeper issues.

Why should women and men be treated as equals? What is the appropriate response of the government to mass-killings? What is the connection between ensuring employment to everyone and social justice? What is the proper function of the police in a modern democratic state? Workers are beaten up, apparently for disobeying the state? But why should we obey the state at all? Why should we be law-abiding citizens? Similarly, we might ask; why should tigers who sometimes turn man-eaters still be protected? Such questions have to do with right and wrong, good and bad, in short, with ethics and morality, with the normative. Admittedly, answers to these questions may not on their own constitute theory, but what additional features are necessary for them to be deemed theoretical?

As *theory*, political theory must share features with theories of other phenomenon. It may even have some features in common with theories of the physical or the biological world. However, by virtue of being *political* theory, it must possess characteristics that are distinctive. Some of these distinctive features separate it from theories of nature but not from theories pertaining to human affairs more generally. But its truly distinctive features must flow from its focus on the political. In what follows, therefore, we outline the more general features of any theory and in particular elucidate features of a theory of human condition and action. In order to do so, we relate theory to and differentiate it from other forms of systematic reflections such as art, literature and religious worldviews. Finally, we ask the question what is political and outline the specific features of political theory.

WHAT IS THEORY?

Humans as Concept-bearing Animals

Let us begin with some truisms. No one denies that we are physical creatures, part of the physical universe and subject to the same laws as any physical object. Nor will anyone deny that unlike purely physical objects, but like other biological creatures, we are sentient creatures: we breathe, we eat, we grow and have sensory experiences. However, what distinguishes us from most, though not all, biological creatures, is that we are concept-bearing animals. As conceptual creatures, we are born in a world that is already arranged thoughtfully in particular ways. Consider the following. A child is told to sit on a chair. From a purely physical point of view, chairs are just wood, nothing else. But it would be odd to tell the child to sit on a piece of wood. What we wish to convey to the child is that a particular piece of wood when crafted in a particular manner serves a particular purpose, that it is something on which we sit or with which we can do certain things such as eating, reading, writing, talking and so on. It is these purposes that we wish to convey to the child, purposes which would not exist unless conceptually formulated. This is true not only of objects—such as chairs, tables, blackboards, chalk, the classroom in the school building—but also of human beings themselves. A student interacts with the person standing in front of the blackboard and talks to her not as if she is any odd person but as one who is there

to perform a certain role, that of a teacher. Once again, no teaching is possible unless all of us already have a rough idea of the social role of students and teachers. The same is true of bus conductors, drivers, ticket inspectors, shopkeepers, government officials and so on. A society cannot function without these elementary understandings and so every child is initiated into the social world by an informal instruction in these concepts. Unlike the purely physical, chemical or the biological world, the human world is conceptual through and through. Plants and most lower order animals live in this world and sense it, but by virtue of living the world through concepts, humans do not merely have sensory experience. Because their experience is mediated by images, concepts and representations, we might say that human experience is always thoughtful. Humans do not merely live but have a thoughtful experience of living—what we might call *lived experience*.

Concepts Embedded in Practices

As hinted above, most concepts that we use in everyday living are not formally learnt in the classroom but are acquired by participating in various practices. Since we use concepts, we may liken them to tools but this should not lead us to think that we have mental boxes in our head from which we pick them out as and when we need them. Much of our conceptual understanding is available to us as a practical skill or is directly embedded in practices. We are not even aware most of the time that we possess this skill or understanding. This may appear implausible to you at first. But really, the matter is quite simple. Several activities you do routinely are not thoughtless but are mostly absent in the stream of your consciousness. (How many times do you really interrupt the flow of your activity and think?) You just do them without explicitly thinking about them, just as the bus driver changes gears without first asking himself whether or not he should. You see the object in front of you as a table or a book and you understand that what you are doing is sitting at the table and reading. When we see a person entering the poll booth and approaching the ballot box, we understand that he is voting. This understanding is direct and practical, not inferred from something that first takes place in your consciousness. It is usually the same with people and social relationships. We might call this an embedded understanding of things, practices, people and relationships.

Human Expressions

All humans have the ability not only to have thoughtful experiences but to express these thoughts in different media. A child experiences a piece of wood as a chair or a table but she may express this experience in a drawing, by representing these objects on paper. An actor, a mime artist or a dancer may use her body to say the same thing. A photographer may use the camera for the same purpose. There are multiple ways of expressing an experience, some word-dependent and others not. Besides, we may express this experience in words

to other people: 'Hey! I see a table there.' Or I may express it to myself, privately, 'That's a table, isn't it?'. So, some of these expressions are in the outer world, in public spaces and some may occur inside, privately as ideas in our heads. These private expressions may be called subjective reflections, a kind of mirroring of the world in our own heads.

Ad hoc and Systematic Reflections

All expressions, including subjective reflections, may occur randomly, on the spur of the moment or be arranged systematically. All of us, from time-to-time have spontaneous and random reflections. The chalk with which I unthinkingly and effortlessly write on the blackboard keeps crumbling one day. When that happens, I may interrupt the flow of my action, examine the chalk and ask if I could not have a chalk of better quality. I have an embedded understanding of what a chalk is and practical knowledge of what is to be done with it; but confronted with a piece of chalk literally melting in my fingers into dust, I may think to myself, just what it is made of, whether it really is what it is meant to be. 'Is this really a piece of chalk?' Such, random thoughts may occur and then disappear for no ostensible reason, but they arise invariably when there is an unexpected interruption of my activities, when I am faced, for example, with a problem.

Word-dependent and Word-independent Reflections

Suppose then, that I don't let this thought disappear: I engage with it, indeed pursue it obsessively. Suppose that I now examine not merely the chalk in hand but the entire box, indeed not just one but all the boxes bought by the department of my college, and arrive at the conclusion that the entire lot is defective. I identify the manufacturer and begin to look at the quality of other lots used elsewhere. Quite obviously, I have begun a kind of sustained and systematic empirical enquiry. When I write a report on chalk produced by the manufacturer, it becomes an expression of systematic reflection on an issue selected for sharper focus. A report is systematic and word-dependent. But humans have the ability to systematically reflect and express themselves in a variety of non-linguistic media. Systematic expressions and reflections on the world and on ourselves are also found in music, sculpture, painting, dance, pottery, architecture and so on. A filmmaker or a painter may reflect on the human condition, on a social environment, on the problems of a society in transition, on the predicaments of modernity or on the futility of war but without deploying words to convey their meaning. Have you seen the paintings in Ajanta caves? Or Madhubani and Worli paintings? Or a replica of the Spanish painter Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*? Many of you may have heard Amir Khan's rendering of *Bhairavi* or Kumar Gandharva's rendering of *Bhim Palasi.* These, too, are systematic reflections. Other forms of systematic reflections use language but in interestingly different ways.

Varieties of Word-dependent Reflections

Word or language-dependent systematic expressions or reflections can also be accomplished in multiple modes, in interestingly different ways. The essay is one form; a written dialogue is another, poetry is yet another. Newspaper articles, a mixture of short description and analysis, provide another form. A record of one's experience in a village, the ethnography of a good anthropologist is a systematic expression of collective lived experiences. Folk tales, moral fables, myths and legends, epic poetry, short stories and novels are all systematic reflections.

What has all this got to do with theory? I propose that theory, too, be seen as a particular form of language-dependent systematic expression different from, but related to, other forms of systematic reflections on the world. Like other expressions, a theory articulates in a particular medium a conceptual world lived practically by a specific set of human agents. Moreover, it does so in its own distinctive way. What marks a theory out from other language-dependent systematic expressions? I propose that there are six such features, four of which it necessarily shares with philosophy and two that are specific to it.

THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF THEORY

The *first* feature is an almost obsessive and self-conscious concern with the internal structure of concepts, with how concepts relate to one another and come in clusters, and how in turn, they mark their own boundaries. A philosopher or a theorist—for my purpose I will often use these terms interchangeably—focuses on the meaning of words, on the different ways in which the words are used so that she can eventually answer questions, such as 'what is justice?' What is the meaning of the phrase 'social revolution' and how is it different from 'social reform' or 'social engineering?' What is the core idea of freedom, if there is one? What are the different interpretations of this core idea? What is the relationship between freedom and equality? And, between freedom, equality, and justice? What distinguishes power from influence, force, violence or persuasion? In ordinary life we use words more or less unself-consciously and we are not normally compelled to ask such questions. But philosophers must raise these questions and understand them in a particular way. When asked what 'Time' is, we don't expect philosophers to look at their watches and tell us the precise time of the day. Philosophers are expected to convey to us what the meaning of time is and what it is for us to live in time. Likewise, if a philosopher is asked a question about basic needs, he is not expected to supply us with a list of our most urgent desires but rather to make us understand how needs are different from ordinary desires and what the distinction is between our most inescapable and significant needs and others that at least temporarily we may live without.

As long as our purpose is served, we don't ordinarily care whether a word is used literally or metaphorically, or both. Poets, novelists, essayists use words self-consciously and with extreme care, but it is not their business to elucidate why they have chosen to use this rather than some other word or to make explicit connections between different concepts.

The job of a philosopher and insofar as philosophy is part of theory, the job of a theorist is to accomplish precisely this. A full-blooded sensitivity to the entire web of concepts and a commitment to its articulation is the first feature of theory.

Let me illustrate this further with an example. Suppose that someone gives a call for freedom: 'We should all be free'. What are people to make of this call? For a start they must understand what it means to be free. Once they have understood the meaning, or rather, the different meanings of freedom, they may ask why they should be free or at least why they should be free in this rather than in some other sense. To be free of, or from, something is to get rid of it. What you wish to get rid of must be something that you evaluate negatively. In the literature on freedom such things that you wish to get rid of are usually called constraints. So, to be free is to be free from constraints. But what is the nature of these constraints? Surely, our ideas of freedom will depend upon our understanding of what these constraints are. Are these constraints purely physical? Take the paradigmatic example of freedom: a man is in chains. Get rid of the chains and he is free. The same is true of birds in a cage. The cage imprisons, restricting the flight of the bird, that which it is most prone to doing and is its nature. To set the bird free is to get rid of the cage. In the same way prisoners are set free when they are released. Have you noticed that our notion of constraint may already have changed with this last example? For at issue here is not merely the idea of physical but of legal constraints. A person may have been put behind bars because he has been caught stealing. He stole because he was physically free to steal and yet he was imprisoned because it is illegal to do so. Appropriating a thing that by law belongs to another is illegal and it is because of the presence of this legal constraint that the man was put in jail. To be free then is to be free not just from physical but from legal constraints.

Is this all there is to freedom? Notice that both physical and legal constraints are external to the agent. Can a person be unfree not because of the presence of physical and legal constraints—there may be none—but by virtue of psychological barriers, obstructions that are present within his mental make-up. So, consider a slave who is set free and who is now pronounced as formally equal to his former master. Suppose that they both compete in an open exam, and while the former master always does well, the former slave simply cannot perform. Centuries of slavery have taken away from him the basic self-confidence required for a good performance. He is unable to achieve his objectives not because of physical or legal constraints but due to internal psychological ones. A conception of freedom in purely physical or legal terms is unable to capture the mechanism of unfreedom which is at work here. We can similarly talk about constraints which are neither purely external nor purely internal but a bit of both—I mean social constraints. A person is physically and legally free to enter the higher education system. He has done well in his school examinations, well enough to get a place in a decent college. But higher education is costly. There are no subsidies or scholarships. The person is confident that he would do well and he has every reason to feel so. And yet, he cannot get higher education. He is severely handicapped by his relative poverty which is a major socio-economic constraint on what he wishes to do. Implicit in this is a still different conception of freedom: freedom from not merely physical, legal and psychological but also socio-economic constraints.

Hitherto we have focused on constraints. However, our conception of freedom changes with our ideas about what we should do once freed from constraints. Some argue that it is enough that we are able to fulfil whatever we happen to currently desire. So, if I desire to smoke and no constraints exist to prevent me from doing so, then I am free. Others argue that by a focus on current unevaluated desires we misunderstand what is really at issue in discussions of freedom. Such people work with a less instrumentalist, more robust conception of reason and argue that one is free only when there is absence of constraints and a real opportunity to do what we evaluate to be good for us. On this view, if information that cigarettes are gravely injurious to health is available to us but we continue to both desire smoking and fulfil this desire, then we are not really being free. We are not free because we succumb to a habit or addiction, completely bypassing, ignoring or evading what our reason says is good for us. To fall prey to one's current unevaluated desires, in this view, is to be in a state of unfreedom. Freedom is a condition of leading a life and of doing things that are evaluated to be good for us, to fulfil desires that are judged to be worth having in the first place. This view slowly leads to the idea that freedom is identical with self-realization. The detailed elaboration of different conceptions of freedom is one task of political theory. The other one is to reason why we should choose one rather than the other conception; why, if at all, one conception is better than others.

This brings me to the ***second*** distinctive feature of theory or philosophy, i.e. that it is a rational enterprise, where the term rational is understood very broadly to mean that the conclusion arrived or hinted at has some discernable structure of reasons behind it. To say this is not to imply that philosophers or theorists do not rely on instincts, emotions, or flashes of insight. Nor does it mean that a philosophical or theoretical enquiry must possess a definite argumentative structure of the kind made familiar by logicians, although some philosophies and theories may have some such pattern. However, it does mean that philosophers and theorists are not satisfied with bland assertions, the flat announcement of a claim or the presentation of a readymade proposal. When they make an assertion or proposal, they must state why they do so. In other words, they must give a reason. Indeed, they cannot be satisfied with providing one reason and stopping the process of questioning at this point. There can be a reason for a reason already supplied and a reason for the reason for the initial reason. In other words, whether stated explicitly or not there is a chain of reasons that is discernable in a theoretical or philosophical work. Does this mean that we can reach the final reason, a reason beyond which there is no reason—the foundation of all reasons? Some philosophers appear to be obsessed with this idea of ultimate cause or justification of an event or act. But I doubt if we humans can ever get to the bottom of all things.

Take the example of scientific theories. Suppose that it is claimed that water is a compound. This must be backed by some evidence demonstrating that it is composed of two elements: hydrogen and oxygen, and that this composition is not a mere mixture of features of both but rather a new substance with features of its own. Furthermore, this evidence must itself be supported by more general claims about the mechanism by which such a process takes place. Similarly, suppose that it is proposed that all children must

be provided elementary education, and suppose in answer to the question 'Why?' it is asserted that education is a fundamental right, then it must also be argued that at least in modern times there is a connection between education, employment, and a life of dignity and, further, that a dignified life is a crucial component of human well-being and so on. This rational structure of theories, their internal requirement that they persistently ask for reasons makes them, albeit with some qualifications, subversive—with the potential to transform societies.

The rational component of theory also illuminates another of its important features, namely, its aspiration to truth and objectivity. This claim must be made very cautiously but clearly. The truths that theories, particularly social and political theories, aspire to are not valid for all times and all places. The truth of most theories is context-dependent and therefore limited to specific times and places. Only the very exceptional theories have a reach that cuts across time and space. Nor is this very achievable but limited truth in any way final. We must rid ourselves of the illusion that like God, we humans can stand outside all perspectives and attain God-like objectivity or an eternal truth of the matter. The truth that we achieve is dependent on the collective reasoning of human beings and even if all rational persons can agree at any given point of time that they have arrived at the truth of a certain matter, new information or a flaw in an argument detected much later by other reasonable beings can force us to revise our earlier truth-claims. Human knowledge can neither altogether escape subjective viewpoints nor be imprisoned within the subjective biases of wealthy classes, powerful political blocs or even intellectuals. Such views may pass off as knowledge for sometime but sooner or later their limitations are bound to come to light. We might, then, arrive at some acceptable version that can be rightfully claimed as the truth of the matter, an achievement not possible without the use of reason, although reason alone cannot help us attain it.

A *fourth* feature of philosophy/theory is that it is committed to unearthing the background assumptions and presuppositions of our statements, beliefs, actions and practices. For example, the force of gravity is presupposed by all our situated action. We don't always articulate this nor are many of us aware that this is so. Yet, without the force of gravity, embodied persons cannot exist on this earth. Similarly, when we set out to attend a class we make many assumptions which remain in the background, as part of our pre-reflective understanding. For example, the classroom is exactly where we left it on the previous day, that the teacher would arrive to take the class, that at least some other students would be present, that the teacher will give the lecture in a language that we speak or understand and so on. All of us exist, think and act with these assumptions and presuppositions but do not always articulate them. To take another example, in 17th century England, politicians had begun to think and speak of politics without appeal to religious principles. But frequently, they did not acknowledge this. It was left to Hobbes to articulate these new background assumptions and to show that it was possible to conduct politics in a purely secular manner. Thus, within reasonable limits, philosophers and theorists are committed to articulating these background assumptions and presuppositions.

The *fifth* feature of theory—and here philosophy and theory may begin to diverge—is this. A theory aspires to some degree of generality and abstraction. It does so because it aims to cover a wide variety of related but disparate phenomena. This does not mean that all theories must be universal in scope. But it does mean that a theory cannot deal only with a concrete particular, something in the singular. Thus, we have a theory of motion that applies equally to planets as it does to rolling stones. Such a theory has a very high degree of generality appropriate to the object of its study. There cannot be a theory exclusively for rolling stones. Likewise, we could have a descriptive study of Indian nationalism or an empirical study of the causes of Indian nationalism. But, it is unlikely that we will have a theory of nationalism that applies to India and to India alone.

Finally, a *sixth* feature of theories, one that is a product of modern conditions and has emerged more particularly with the birth of modern science, has to be mentioned. Modern theories cannot be purely speculative and must pass through and then transcend the empirical world. They cannot bypass the empirical world altogether. This feature is related to the point mentioned above. The data collected by the sciences, the collective lived experiences of a people captured in the work of insightful observers, socially engaged thinkers or consummate social scientists cannot be ignored by theorists. These general and interconnected reflections must take into account all of these. For this very reason a theory must be simultaneously rooted in and transcend the lived experience of a people, the collective practices of a society, and the embedded understandings and common sense of a community. There is no theory if there is mere description of lived experience and common sense, but we have theory only in name if theoretical propositions are altogether disconnected from experience, practices and the data collected by sound empirical enquiries.

Let me sum up. A theory is a form of systematic reflection with six features. (*a*) Conceptual sensitivity, (*b*) rational structure, (*c*) aspiration for a humanly achievable truth and objectivity, (*d*) generality, (*e*) an explicit mandate to unearth assumptions and presuppositions, and (*f*) strong non-speculative intent—the need not to bypass results of micro-enquiries into the particular. It is not identical to any one feature but must possess all six. Thus, a theory must be distinct from ad hoc reflections, speculation, empirical enquiry into the particular, rich insights, imaginative but fictive prose and other related narratives. It must also be distinguished from ideology, worldview and cosmology—a point that will emerge more clearly below. A rare specimen of theory may be universalist or reach the foundation, but on the whole, the constitutive features of a theory do not include a commitment to foundationalism or universalism.

COSMOLOGIES AND COMMON SENSE

I have used the terms 'embedded understandings' and 'common sense' above. Let me remind the reader what I mean by them. I made a distinction between conceptually organized lived experience and reflection on that experience. This distinction presupposes that though conceptual, lived experience may not be present in our consciousness. We may use our concepts in practice but be unable to speak about them, quite like a skilful cook who can

make delectable dishes without quite being able to tell us how. (Conversely, the possession of a good recipe book is not sufficient to make a good cook.) By embedded understanding, I mean, this practical knowledge that remains pre-reflective and inarticulate. It is an understanding we acquire by being initiated into the practices of a society. The term 'commonsense' is broader and covers embedded understanding but also, at the very least, our spontaneous and ad hoc reflections, including reflections that are closely aligned to our practices, which might be called practical reflections. It usually also includes stories, epics, folk tales, legends, myths that have been passed on from one generation to another and with the help of which we make sense of and evaluate the entire universe. Such nearly systematic but non-theoretical reflections which knit together in a seamless web the physical, biological, social, mental and spiritual worlds may be called cosmologies. Cosmologies frequently inform and become part of a society's common sense.

If this is true of the relationship between cosmologies and common sense, can it also be true of the relationship between theories and commonsense? Can theories shape and inform our common sense? Though they can do so (indeed, good theories must aspire to do so), the two remain and perhaps must remain distinct entities. The common sense of a society is the collective possession of an entire people. A theory is a specialized activity or product dependent on and generated by specific skills. Does this mean that theorizing is an elite activity from which the common man will remain forever estranged? I don't think so. First, distance does not mean estrangement. Many cricket lovers in India have never played cricket. Some do play it but quite badly. Still others play well but are not exceptional.But all of them can love or admire the skills of a Sachin Tendulkar or Azharuddin. In some ways they are distant from them but surely no one can claim that distance here necessarily means estrangement. Second, and more importantly, though the practice of theory involves skills, these can be acquired, in principle, by anyone who has some talent and a lot of opportunity and commitment. Just as cricket is not the preserve of a special class or caste of people, so also theory is not the monopoly of a particular kind of people.To think so is to be committed to a deplorable and outdated form of casteist Brahminism.We must avoid both the view that theory is the monopoly of the special, naturally talented or genetically endowed group and the claim that it is available effortlessly to the masses.To the objection that there is a sense in which everyone is a philosopher or a theorist, an appropriate response is to draw the distinction between having a philosophy/theory and doing it. Though all of us have a philosophy, we do not all *do* philosophy. Everyone may have a systematic worldview, a theory of the world, a philosophy, but it does not follow that all these are the result of his or her own theorizing philosophizing.

The emphasis on the distance between theory/philosophy and common sense as also between theory and practice should not be misunderstood or exaggerated. As I pointed out earlier, there is also a close relationship between theory and common sense and between theory and practice. As we will see in Chapter 2, the most fundamental questions asked by philosophers are the same to which answers are implicit in our practice and in common sense. A philosophy of the human world articulates what is already implicit in human practice. In this sense and unlike what many believe, philosophy is down-to-earth. Yet, it

is also up there. It takes flight and is up there because like other systematic reflections—and this close relationship between theory and the arts is equally worth emphasizing—it frequently tries to do more than merely describe human practice. *It also attempts to explain and justify it in general terms and less directly to endorse, modify or change it.*

WHAT IS POLITICAL?

The term 'political' has multiple meanings. The first goes back to classical Greece and is derived from the word 'polis' which literally means the city, but is better, more properly understood as a place with a common world or even more simply, a community. 'Political', then, pertains to whatever is done within or by the community. More specifically, it refers to *decision making* within and about the community. Decision making itself has a specific connotation. To be political, to live in the polis, as Hannah Arendt tells us, means that everything is to be decided through words and persuasion and not through force and violence. The term 'political' then points to a specific mode of decision making—by words, not force. However, the term 'political' also refers simultaneously to what decisions are about. When we use the term 'political' in this first sense, we speak not merely about life but necessarily about the *good* life of a community. Thus, we may ask, given that we live by a certain conception of the good life, who is to be a member of the community and why, who is to rule, i.e. take fundamental decisions about the community and for what reasons, how resources are to be distributed, to whom and why. In this conception, as we can see, the empirical and the normative are completely intermeshed. Nor has the distinction emerged in this context between political and social spheres. Nothing that we now consider to be merely social, i.e. falling between the public-political and the private-household is outside the political. On this classical view then, there is no distinction between social and political theory. Political theory is about how and with what justification decisions are made concerning the good life in a community.

Over a period of time and particularly with the advent of modernity, the meaning of the term 'political' appears to have changed. To understand this change let us go back to what I said above. In classical Greece, the term 'political' had to do with fundamental decision making about the affairs of the community. To make decisions, however, one must first have the power to do so. If the entire community is involved in decision making, then decision making presupposes the collective power of the entire community. The term 'political' then may also refer to this collective power, to the use of this power to make decisions, and political science or philosophy may be viewed as the study of this collective power. However, as is well known, even in Greek societies, decisions were not made by everybody. Power was not exercised by everyone. Slaves, women and aliens were excluded from the decision-making process. One might then say that decisions about the entire community were taken by some, only by excluding others from the processes within which they were made. Some people had the power to make decisions about everyone only on condition that they also exercised power over some others. Of course, this can be said only with hindsight. People living at that time did not see their own condition as we now describe it.

With the advent of modernity, this meaning of the term 'power' became far more explicit. Indeed, the classical meaning of power as the collective capacity to decide about the community was almost completely obscured and replaced by the second meaning of power as the capacity of some people to act in a manner that thwarts the significant interest of others, that marginalizes and excludes them, so that they are left with no ability or capacity to take decisions about themselves or about the whole community. Power came simply to mean power over others. Correspondingly, the term 'political' refers to this power *over* others. Political science, then, came to mean an empirical enquiry into the exercise of this power. And political theory, the most general reflection on the processes, mechanisms, institutions, and practices by which some people are excluded by others from significant decision making.

Yet another related meaning emerged under conditions of modernity when major sites of decision making were relatively separated from the rest of society and were concentrated in a specific set of institutions designated by the term 'state' (this is related to the point that a new concept of the social emerged which was distinguished from the political). If politics, considered as a comprehensive enquiry, is the study of decision-making power, then the birth of the modern state naturally implied that the major object of study of political science and political theory is the state. Indeed, the term political was itself identified with anything pertaining to the state rather than to the entire society. Political science and political theory studied the institutions of the state—the government, the judiciary, the bureaucracy, the military, the police and so on. Sociology and social theory, on the other hand, studied all those structures, processes and institutions that fell outside the state. Some people continued to believe that a study of the state was the study of how power was exercised on behalf of and in the interest of all the individuals who make up a particular society. Others, cynical of this view, saw political science and political theory as the study of how these institutions take major decisions on behalf of a small elite or the dominant class to the exclusion of the interests of the subordinate classes or subaltern people.

To summarize, the term 'political' has multiple meanings: (*a*) The collective power to take decisions about every aspect of the good life in the community. Notice that 'political' here refers both to power and to ethical values. (*b*) The power of some groups to control or subordinate others in order to realize not the good of the entire community but their own narrow interests. In short, to get others to do things that might go against their own interest. Here, the term 'political' is used to relate power and self-interest. It also refers to power embodied in a separate institutional apparatus, i.e. the state and, therefore, (*c*) to state power used to realize the common good/values, or (*d*) state power used to exercise domination by one group over others.

But how can (*a*) or (*c*) coexist with (*b*) or (*d*)? How can the entire community take decisions when a group excludes others from collective decision making? Well, in this case we might say that a split has occurred between the empirical and the normative. The subordinate group may be excluded from decision making but may have the desire to forge a new world where everybody is involved in taking decisions about shared interests and values. Then (*a*) and (*c*) become normative/ethical notions capturing something which is hitherto unrealized

or realized very marginally while (*b*) and (*d*) capture what really exists on the ground. A final meaning is related to but still different from how we have hitherto conceived (*a*). The reader may have noticed that so far (*a*) refers to the good life of the community, to values of specific communities. But what if we begin to use the term 'political' for values common to the entire humanity in abstraction from both power and specific communities? What if it refers to values common to all living species? Here, polis coincides with cosmopolis. So (*a*) splits into two and gives us a fifth meaning of the political. This meaning, (*e*), refers to values common to the entire humanity, even all living species. Recall that the political sphere may also include the art of imagining new values and devising new worlds. Therefore, (*e*) is maximally abstracted from really existing lives. Thus, today, we use the term 'political' in each of the five senses and as both an empirical and a normative concept.

Political theory then is a particular form of word-dependent systematic reflection on any or all of the following: (*a*) the collective power to take decisions about the good life of a community, (*b*) the mechanisms by which power is exercised by one group over another, (*c*) the use of state power to achieve the good of the community, (*d*) the use of the state by one group to exercise power over another, and (*e*) on the values by which a particular community governs its life. Finally, (*f*) there can be a grand political theory that reflects on the general condition of the entire human kind or the values by which the entire humanity may govern its life.

Points for Discussion

1. A child complains to his father that he has got fewer chocolates than his brother. Women's organizations complain to the state that women are often given unequal pay for the same job. Are both these acts political?
2. Can you think of things in the world which are not 'concept-bearing'? Is concept-bearing a unique feature of human beings? Can you think of worldviews which reject this idea?
3. Do you think that even in our ordinary life we are frequently engaged in explaining or justifying our acts? Can you think of examples?
4. The term 'political' refers both to power and to values, sometimes together and at other times separately. Do you find this puzzling? Can you explain why?

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CHAPTER 2

Why Do We Need Political Theory?

Rajeev Bhargava

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INTRODUCTION

What in general are theories meant to do? What are the functions of theory? In the first chapter, some of these functions have already been listed. However, here we ask a different, deeper question. Do we really need political theory? One may ask how this question is different from the one mentioned in the previous line? Consider then the following: doctors of modern, Western, allopathic medicine undeniably perform a function in our society. However, we might ask, in the critical spirit of Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj*, if we really need doctors who practise modern Western medicine? Can the function of healing and restoration of health not be performed by other practices and their practitioners? Analogously, we might ask: can the function of political theory be better performed by something else, say ideologies or cosmologies? Why do we need political theory?

I propose that this question cannot be answered unless we ask the big questions of human existence and collective life. I suggest that many of these answers are now provided, though not exhaustively, by natural-scientific theories and the social sciences. However, this was not always the case. Most of these answers were once provided only by religions, cosmologies and philosophy. Moreover, political philosophy simultaneously performed both explanatory and normative functions. In what follows, I suggest that political theory now performs three key separate functions. It explains at the most general level possible, it evaluates and tells us what we should do and it speculates about our current and future condition. It also tells us who we are. In some sense, these functions are no different from the tasks performed by cosmologies and ideologies. Yet, I argue that political theory is distinct from both. I also try to claim that political theory has a special function under modern conditions. Far from being dead, it not only lives but needs to flourish.

THE BIG QUESTIONS OF HUMAN LIFE

Consider the following abstract but significant questions:

- What is there/going on in the world? (Understanding)
- Why are things there/going on in the world? (Explanation)
- Will something that is currently going on continue to go on in the future? (Prediction)
- Is that which is there/going on good or bad, right or wrong? (Ethics)
- What am I to do? What is to be done? (Normative)
- Who am I? Who are we? (Metaphysical self-knowledge)

Human life is virtually impossible without the availability of answers to each of these questions. One might say that one becomes a human being, or at least a certain kind of human being, as answers to these questions are learnt. Humans can live in a society only if they have some understanding of what the nature of the society is. For example, it is

crucial that in a hierarchical society a person has an understanding of his own rank as well as the social standing of others. A person who is part of the 'lower' order has a practical understanding of this status and knows that he must be deferential to someone superior to him. A member of this society understands what is going on when a person stands bowing his head and lowering his eyes before another man. He also understands why this is going on; he knows that a person must bow before another person *because* he is inferior. Such understandings and explanations are part of common sense and crucial to the functioning of the society. Similarly, members of such a society have some idea of what is in store for them in the future, indeed what they can hope for. For the lower castes, practically nothing. For the upper castes, the permanence of privilege. And all this is linked further to a fairly common understanding of what is right and wrong, good and bad in that society and to a certain self-understanding. Given that I am a member of the lowest caste and therefore inferior, I must perform this action. In a properly functioning hierarchical society, the person deemed inferior believes that bowing before his superiors is the right thing to do, that it would be wrong to violate this norm. Thus, the possession of answers to all these questions is vital to the working of a hierarchical society. The availability of different answers to roughly the same questions makes possible a functioning egalitarian society.

Of course, to possess a fairly comprehensive understanding of one's society does not mean that this knowledge is available *as answers* to questions. As a matter of fact, we do not first have questions for which we seek answers. We begin to have an understanding of our world that is reformulated as answers to these big questions when, as reflective creatures, we learn to raise these questions. But what are the circumstances in which we learn to raise these questions? There are many reasons why this might happen. I mention three. It might happen first if, for whatever reason, an individual or a group is alienated from the rest of the community. It might then be asked by alienated persons: do I really belong here? Who really am I? This estrangement leads to a crisis of mutual understanding. Second, this could occur with the entry of the stranger whose opaque actions provoke curiosity and internal dissonance. Why is that man doing whatever it is that he is doing? How should we relate to him and others like him? Third, it may be caused by unpredictable changes in the natural world: disease, flood, earthquake, any natural disaster. Why do such dramatic changes occur in nature? Why do they cause suffering in this world? Why is there suffering in the world? Why are we born at all if we *must* suffer?

Now, I want to suggest that small communities develop their own local cosmologies in the face of any of the three changes mentioned above. Unpredictable changes in nature, the coming of the stranger, the possibility of the break-up of the community—all of these lead human beings to seek re-familiarization with what has become unfamiliar. In order to make a fresh sense of the world and their own place within it or to lend larger, deeper significance to our somewhat shaken existence, revisions in common sense become necessary.

Cosmologies perform this function and help us tell a story about ourselves and our relations to others and to nature and make sense of the existing chaos. By making sense of something that is going out of control, becoming meaningless or discordant, they help in endowing it with meaning, make it harmonious with other things and bring it under some semblance of control. Cosmologies inform and re-fashion common sense. They frequently

extend and even challenge the common sense of the day by raising some of these questions afresh. Is the world that is apprehended by our senses real? (A question remarkably similar in form to: is the chalk that is crumbling and falling through my fingers really a piece of chalk?) Does life end with the physical destruction of the body? Am I to be identified exclusively with the physical body? Several cosmologies provide negative answers to these questions and thereby oppose our common sense. The world of senses is illusory or there is a life of the soul after death, they say. Whatever the case, cosmologies are never identical with common sense.

THE EMERGENCE OF WESTERN MODERNITY

Several ancient cosmologies tied to relatively small communities tended to see these questions as pertaining to one unified universe. A distinction between the human and the natural world was neither drawn sharply nor seemed significant. Metaphysical self-knowledge was believed to be related to an understanding of the whole universe including nature. As Charles Taylor points out, identities in these worlds were not self-defining but defined in relation to the rest of the universe. Moreover, ethics frequently pertained not merely to human action but also to natural events. There was no distinction between science and philosophy and certainly no clear lines were drawn between a philosophy of the natural and the human world.

This judgement might seem over-simplistic about all cosmologies. But it is certainly true of several European cosmologies and Aristotelian sciences and it is not too off-the-mark to claim that elements of such cosmologies are present in virtually every 'pre-modern' cosmology, including in several world religions. Let me stick, however, to 'pre-modern' European cosmologies. For example, before the rise of modern science, much of what we call the Western world believed that the universe is a meaningful whole signifying something higher than humans or embodying some important purpose, goal or final cause and that everything which exists was moving towards the fulfilment of that cause. This was the great design or pattern in the world. Moreover, some cosmologies believed that this design was part of the intention of a transcendent God. To find fulfilment, human beings simply had to relate to this pattern, one that existed in society, nature and the whole of the universe. This pattern could be known either by revelation, by the grace of God, or by pure reason.

EXPLAINING HUMAN AND NON-HUMAN NATURE

Around the 15th century, a change began to occur in the intellectual climate of several Western societies. For many of its members, nature no longer appeared to be meaningful. It expressed neither an idea nor perhaps the intention of some transhuman subject. Aristotelian physics was challenged by a new perspective. The elements of nature were no longer believed to be purposeful. Fire does not move upwards because this is its purpose; likewise water does not flow downwards to serve this purpose. It is mistaken to understand

nature in terms of final causes, as if its design was pre-ordained. Rather, for the moderns, nature was composed of discrete things, in themselves meaningless and independent of one another. They were not related to one another by virtue of some overall design. If related, this relation was more accidental. A ball moves because one hits it with one's foot, not because it is destined to fit into some larger cosmic pattern. Its movement in a particular direction is not pre-ordained. It is due to a variety of contingent reasons, i.e. that a person happened to hit it with his foot and the ball remains hit, keeps moving till some other force stops it. How does one find this out? Not, by relying on cosmologies that talk of deeper significance. This interpretative move, the 'moderns' felt, must first be jettisoned. Instead, one discovers this by 'seeing' the world unmediated by these meanings. One observes what an entity is like, how it happens to relate to other entities. If they happen to relate regularly, then this observed, *de-facto* regularity is what constitutes causation. There are no final causes at work here. Explanation is nothing but recording this pattern of regularity. By recording regularities one can explain not only why something occurred in the past but also why it is likely to occur in the future. If you go near the fire and feel warm and this happens each time you have been there, then this is also likely to happen at a future time. This fact can be predicted. Thus, these new sciences are not just telling stories about nature but, so it appeared to modern thinkers, also explaining and predicting it.

Before the birth of modern empirical sciences, the only form of rational enquiry abroad was philosophy, which used the *a priori* method of reasoning to arrive at answers to each of the six important questions concerning both the worlds taken together. In other words, a speculative, largely non-empirical mode of enquiry was expected to answer all the questions. With the birth of modern natural science, the traditional role of philosophy was transformed. For it now transpired that reason by itself can not arrive at knowledge of the natural world. It could not by itself answer questions concerning the nature and activity of the physical world, nor to explain or predict what goes on within it. This could be done only with some partnership with the human senses. Some considered this a partnership between unequals, with reason playing a subsidiary role. Others thought that reason and the senses were joint authors of our cognitive world. What the precise nature of this partnership is remained contested but the sole authority of reason had been permanently debunked. This meant that philosophy became, in the now famous words of John Locke, 'a hand maiden of science'.

Several thinkers—Hobbes, for example—tried to apply to human behaviour what was earlier applied to natural phenomena. Hobbes tried to replicate the idea of a unified universe, by talking of an all-embracing materialism. To him, it appeared that what held true for the physical world was also true of the socio-historical world. Later, some philosophers drew the conclusion from this Hobbesian standpoint that a rational enquiry of the moral world or the self was impossible. As in the natural world, the task of the rational enquirer was to seek the guidance of the senses, to gather data about the social world and to try and understand its structure, and to explain and predict all the manifold events that take place within it. Theory was a more generalized form of explanation, rooted in and dependent upon data-based enquiry into the particular. Direct observation yielded a knowledge of particular things. Reason saw connections between all these different things and offered

generalized explanations and predictions. These generalized explanations were theories of both the natural and the social world.

UNDERSTANDING HUMANS

However, soon a second perspective emerged in which the universe began to be segmented into at least two worlds. Though some questions were relevant to each, their form became different. Other questions could be raised only in relation to one of these worlds and not to the other. Modern understanding allows for a much sharper distinction between at least two worlds: the non-human natural world—the world of physical and chemical objects, and the world of plants and animals—and the world of humans that is already constituted by pre-reflective and reflective understanding. To admit the existence of two worlds does not imply that they are completely disconnected from one another. But no matter how deep the relationship between the two, there also exist some fundamental differences.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE HUMAN AND NON-HUMAN WORLDS

One such difference is this; while the natural world in principle exists independently of human beings, the human world is largely constituted by and is therefore dependent on human action. The force of gravity is not contingent on whether or not we exist. Neither is the movement of planets. Even if the entire human species were to perish tomorrow, rainfall, thunder, a flash of lightening will still occur. Not only are these independent of our actions, they are also independent of our thoughts. There is rainfall whether or not it is apprehended by us, whether or not we have a concept of it. This is not the case with the human world, which is both action-dependent and concept-dependent. Let me explain.

Consider the act of raising one's arm. This is already different from the expression, 'the upward movement of the limb'. The latter is a purely physical description, while the former is an intentional *act*, a movement guided by or possessing an intention. To raise my arm, I must already be in possession of the concept of an arm and I must know what it means to raises something. The concept of raising something is constitutive of the physical movement of the hand going upwards. Now focus on the phrase 'raising my arm'. This, in turn, may mean different things in different settings, i.e. in different conceptual worlds. In the classroom it means that the student wishes to raise a question or offer a comment on what she has heard. In the board meeting it may signal the act of voting on an issue. On the cricket field it signals a bye and so on. Outside these settings it is simply the raising of the arm. In other settings, it signifies questioning, voting or signalling a bye. In each of these settings, therefore, the relevant concept of questioning or voting or signalling a bye is constitutive of the purely physical upward movement of the arm and involves an enrichment of the simple idea of raising one's arm.

All human actions, practices and situations are *constituted* by concepts. To understand them is to understand these concepts. This is why an *interpretative* component is crucial to what we mean by the empirical in the human sciences. Understanding the human world is to grasp the complicated structure of concepts that partly constitute it. This is not true of the understanding of the natural world. So, this is the first qualitative difference between empirical social sciences and natural sciences; indeed, the word 'empirical' itself has an entirely different connotation in the human sciences. The term 'empirical' is related to experience but the nature of our experience of the natural world is different from experience in the human world. The natural world cannot be apprehended without concepts but it is not constituted by them. In this sense, the natural world exists independently of the concepts we have of them. As I said, it existed even before we had any concepts of them, before we even existed on this earth. This is not true of human or social phenomena.

What is true of human sciences in general is also true of social and political studies. The state is not just an ensemble of material things and movements. To describe it materially is absurd. Besides, such a purely physical understanding fails to distinguish the state from other social and political institutions. The modern state is a form of public power, relatively independent of the ruler and the ruled, embodied in an apparatus that has virtual monopoly of violence in a particular community or territory and that functions to reproduce the conditions of existence and perpetuation of that community. This is just one way of understanding of the state but notice how many different types of concepts we must have already learnt in order to grasp the concept of the state: power, ruling, the distinction between ruler and ruled, monopoly, violence, community, conditions of existence and so on. Take a relatively simple example: A man called John F. Kennedy has just died. Physically speaking, a living body has turned into non-living matter. But we humans describe this event as death. The person in question was no ordinary man, however. He was the President of the United States. To understand this fact about Kennedy is to already grasp a complex institutional setting. Moreover, we must ask: is it true that President John F. Kennedy simply died? Yes, and No. To say that he has died does not convey that he has been killed. Indeed, to say that he was killed still does not capture what has happened. For one can be killed in an accident. Would it then be right to say that he was murdered? This, too, is true but only up to a point. For Kennedy was a President of the United States of America and his murder had a political motive. He was murdered probably by a network of rival political groups, state agencies and the mafia. His was a political assassination. When a person says that Kennedy was assassinated, we assume that he understands the distinction between dying, being killed, murdered or assassinated. Each of these concepts and the distinctions among them are part of, and implicit in the event of Kennedy losing his life.

Thus, we arrive at the following conclusions:

- The question of understanding, explanation and prediction about the non-human natural world is answered by the natural sciences.
- Given the difference between human and non-human nature, the question pertaining to the understanding, explanation and prediction about the human world is answered by the human sciences (by political science, sociology, anthropology, economics, etc.), though always aided by humanities and the arts.

What then is the proper role of social and political theory? Why we do need it? Let me straightaway elucidate two functions of political theory which it shares with social theory. Indeed, the *first* is not a separate function but an integral feature of all social sciences, including political science. If all human phenomena are constituted by pre-reflective or conceptual understanding and if philosophy/theory helps us understand this and make it explicit, then given the first feature mentioned above of political philosophy or political theory, the latter is an integral part of empirical social science. You can neither identify what you wish to explain nor what you are to explain it by unless you have a conceptual grasp of what these are. Philosophy is not merely a handmaiden of the human sciences but its integral feature. This is the interpretative and explanatory role of political theory.

The second function of political theory is this. Some social and political phenomenon have such a large scale that no specific empirical enquiry can do justice to it. Nor can it result from a collection of all the empirical detail. Data gathering and controlled enquiry can never suffice for the understanding of large social formations and for the explanation of changes within them or changes from one type to another. So the explanation of the rise of capitalism or the transition from feudalism to capitalism can never be understood or explained without some degree of speculation which is independent of empirical enquiry. Nor can we fully understand the nature of modernity or the variety of human predicaments in the modern world or the general attributes of subordination in a society that is colonized by another society merely by controlled empirical enquiry. This job is best done by social and political theory. The object of this enquiry itself is identified at a very general level and its fuller understanding or explanation cannot be properly controlled by empirical data but requires a speculative jump. Political theories must perform this second function of providing insight and understanding into the most general pattern of human practices and social change. Bhikhu Parekh calls this the contemplative role of political theory.

To grasp the *third* function of political theory, it is important to register the second qualitative difference between the natural and the social world and therefore between the natural and the human sciences. It makes no sense to ask moral and self-related questions about the physical world. It is no longer sensible to ask: how do we morally evaluate the force of gravity? Is there anything good or right about the laws of motion? Do chemical compounds have self-knowledge? However, such ethical and normative questions are at the heart of the human world.

Why is this so? Consider once again our claim concerning the action-dependence of the human world. Also, consider any human action. It is true that human action can be explained and to explain it is to provide the reason for why it was done. In this respect, explaining an action is no different than explaining any natural event. But in the case of human action we could ask another question. Is the reason for action a *good* one? Now, to say that it is a good reason is to endorse the action, to justify it. An action is not merely explained, it is also justified and as I said this justification is always accomplished in the light of some idea of good and bad, right and wrong.

This idea of justification can be explained in another way. Take the example from cricket again. When a batsman faces a ball bowled outside his off stump, he also faces a number of distinct possibilities. He can leave the ball alone or flash at it. If he decides to hit the ball,

he must make a quick decision whether to drive, slice or cut it, to hit the ball towards long off, to cover drive or square cut. If he is audacious, he can even pull it towards midwicket. This judgement must be made on the spot, within a split second. Now suppose, the ball is a perfect out swinger, the batsman flashes at it, gets an edge and is caught behind. He must ask himself if he had good reason to go after the ball, whether or not he made a correct judgement. Could he justify what he did to himself, to his captain, his team, the team's coach? Indeed, he is answerable to a much wider public. He is answerable because he could have acted otherwise. There is a reason why he got out. But it is not a *good* reason. His rash act can be explained but it cannot be justified.

Now, I want to draw a general conclusion from this example. To say that the human world is action-dependent is to say that it is grounded in one set of reasons from among several available and that the choice to act on one rather than another is made in the light of the person's own understanding and judgement of what is good or right for the agent in the context. This understanding can be evaluated by others. We can ask if the person's judgement of what is good is really so. Moreover, what is true of human action is also true of the state of affairs it brings about. Any thing which is a result of human action is out there from among many possibilities and part of the reason why it is there is because the agent or agents in question undertook it in the light of their own understanding of what is good or right. Human action and the world it creates must be necessarily evaluated because a normative component is an integral part of it.

The example I took involves an evaluative but not an ethical dimension. But cricket does possess an ethical aspect, too. Consider once again a bowler who has been hit for three consecutive fours. This assault is not merely on his bowling but on his own reckoning also on his sense of self-esteem and dignity. As he goes towards his bowling mark, he is angry and resentful. Indeed, he is so angry that he cannot contain himself. It occurs to him that to avenge the treatment meted out to him, he should bowl a beamer. Should he, really? He has a second to decide whether to do so or not. Should he use unfair means to remove the batsman from the crease? This is not all. A bookie has offered that if he is hit for four consecutive fours, he would earn twice the match fee paid to him by the Board. Should he succumb to this temptation? He must assess these reasons in the light of some conception of the good life, some idea of right or wrong. A cricketer has this choice. So do all other human beings in their respective contexts. In short, a human being has some degree of ethical or moral autonomy.

Similar ethical considerations also arise in politics. Consider that the state is withdrawing from the public sector, say public educational institutions. The policy of reservations is predicated upon the availability of seats or jobs in the public sector. If admission or employment opportunities get limited in this way, the policy of reservations becomes practically toothless. What must now be done for those who have been historically disadvantaged? At least two options are available. One is to pretend helplessness and to become indifferent to the plight of the 'Scheduled Castes'. The other is to compel the private sector to have, for example, a proportion of seats or jobs reserved for them. Whatever policy the state

adopts will be guided by some reason. The question is whether the reason guiding the policy is a good one. And whether it is really good or not must take into account the policy makers' understanding of what is good or bad, right or wrong and the assessment of this understanding by others. It will depend upon whether these considerations are given any weight at all, which itself is a matter of ethics. To fail to assess one's reason in the light of any ethics is itself unethical, if ethics has a bearing on these issues.

DECLINE OF POLITICAL THEORY?

This view that all human actions including public policy can be evaluated in the light of ethical considerations was not accepted by scientific-minded early modernists and resistance to it has somehow persisted to this day. A number of persons believe that a rational evaluation or enquiry of the moral world is impossible. The moral and political philosophy of yesteryears expressed merely the opinions, tastes and preferences of the individual enquirer and did not deserve the status of knowledge. Our experience yielded a wide variety of forms of self-understandings and moral opinions which can not be rationally evaluated. If they come into conflict, reason cannot arbitrate between them.

Perhaps for this reason, several philosophers in the Anglo-Saxon world began to claim that political theory was in an irretrievable decline. If political theory is a rational and normative enterprise, as indeed classical political philosophy from Plato to Hegel had sought to be, then after the 'new discovery' about the impossibility of such an enterprise and the rise of the empirical sciences, political theory was believed to have no future. Indeed, as someone put it, it was already 'dead'.

This view, associated with Positivism, is now widely believed to be deeply mistaken. Everything seen, heard or touched by human beings is already constituted by concepts and therefore everything in the human world has to be properly understood even as it is observed. Moreover, most of these concepts carry a normative import. The human world has to be, to some degree and extent, good or bad and human action, right or wrong. There is no feature of the human world entirely free from evaluative significance.

Of course, from this we could draw two different conclusions. If values are impervious to reason but constitute the human world, then all we can have is subjective opinion of this world. This means the impossibility of social sciences. This is a radical conclusion that the positivists did not reach because they rejected the first premise, namely, that facts and values are intertwined. Alternatively, we must abandon the assumption that values are beyond reason, and that therefore, it is possible to have objective knowledge of the human world. If values can be known and rationally assessed, then their permeation in the human world is no barrier to its understanding or rational assessment. This not only brings out the difference between the character and method of the natural and social sciences but also paves the way for a kind of systematic reflection that is exclusive to the human world, namely normative, moral or ethical theorizing.

So, in addition to two functions of political theory mentioned above, we have a third function, one that is special because exclusive to human phenomena: to bring out the normative import of concepts embedded in social practices and used in social sciences and to subject them to detailed critical reasoning. Indeed, for some people this has become the defining, perhaps even the sole function of political theory. Much of Anglo-Saxon political theory focuses only on the normative at a sufficient level of generality. In contrast, political theory on the Continent refuses to separate the normative from the explanatory/interpretative and the contemplative.

Continental political theory has a broader scope for another reason which needs explication and brings into relief the *fourth* function of political theory; to tell us who we are. Recall the point made earlier that in a hierarchical society, people perform actions in accordance with their social role, what in contemporary parlance we might call their identity. A person stands bowed with folded hands or walks at a safe distance from others, given that he is from a lower caste and the other has a much higher rank in the caste hierarchy. What he does now depends on what goes on in society and who he is. More generally, almost everywhere what one should do and who one is are related issues. When we ask the question, what are we to do? There is another question that we do not always ask. The implicit form of the question is: given that this is what we are, what are we to do? Classical political philosophers almost always asked these questions together: given the essence or purpose of human beings, what should they do? In contemporary theory, these questions are separated. Thus, political philosophy remains both a practical philosophy, i.e. one that has an action-guiding character and a systematic enquiry into the self, a kind of metaphysical self-knowledge.

At the cost of repetition, let me once again answer the question: What is the function of political theory? Given that empirical political science is meant primarily to understand, describe and explain how decisions are taken in a society and how some individuals, groups or classes are excluded from such decision making, one task of political theory is to help empirical political science to perform this role. However, it performs three roles not undertaken by the social sciences. First, to offer a general reflection on 'the human condition', on the predicament of modern societies, on who we are and so on (in Chapter 1, see point [e]). Second, a general reflection on a relatively narrow topic: the exercise of power in societies and the mechanisms by which power, i.e. domination is exercised by some over others. This includes the most general reflection on state power but if power resides in the capillaries of a society, then political theory is a reflection not only on the state but on the myriad capillaries in society (in Chapter 1, points [b], [c] and [d]). Third, it is the study of how this power should be wielded, by whom and why, and in the light of which values and ideas of the good life. This is a prescriptive, normative and broadly ethical enterprise. (In Chapter 1, point [f] and partly [a]). These three constitute the distinctive functions of political theory.

We can put the point differently by once again examining the six big questions. If the first three are answered primarily by the natural and the human sciences, the next three questions, of ethics and normativity and of metaphysical self-knowledge are answered by normative political theory along with philosophy, humanities and the arts.

TYPES OF POLITICAL THEORIES

Allow me to elaborate in somewhat greater detail these three different types of political theory.

Explanatory

Suppose that we wish to understand the birth of capitalist socio-economic formations. In the social sciences we have several different explanations. For example, Marx offered a general theory of fundamental social change. In one version of this theory humans have a fundamental interest in improving their material well-being and, therefore, in raising their level of productivity. Thus, Marx believed that this interest explains why there is a constant improvement in the level of productive forces. However, he also believed that a thing became a productive force only in use, and the use of productive forces presupposes that human beings relate to each other in particular ways. Marx called these relations social relations of production. Marx proposed the thesis that a certain type of social relations of production is appropriate, roughly speaking, to a particular level of development of productive forces. For Marx, a particular type of social relations of production facilitates the development of productive forces. However, beyond a point these very relations begin to hinder the further development of these forces. The level of productivity fails to rise, productive forces get into crises and yet the human urge for better material well-being does not cease. In short, a contradiction develops between the ever-developing productive forces and the existing but outdated relations of production. This contradiction, according to Marx, is resolved not by preserving the level of the development of productive forces but rather by changing the social relations of production. The new set of social relations of production comes into existence in order to facilitate the further development of productive forces. Marx developed this general theory to explain the rise of capitalism, which he defined largely in terms of the relation between capital and labour mediated by a free market. Such relations had to come into existence in order to increase human productivity at the time of the emergence of capitalism. Other thinkers offered different explanations. For example, Weber argued that capitalism could not have come into existence without a change in the cultural climate, in the attitudes of a specific set of people. This change of attitude was a component of and was brought about by a transformation in the dominant religion of particular societies. For Weber, the Protestant ethic that emphasized a certain degree of this-worldly asceticism and disciplined work was crucial both for the accumulation of capital and an efficient labour force, both of which were crucial for the emergence of capitalism.

Normative

Suppose that in a poverty-stricken country such as India, there is a demand that the right to work and therefore, that the right to an adequate minimum income be entrenched not just as a desirable goal but as a legal guarantee. Suppose also that there is a great

deal of resistance to this idea. For example, it might be argued that while social justice is important, it should not take precedence over the decisions of elected representatives and that therefore the government of the day, backed by the parliament may, from time to time, decide to have welfare schemes for the poor, and no welfare measure should be guaranteed by law. Thus, we have two broad positions on this issue, one for the right to work and the other against it. How do we break the deadlock? How do we advance further to resolve this dispute? We can settle the dispute in a number of ways. One, by a simple recourse to power. A position that is backed by greater power may override the other, irrespective of its moral strength. A pro-poor government may enact a law that entrenches the right to work as a judiciable right. Alternatively, a coalition of wealthy classes may buy off the fence sitters and block the constitutional entrenchment of this right. Both sides may arouse passion and let the matter be decided in the heat of the moment. In all such cases, a decision is made in favour of one or the other position without examining the merits of the case, without a detailed review of possible justifications in favour of either of the two positions. Normative political theory does not accept this way of proceeding on this issue. While it does not disregard the importance of emotion, rhetoric, negotiation and even power, it begins with the assumption that rational argument, in whatever form, must play a pivotal role in decisions on such matters.

So how would a normative political theorist proceed? A brief account may be as follows. The normative political theorist must begin with assumptions that most people can endorse. For example, few would deny that all citizens have a basic interest in living a minimally decent life. Nor would anyone deny that absence of physical suffering is part of a minimally decent existence. Thus, a modicum of material well-being is important for everyone, regardless of caste, religion, gender, inherited wealth and so on. We all have an equal moral right to a minimally decent existence. Once these assumptions are accepted, we are left with the more contentious issues. Does minimal well-being include simply the absence of physical suffering that can be remedied by welfare schemes or does it include the guarantee of work? Here we have to bring in two further issues. First, whether or not the democratically elected government of the day can be relied upon for initiating these schemes? Second, whether apart from the avoidance of physical sufferance, dignity is also an important component of well-being? What psychological impact does merely receiving benefits have on the poor? Is it not important that even the poor feel not that they are living on charity but that they have earned what they receive? Once dignity is included in the concept of well-being, which, if we think of humans not just as biological organisms but as persons, we must, we are committed to the view that, at least in modern societies, work is crucial for well-being. Therefore, a right to well-being, a right to be free from suffering must include the right to work.

To go to the second issue now: can we rely on democratically elected governments of the day to guarantee well-being? This is to be decided partly by the political history of societies and our understanding of the behaviour of people with wealth and power. My own answer is that the government of the day cannot be relied upon for such guarantees. This may be true even for governments with the best of intentions. Indeed, this assurance is

even less likely in democratic societies where governments may change every four to five years, and people have to live with a government that might initiate policies that go against their interests. Democratic governments cannot be trusted with the promises they keep, no matter how sincere they are. If so, such guarantees must be made an integral part of the constitution so that every democratically elected government is constrained to ensure the fulfilment of the right to work. An argument such as this neither undervalues democracy nor presents itself as the final word on the matter. It shows that this is one way in which we might proceed in democratic societies. In the last instance, it is meant to take a brief glance at and to illustrate how normative political theory may be done.

Contemplative

In her famous book, *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt begins by drawing our attention towards how in 1957, a satellite, an earth-born, man-made object stayed in skies, circled the earth and 'dwelt and moved in the proximity of the heavenly bodies as though it had been admitted tentatively to their sublime company'. She spoke of how for many this was the first 'step toward escape from men's imprisonment to the earth'. She also spoke of other new developments: the splitting of the atom as well as of the birth of a new language of mathematical symbols that contains statements which cannot be translated back into speech. With these introductory remarks, she proposed that in her new book she would offer a 'reconsideration of the human condition from the vantage point of our newest experiences and our most recent fears'. For Arendt, political theory was not reducible to its explanatory or normative functions, although clearly these functions are part of its defining features. Political theory for her, as indeed for many others, continues to be what it was for classical thinkers: a deeply contemplative enquiry into the general condition of human kind either over a very long period or at a certain stage of their changing existence.

LITTLE THEORIES, GRAND THEORIES

I have claimed that there are three types of political theories, explanatory/interpretative, normative and contemplative. All theories contain each of these dimensions. However, most of them implicitly emphasize either the explanatory (e.g., Weber's theory on the rise of capitalism or Marx's historical materialism) or the normative dimension (e.g., liberalism). These might be called little theories. On the other hand, some explicitly possess both. Let these as well as deeply contemplative theories be called grand theories (e.g., there are traditions of Marxism that claim to have each of the three features). Grand theories need to be distinguished from ideologies, worldviews and cosmologies that possess *one* of the six features mentioned above, namely, generality. In addition they may possess one or two other features, but rarely all. For example, they may attempt conceptual clarity or possess a rational structure but simply ignore the requirement to unearth hidden presuppositions.

Besides, unlike theory, their commitment even to these is half-hearted. They may start off with conceptual elaboration or the construction of an argument but stop mid-way—arbitrarily and abruptly. Almost always, they bypass controlled enquiry into the particular and are, therefore, largely speculative.

Theory and Ideology

The relationship of normative political theory and by implication of grand theories to modern ideology is particularly complex. Both try to persuade—in a crude sense, if we believe that we are roughly equal, we all try to convert one another to our own viewpoint. But there are important differences. While political theory tries to give the fullest possible reason for why a certain stand-point must be adopted, or why an act must be performed on the basis of one set of principles rather than another, ideology lacks a commitment to spell out all reasons. Reason is short-circuited and principles reduced to formulae. This is true of nationalism and fascism but also of liberalism and Marxism when they function as ideologies.

The case of liberal and Marxist ideologies shows that an ideology need not be entirely disconnected from reason. It may have a strategic connection. But it is in the nature of strategic connection that it is snapped if it no longer serves a specified end. As explained above, theory has an intrinsic commitment to reason that an ideology does not have. When liberalism and Marxism function as ideologies, they have merely a strategic connection with reason. This is not so when they function as political theories. It is possible then for Marxist or liberal political theory to come into conflict with Marxist or liberal ideology.

If all that I have said above is true, then political philosophy is even more different from another mode of persuasion and conversion, i.e. propaganda. For in propaganda, conversion is sought by opaque, manipulative methods. Advertising is a good example because here anything goes. Not only is transparency abandoned and reason short-circuited but everything hinges on pure rhetoric. Lies are permitted, so are half-truths. The bad points of a product are never mentioned and the good ones are exaggerated.

Before I end this section, one misunderstanding must be dispelled. Grand theories do share with ideologies and cosmologies another feature; they all perform one function—all of them attempt to formulate a common understanding of the world as well as provide a common normative orientation. When they do both, they provide a common self-definition, an identity. In the performance of this function, grand theories, ideologies and cosmologies may on the one hand compete with, rival, and substitute one another and on the other hand be mutually complementary. Thus, I am not suggesting that ideologies should be replaced by political theory. This can never happen. Ideologies have a function in society. Nor am I saying that we must always be rational and that there should be no place in the public sphere for emotion, rhetoric, or even condensed statements or formulae. But none of these should have such an overwhelming place in society that political theory is seen or made to be entirely redundant.

COSMOLOGIES AND POLITICAL THEORY

I have proposed that there is something distinctive about political theory and implied that something socially valuable is lost without it. In other words, I have suggested that we all need political theory. This might seem an odd claim. After all, many societies have lived without political philosophy or theory. At least, political philosophy has not existed as a separate entity in most societies. At best, we might say with hindsight that it lies hidden within cosmologies. My claim would be more defensible if it was made in favour of cosmologies for it is hard to imagine any society that is not accompanied by a cosmology.

One might then ask why cosmologies alone cannot suffice for the functions I have claimed for social and political theory? This brings us to the question of the difference between cosmologies and theories. And to why in modern societies, cosmologies probably do not suffice. I have three reasons to offer in support of theories. First, cosmologies are local and too tightly tied to contexts. Under modern conditions, however, we live in several contexts at once. Moreover, these contexts are not insulated from one another. They interact, intersect, inter-communicate. In these circumstances, anything with a purely local significance will not do. We need inter-contextual thinking. We need something which does not merely pretend to be general but is really so. Since theories possess this inter-contextual generality, they are better likely to serve us in these conditions. Furthermore, we live in times and in places where people with remarkably different cultural backgrounds and cosmologies have been thrown together. This has happened not merely with globalization but much earlier with the formation of nation-states. Despite their claims of cultural homogeneity, nation-states have had to deal with diverse local traditions and deep cultural heterogeneity. Nation-states bring together strangers. Recall my point that cosmologies are required to re-familiarize what was once familiar and is currently not. Now, this condition of almost permanent unfamiliarity with everything around us, including other human beings with whom we interact, is pervasive in modern societies where, frequently, the very distinction between insiders and outsiders collapses.

Second, the situation in our times is one of a near-permanent crisis of mutual understanding and common agreement. Nation-states are built around a rough consensus on some issues, a mixture of indifference and forgetting on the part of its members, a fair amount of illegitimate force and huge areas of difference and disagreement. Such large societies can hardly be stable. But they are unlikely to survive without a good deal of open communication among its diverse people. Conceptual clarity enables better communication. Through argument, differences which are the norm in our societies can be managed if not resolved. We need to give reasons to one another for and against why some policy is to be initiated. We need to be more critically self-aware of why we are doing what we do. The rational structure embedded in theories appears to offer some hope towards a possible resolution of some of the most significant differences that remain between us. Third, modern societies no longer have one locus of authority. In the past, community-based cosmologies frequently gave answers in a manner that gave the impression that they were emanating a single authoritative

source. Some theories which imitate these cosmologies give the same impression. But the truth is that such a source does not exist anymore. We have multiple sources of authority and to communicate amongst them, we need a space where reasons are offered, examined, questioned, challenged, endorsed, rebutted or mediated. A theory provides such a space which local cosmologies may be unable to provide. Apart from these, there is a wholly separate reason: Questions answered by normative political theory need to be even more urgently addressed. There are no easy answers to the questions: 'how are we to live?' 'What am I?' 'What are we to do?' These questions have acquired urgency because old certainties are gone, everything is up for grabs and therefore, everything needs to be justified. Nothing today can be taken for granted. Secularism, democracy and equality cannot simply be assumed. Their ethical importance will always be questioned. Their value has to be justified not only to those who oppose but also to those who defend them. Besides, these concepts do not come in one unique form. Therefore, we have to justify which conception of secularism or democracy or equality is worth having in our context. Normative political theory is meant to do just that.

To sum up, both the task of general understanding and prescribing are crucial in modern societies. A theory of both how power is really exercised and how it should be used is crucial for two reasons. First, because modernity disperses communities and yet connects societies in such an intensified manner that understanding and explanations of specific groups and societies will never yield a relevant, comprehensive understanding of any issue. Disparate but related phenomena must be brought together under a general rubric to give us a satisfactory knowledge of them. Second, traditional knowledge systems and older cosmologies are unable to tell us what we need to do and in the light of which values. Modern political theory appears to have the potential to do so, as long as it performs this task with modesty and with the help of social science, humanities and the arts.

HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT AND POLITICAL THEORY

I need to address one final issue before bringing this discussion to a close. I have written of political theory as if its history is irrelevant. If I have given that impression, it is because of paucity of time and space. Let me address it very briefly. Consider a social practice. Suppose that it is being challenged by a group but you are not among those who oppose it. You wish to defend the practice and therefore ask the legitimate question: what is the good embedded in the practice. In fact, you may be more neutral and may wish to examine and evaluate the practice so that it may be critiqued or endorsed. But before you begin to do so you must identify it. You need to articulate both what it is and the underlying point behind it. This, however, is not as easy as it seems. Sometimes that with which you are excessively familiar, that which appears to you to be obviously valuable is among the least understood. It is not properly understood because it has receded into the background, almost merged

with it. It is so much taken for granted that one does not even notice that it exists. After all, this is precisely what is meant by taking something for granted. This excessive familiarity has then become an obstruction to its proper understanding and to an understanding of its underlying values. If we are to better understand it, a change of stance towards it becomes mandatory. To begin to notice it, we need to make it unfamiliar, to defamiliarize it. Some strategy of radical estrangement is required to counter an already existing familiarity. We need to introduce a part-existential and part-reflective disquiet about the practice. Only then will we begin to better recognize it. Among the strategies of estrangement and re-familiarization is to place the practice along with other similar yet related practices. Locating a practice among others may be accomplished either by the use of one's imagination or by cross-cultural comparison. When this is done one gains the awareness that it is one among several practices, one of the several ways in which the objective or value underlying the practice is accomplished. One realizes that what had appeared natural, what one had taken for granted is one of the many possible ways of doing roughly the same thing and that it is not a natural, permanent phenomenon but a social construction carved out of one set of choices.

Now, this defamiliarization can be accomplished not just by travelling in space, that is, by moving from one cultural location to another existing at the same time but also by moving back in time. In short, by asking the question: what were the analogues of this practice in the past that achieved if not the same, other similar values, values that belong roughly to the same family? Or else, we can go back not to the very distant past where we would find entirely different practices for comparison but to that moment of transition when this very practice began to first take shape? Indeed, to go back to its moment of origin is useful for another reason. It is useful because when the practice was born, there may have been something startlingly new about it. Therefore, it must have been noticed by everyone. This is precisely the time when it was least taken for granted, when those in favour of it were keen to offer a fully explicit defence on its behalf and those opposed to it were equally keen to rebut it. At that period and in that context it is likely that a very rich set of arguments surrounded the practice, one that by now is forgotten. By going back in time, we retrieve those arguments, that one must remember, are once again desperately needed, now that it has become contentious. Rather than put all our labour into a *de novo* articulation of the conceptual and normative structure of the practice, understanding the history of the practice is a more economical way of achieving the same result. We re-articulate what is currently in a hopeless condition of inarticulacy. This remembering is also a process of recovery of the richness of that practice. This is why a proper political argument about rights must take us back to the writings of John Locke, a proper understanding of nationalism must compel us to return to Herder, and in order to properly debate about Western modernity and colonialism, we cannot set aside Gandhi's *Hind Swaraj*. For a full disclosure of all the complex reasons for and against a practice, for the values that inspired it and the murk in which it was entangled we need to uncover the origins of that practice and to fully grasp these origins we need to do the history of political philosophy.

In this chapter, I tried to answer the question what theories in general are meant to do. I suggested that, in their own distinctive way, theories also answer the big questions of human existence. I then suggested that some of these answers are now best provided by systematic empirical enquiry and natural-scientific theories. The natural sciences understand, explain and predict events and processes in the non-human natural world. Scientific theories do the same at the most general level. The social sciences—including political science—understand, explain and seek to predict events and processes in the human world. Political theory is then left to perform three important functions: the explanatory function at the most general level, but more distinctively the contemplative and the normative. In this chapter, I also (*a*) distinguished between political theory on the one hand, and ideologies and propaganda on the other; (*b*) claimed that political theory may be able to respond to our needs under conditions of modernity somewhat better than cosmologies do; (*c*) briefly explained why in the 1950s, there was widespread belief that political theory was either dead or in decline, and; (*d*) explained the relationship between contemporary political theory and the history of political thought.

Points for Discussion

1. Charles Taylor has called humans 'self-interpretating animals'. Gadamer says that interpretation is the distinctively human mode of being. What sense can you make of these statements in the light of what you have read in this chapter?
2. There is a widespread belief that all evaluations are subjective. Good and bad, right and wrong are relative to each individual, at least to every society. This makes normative political theory impossible. Discuss.
3. If cosmologies can explain, understand, evaluate and give effective answers to questions about who we are, then modern political theory is redundant. Discuss.
4. Deep down, political theories are ideologies. Therefore, political theory is an intellectual passion of the elite. Discuss.

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