



Political Science And Normative Political Theory As Tools For Social Transformation

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ABSTRACT

This paper made a case for the continued relevance of Political Theory in today's world. It tried to answer the question: is Political Theory still relevant, and if so, to what extent? The paper explained the meaning and scope of Political Theory as differentiated from other enquiries about politics. It argued that Political Theory is essentially normative and ethical, and therefore plays a distinct and special role in contemporary social transformation. Revisionist Marxist Critical theory of the Frankfurt School which included thinkers such as Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno, Jurgen Habermas, Georg Lukacs, and Herbert Marcuse, was adopted as the theoretical framework. It is an essentially theoretical work and therefore relied on secondary sources of data such as books, academic journals, periodicals, newspapers and magazines and internet materials as well as logical, critical and content analysis of extant literature for data analysis. In conclusion it faulted the emerging trend in which studies that are not grounded on empirical observations are regarded as not potent enough to give valid knowledge or that only studies that dealt with material objects could be admitted into the realms of worthy studies. Its major recommendation is that Political Theory should continue to be part of the academic curriculum of the Twenty-First Century as it serves as a tool for both social transformation and stability in contemporary societies.

Keywords: Political Theory, Normative Theory, Society, Positivism, Empiricism

INTRODUCTION

It is easy to dismiss discussions on the significance of Political Theory with the assumption that it deals with the review of the ideas and philosophies of ages past –some as old as two and half centuries. Plato, the supposed rallying figure of Political Theory, lived and wrote between 427 and 347 BC, that is, over 2400 years ago. Aristotle lived and wrote between 384 and 322 BC; Niccolo Machiavelli between 1469 and 1527; J. S. Mill between 1806 and 1873; Thomas Hobbes between 1588 and 1679; John Locke between 1632 and 1704; Georg W. F. Hegel between 1770 and 1831, and Karl Marx between 1818 and 1883. And all these men did weave their political philosophies from the social realities of their days, and the realities of their days were far different from ours. Therefore if Political Theory is the review of these men's philosophies, then there is a question mark on the relevance of Political Theory today. Or does it stretch beyond the review of political ideas? Hence, Political Theory, as an arm of political science, is in dare need of defence. Why should our curriculum still have space for Political Theory? Moreover, in a world where the benefits of science have become very glaring, every study that is not grounded in the scientific method needs some sort of defence, or else it would slip into the relics of history. This is more so for Political Theory because of the importance and dynamics of politics and the urgency and passion with which political goods are demanded.

It has become necessary, given the nature of the times, to justify the continuous inclusion of Political Theory as a foundational part of the curriculum of the Political Science Course. It would be laughable to respond to the question of the contemporary relevance of Ancient and Mediaeval Political Theory, for instance, with: “Just trust the framers of your curriculum!” This is especially so because there is this increasing distrust of the governments who are the major stakeholders in the framing of curricula the world over. Every teacher has the duty to justify his paycheque, and that justification is harder for those whose lessons do not relate to immediate concrete realities.

Some very hard questions need to be asked and answered if Political Theory is to continue to be part of the curriculum of the Twenty-First Century. One of such questions is on the nature and scope of Political Theory, that is, what really is Political Theory? The answer to this question is imperative because of the long history of Political Theory—a history whose *official record* stretches back into the 5th century BC – which has made it to undergo many philosophical and practical transformations. To defend Political Theory, we must answer the question of what Political Theory is. Another question that must be answered relates to the extent of the relevance of Political Theory. Political Theory may not be outdated, but how relevant is it to the political and social challenges of the times to be offered a space/place in the contemporary curriculum? This question has to be answered because of the nature of the time. There are many areas which man has to explore, so many fronts to be covered, so why do we have to keep expending energies in the endeavour of Political Theory?

The Problem

The aim of this brief paper is modest but critical. It would make a case for the continued relevance of Political Theory, by explaining its nature, scope and relevance. Many people tend to misunderstand what the field of Political Theory is about, and therefore fail to appreciate or recognise its importance in a world burdened by the demands of empiricism. This study would try to explain the problem of what constitutes the grounds of Political Theory. Part of the problem is the confusion over the proper conceptualisation of Political Theory. Another is the problem of boundaries of political inquiry between the ideas of past political thinkers, the exploration of which would reveal how political theory is broader than the general perception of outsiders. A further problem to be examined is that of the effect of the rise of positivism and empiricism on Political Theory as a field of study and a tool for social transformation. The study would show how the fame of Political Theory declined with the rise of science and the belief in the universality of empiricism. Generally, the paper would demonstrate why Political Theory is still very relevant, despite today’s world being apparently driven by science and empiricism. In doing so, it would also make a case against soulless empiricism.

Critics of this piece may be uncomfortable with the title and aim of this paper. They may argue that the concern of this paper is outdated and would have been appropriate during the expansionary campaigns of the behaviouralists in the 1950s. However, this praise for Political Theory is still imperative for three reasons. First, Political Theory has not fully recovered from the attack that it got from the empiricists in the 1950s. Hence, it is still important to say in clear terms why value-judgement should still be part of the study of politics. Second, Political Theory may not currently be under attack, but it is at risk of being ignored –which is an equally huge concern. Many people pay little or no attention to the issues raised by the political theorist. Even though his ideas are not under attack, there is a need to call attention to the validity of his concerns; he needs to be defended from the cloak of neglect. Third, giving the nature of the contemporary world, it is increasing becoming clear that there is need to start thinking deeply on how to manage the benefits (consequences?) of science and technology. If contemporary technologies are not checked by some moral prism, the world is only headed for doom. So there is need for the political theorist to keep restating some of the values human share at the political level, especially because political decisions usually have very wide range of impact.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

This paper aimed to explore the real meaning of democracy and its relationship with the provision of dividends of democracy as well as the circumstances under which it could facilitate political and economic development. The specific objectives are to:

1. Explain the various strands of the concept of democracy.

2. Examine the relationship between modern democracy and the dividends of democracy.
3. Show how democracy could facilitate economic prosperity.

Research Questions

1. What are the various strands of the concept of democracy?
2. What is the nature of the relationship between modern democracy and the dividends of democracy?
3. In what ways and under what circumstances could democracy facilitate economic prosperity?

Theoretical Framework

The preferred theory to provide an organizing framework for this study is Critical Theory, a conceptual paradigm produced by what came to be known as the Frankfurt School, the Institute of Social Research established in Frankfurt, Germany under the directorship of Max Horkheimer (1895–1973) in 1923. Critical Theory is a brand of Marxism, a revisionist social and political philosophy that though inspired by Marx, nonetheless made far-reaching theoretical shifts. The Institute brought together a number of like-minded scholars and researchers, such as Theodore Adorno, Benjamin Walter, Herbert Marcuse, Jurgen Habermas, Karl Korsch, etc. The basic task Critical Theory imposed on itself was a reconstruction of the basic and traditional assumptions of positivism and empiricism in order to create a niche for revolutionary or critical thought and action as a brand of knowledge distinct from the natural and even some social sciences. Consequently, the theoretical focus of the Institute under Horkheimer radically shifted from the somewhat scientific or empirical Marxism of Carl Grünberg, the first director of the Institute, by rather adopting a more interdisciplinary approach, which incorporated and effectively utilized the methods of economics, psychology, history, and philosophy.

Horkheimer drew a theoretical distinction between “traditional” theory and “critical” theory, based on their normative and practical objectives and focus. Traditional theory is an approach predominant in the natural and social sciences that is preoccupied with mathematical procedures and models, while Critical Theory focuses on men as producers of their own historical and social way of life in totality. In contradistinction to traditional theory, which tends to appropriate the scientific method of inquiry to itself, Critical Theory places emphasis on real life situations, conditions or social and historical factors that determine the imperative of scientific inquiry in the first place (Bolaños, 2013).

Horkheimer conceptualized ‘traditional’ theory in terms of the scientific principles of positivism and empiricism and designed either to maintain or ignore the status quo or both. Conversely, Critical Theory draws its strength from interpretive and self-reflective methods and designed not only to describe or survey the world or phenomena, but to also act as a force within it to instigate change. This philosophical thought is inspired by Marx’s 11th thesis on Feuerbach, which states that “philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it” (Marx 1977: 158). Critical theorists refer to traditional theory as instrumental rationality, i.e. essentially as an instrument of social domination. It is also on this basis that it rejects the positivist separation of facts from values, subject from object of knowledge. Thus Critical Theory seeks to remove these ideological forces and forms of domination (Devetak, George, & Weber, 2016).

Critical theory thus seeks the human capacity to devise social and political arrangements built on principles of justice, democracy and the rule of law. This enables them to persistently argue that politics can always be studied, analysed and evaluated from a purely moral perspective. This recovery and clarification of normative or moral perspective in political studies is a major intellectual breakthrough achieved by Critical Theory and is also very germane and significant for this paper. Habermas has drawn attention to how we acquire and utilize knowledge and how this knowledge is defined by prior interests and motivations of which we are often unaware. Such constitutive interests often shape, direct and limit the way in which people think and act. Habermas as cited in Devetak, George, & Weber, (2016) differentiated three kinds of knowledge based on underlying interest or purpose:

- instrumental – referring to ‘scientific’ knowledge regarding human relations with nature
- strategic – referring to ‘political’ knowledge aimed at coordinating human action for particular social purposes, and

- emancipatory – referring to knowledge directed at overcoming coercive or oppressive social and political relations.

While not denying the validity and great value of instrumental or strategic knowledge he insists that they should equally not deny or colonise other spheres of knowledge. Without doubt science very significant as we rely on it for achieving technical knowledge in fields such as medicine, engineering, aeronautics, but is nonetheless only one sphere of knowledge and should not emasculate social and political spheres of knowledge that seek to change or transform society for the better, especially for the underprivileged. Constitutive interests are crucial to a healthy, virile, functioning and egalitarian society.

What is Political Theory?

Imagine for a moment how human interactions would be if there were no police, army, positive law, or other government agencies that help in the regulation of human conducts. More specifically, imagine that there are no traffic laws stating the side of the road on which one is to ride; everyone is free to ride on his preferred side and can switch sides at whims. The result will be chaos!

It does not require any stretch of imagination to realise that social interactions without government would be quite chaotic. It may not be as solitary, poor, brutish and short as Thomas Hobbes (1688) pictured it, but it would be chaotic. Government or the political community is very important in man's quest to actualise his potentials, for it tries to establish the common good and establishes the framework within which social exchanges can be done with the most minimal of conflict.

Given the importance of the political community, thinkers of all eras have expended energies in the quest to understand the factors that have shaped the nature and dynamics of the political community. Thinkers have thought deeply about the problem inherent in group life, and how political societies have adjusted and may adjust to properly manage the contradictions that characterise communal living. Maxey (2000) explains that the reason many thinkers have expended huge mental resources in the study of government is that nothing has influenced the history of the human race more than the institution of government and therefore as long as men do any conscious thought they must think about the political community. Generally, the various endeavours to appreciate and understand the problems in political existence is what is termed, "Political Theory".

It is in the light of the foregoing that Sabine and Thorson (1973, p.73) defined Political Theory as "man's attempts to consciously understand and solve the problems of group life and organisation...an intellectual tradition and its history consists of the evolution of men's thoughts about political problems overtime". Note two things in Sabine and Thorson's definition. First, it has to do with a *conscious thought* at solving the problems inherent in group life. By conscious thought is meant, careful, systematic, and focused reflection. Second, Political theory is the study of political intellectual history. It involves the evaluation of the thoughts of people who have influenced the evolution of political ideas and events. The foregoing notwithstanding, because of its long history and because of the many different efforts that have been made within its domain, it would require many words to say exactly what Political Theory is. Especially, for the purpose of our paper, Sabine and Thorson's definition of Political Theory needs to be fleshed out, so we may properly delineate political theory from other aspects of Political Science. To be sure, it is not every endeavour that is directed at the study of politics and the development of the mechanisms for the solution of the problems of group life that is within the ambit of political theory.

Political theory has its unique characteristics, namely, it is a normative and ethical evaluation of politics. Not all evaluations of politics are normative and ethical in character. What distinguishes political theory from other forms of evaluations is that it is concerned with how and with what normative and moral justifications public decisions are made concerning the good life in a society. To ignore these unique characteristics is to downplay the specificity of an intellectual history that is approximately two and a half centuries old.

To appropriately understand Political Theory, it is important that the terms, "political" and "theory" are separately understood, particularly, because what constitutes the nature and goals of "the political" have often been a huge source of disagreements over the years. It should be stated from the outset that unless the meaning and terrain of the political (politics) is agreed upon, it would be impossible to define the

scope of the relevance of Political Theory. Corollary to the above, it seems that much of the disregard for political theory stems from a misunderstanding of politics. If one understands politics as all the power structures for the oppression of people within a human community, or as do-or-die affair, it may be difficult to appreciate the normative and ethical dimension of the political. Hence, the first prong of our attempt to explain political theory is to define “the political.”

“Political” is simply everything that relates to politics, that is, the political is the expression of politics. The big question is: what is politics? Politics is the means by which people create and recreate the legal frameworks that govern their social exchanges. It may also be defined as the balancing and reconciliation of interests for the appropriate and orderly allocation of resources. Because humans are free agents with different needs, preferences and aspirations, to maintain order, frameworks have to be put in place for the reconciliation of interests and values. And the means for that reconciliation are what are called “politics”. It is in this sense that Laswell (1936) defined politics as the determination of who gets what, when and how. Note two things in Lasswell’s definition, namely, (a) *determination* involves collation of different interests, (b) *what, when and how* involves social resources (goods and values), time (moment and length of time) and criteria for and means of allocation. (All these involve both moral and empirical evaluations.) On the other hand, a theory is a set of generalised propositions about the principles guiding a particular group of phenomena. It is a simplification of the character/nature of the relationship among a set of related objects or phenomena. That is, “a general statement about how some parts of the world fit together and how they work” (Henslin, 2008, p23). Ndu (1998, p.9) defined it as, “a reasoned shorthand explanation of the general and basic principles of a fact or set of facts which belong to the same family...as a product of pure thought, theory is presented as a system of logical suppositions and/or propositions which are intended to explain all the facts –origin, character, functions, purposes and ends – of a given phenomenon.”

When the two terms are put together, we may define Political Theory as the conscious effort at the understanding of the moral essence of political existence, and the philosophical recommendations on the best political frames for the management of social problems. It concerns the critical observations or propositions about the moral nature of the state, government and citizens, and all the tensions and exchanges between them. There are two unique characteristics of political theory that set it apart from other studies that are aimed at the understanding of politics. The first is that it is the *ethical evaluation* of public life, that is, it creates some moral prisms that define the purpose and woe of politics. That is, it is create some moral ideals for the evaluation of present past and future political lives. The second characteristic of political theory, which is a corollary to the first, is that it is normative. That is, it tells what politics ought to be, as against what it is, and suggest ways for the realisation of the best standard of political life.

It is important to mention here that our notion of political theory is that which some scholars would prefer to call, “normative political theory” or “political philosophy.” It is our view that political theory is essentially moral and normative, and hence it is the same with normative political theory or political philosophy! No doubt, political theory has some empirical fronts, because no political theorist, no matter how abstract he tends to be, can weave his political theory without an appreciation of the facts on ground. Even though this appreciation or acknowledgement of facts may sometimes be very faint, it serves as the framework on which theories are built. Consider the theory of one of the most abstract theorists, namely, Plato. In his major work, *Republic*, Plato argued for a totalitarian state where only a few people with philosophical knowledge-philosophers - would man the rein of leadership. His theory was a far cry from what existed (or could exist) in his actual democratic society, as it was not only contrary to democracy but was also totally anti-democratic. It is easy to think that Plato was just too abstract to have taken any philosophical lead from his society. But a consideration of the general context within which he wrote, reveals two things. First, that his theory was shaped by the fact that his master, Socrates, who was declared by the Oracle at Delphi to be the wisest man in Athens, was killed by democracy. Hence, his distaste for democracy and love for knowledge. As Mukherjee and Ramaswamy (1999, p.55) rightly put it, “The Republic was an indictment of the Athenian way of life and its vibrant participatory democratic institutions”. Second, his theory was shaped by the political realities in Sparta, which he believed was a

better organised state. In fact, Russell (2009) thinks that Plato's Republic was largely an exaggeration of the happenings in Sparta, and an expression of his displeasure with the weaknesses of his state, Athens, in the era of the Peloponnesian War.

Our case is that political theory or normative political theory or political philosophy despite being prescriptive or normative is grounded on empirical political premises. To arrive at sensible alternative prescriptions for existing political systems, one must first understand how society actually works. To criticise and recommend an alternative, one must first know what are the political problems and the political capabilities and natural capacity of man for resolving them. This is imperative because it helps one to evaluate the practicability or viability of such alternative blueprints. Political criticisms and prescriptions do not, as Gewirth (1965, p.2) rightly observed, "necessarily entail dogmatic moralising or an ignoring of the realities of power politic . . . The correct assessment of the applicability of such moral criteria demands, as a prerequisite, a realistic awareness of relevant facts". However, what distinguishes political theory from political science is that the former evaluates concerns related to political justifications, virtue, rights, value, norms and ethics.

The foregoing notwithstanding, political theory, properly so-called, is normative; it prescribes what ought to be as against what is. It asks normative questions about politics and describes the nature of the preferred society as distinct from actual society. It does not pay sustained attention to empirical political realities beyond what is necessary for a clear distinction between actual politics and normative politics.

Perhaps the reason scholars have been trying to stress on the empirical aspect of political theory is their fear that the fancy for empiricism in today's world may render political theory moribund. It may be their way of saying "political theory too is empirical and therefore relevant to the times!" To be sure, this paper, however, does not say that the political theorist does not have any right, whatsoever, to claim to be a scientist. He does have some strong points to demand to be accorded the status of a scientist. As it is known, science is only a process; a careful, systematic search for knowledge. And since the political theorist also engages in some very systematic search for the ethical standards on which to base political actions and goals, he is free to claim to be a scientist. But in the grand scheme of things, the political theorist's goal is to establish a moral yardstick for the evaluation of the goodness and badness of political arrangements. He deals with value-judgements, and therefore not a scientist, in the strict sense of the word.

Political Theory is that intellectual tradition which believes that man is a value-agent, and his political actions and inactions must be evaluated beyond the immediate practical concerns of the political community. It is the ethical evaluation of politics, and it prescribes how society ought to be governed. Dahl (1976, p.139) observed that "...one contribution of normative analysis can be –and at its best is –that of clarification. To help us understand the grounds on which we stand, the principles to which we commit ourselves, the relations among our principles –their consistency or conflict –the nature of the alternatives we confront, and, finally, which alternative is the best and our reasons for believing so."

(For record purposes, note that political theory logically has two subdivisions. First, political theory is a conscious process of thinking about the moral reckoning and end of the state. Second, Political Theory is an academic endeavour of contemplating the ideas and philosophies of past political theorists. This paper has collapsed Political Theory as an activity and Political Theory as an academic field of study. Even though these are two separate categories and their distinction could be quite important, the purpose of this paper does not particularly demand such distinction).

Logical Positivism And The Supposed Demise Of Political Theory

The period between Plato (427-347) and Hegel (1770-1831) is popularly acknowledged as the *Golden Age of Political Philosophy or Theory*. Normative studies of politics flourished all over the world. This is not to say that there were no political thinkers who were fans of empiricism and science. It is rather to say that the bulk of political thinking and literature were less concerned with the empirical. The propositions of the students of politics tended to the conceiving of ideals and the designing of blueprints by which the ideals could be achieved in human society. Political enquiries were mainly in the light of subjecting particular political realities under ethical or moral judgements. It was basically the era of political theory,

in the sense of the use of mental or philosophic tools to assess the real worth or value of political realities; it was the epoch of the creation of utopias. All social parameters such as justice, equality, rights, happiness, freedom and even the whole essence of the political society were viewed in the light of morality. How could society transcend beyond its present realities? How could justice be appropriately established in human society? What is the ethical justification for the political society? How should society be governed? What ought to be the nature and goal of political power? Who should hold political power, and why should they hold political power rather than others?

The foregoing were some of the questions that occupied the political thinkers of the era. Students of politics were preoccupied with how society could be given some standard or yardstick for measuring its efficiency, effectiveness and aspirations. Philosophic societies were constructed through hypothetical reasoning, wherefrom actual societies could gain some corrective substance. Therefore, it could be said the traditional political inquiry was concerned about the creation of frameworks that showed the weaknesses of societies and implementable public policies and laws for remedying them.

The reign of Political Theory started receiving some critical confrontations and noticeable jerks in the 17th century with the writings of Immanuel Kant. Kant's division of ways of acquiring knowledge into philosophical and empirical categories has made political thinkers increasingly aware of the divide in political knowledge. The 18th century was crazy over science. Every study had to start adjusting itself to the method of science. And this became even more noticeable in the 19th century. With the works of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) and the century's belief in objectivity and its fancy for empirical over normative ideas, normative political analysis started to lose fame (Dahl, 1976).

However, it was not until the 20th century that a real conscious attempt at destroying what seems to be the unrivalled reign of Political Theory became formally institutionalised. This real and frontal attack on metaphysical political theories has come to be known as *Logical Positivism or Logical Empiricism*. The logical positivist campaign started in the 1920s and early 1930s in two renowned universities in the world: the University of Vienna in Austria (among a small group of philosophers and scientists known as the Vienna Circle) and Cambridge University in England. Of these two, the Vienna Circle stands out and is most often considered the cradle of logical positivism. In the 1950s much of the logical positivist campaign transformed into Behaviouralism –the science of political behaviour.

The Logical positivist campaign had two related goals. First, it tried to show the fault and non-verifiability of all metaphysical knowledge. Its second goal was to promote empirical tools/methods in social studies as it was in the natural sciences. As Lavine (1984,p. 398) rightly observed,

The logical positivism developed by the Vienna Circle set out from its inception to destroy metaphysics...the goal of the Vienna Circle was to destroy philosophy except for the philosophic analysis necessary to establish an absolute certain foundation for the sciences...and to make the science of physics the model for all human knowledge....logical positivism became an international movement holding congresses and publishing monographs for the purpose of propagating and furthering a scientific outlook.

They believed that whatever was not scientifically governed or derived, and therefore not empirically concrete, is not knowledge but mere superstition. Truth, for them, must be a product of empirically verifiable scientific knowledge. Value-judgement has no place in the advancement of the frontiers of human knowledge.

Proponents of logical positivism to this day hold it true that social studies like every other endeavour of the advancement of human knowledge can be or must be uplifted to the realms of science. Purcell (1973, p.3) captures their general convictions thus, “No priori truths existed, and metaphysics was merely a cover for human ignorance and superstition. Only concrete, scientific investigation can yield true knowledge, and that knowledge was empirical, particular, and experimentally verifiable.” For them, therefore, the problem with Political Theory and why it cannot advance social truth is that it deals with values that are not amenable to empirical scientific analysis. Therefore, to save Political Theory from being useless, the tools of the natural sciences must be adopted for its investigations.

In Praise of Political Theory

Political theory tries to understand the value context of political actions, that is, it looks farther away from the practical context of actions to assess the value context of

Granted that political theory has to do with values, it cannot be undermined because of human nature and the human condition. Humans are value agents; they are more value-driven than most empiricists try to make-believe. As Dahl (1976, p.14) rightly noted, "even in the most mundane aspects of life, we act on the belief that some things are better than the other." Human choices bear with them deep-seated values, hence, cannot be understood through some narrow and specific laid down scientific procedures. The restrictions of science and the empirical method cannot adequately appreciate the complex dimensions of man. Moreover, the intentions underlying most of man's actions and inaction are beyond the scope of empirical studies and yet they form a bulk of the explanation of his social and political essence. Those dimensions can only be appropriately understood through cerebral and philosophic endeavours. To fully understand man's political behaviour, one must pry into the realm of values. It is only when a student of politics is able to appropriately capture and understand the beliefs underlying man's choices, their essence and locus – which are mostly in the abstract realm – that he would be well-positioned to solve with appreciable success the problems inherent in group life.

Ndu (1998) has rightly observed that politics, like most other social activities, has to do with values. Some basic values underlie every political decision, and unless those values are understood, man's political decisions and actions may not be appropriately understood. This was why Lipset (1966, p.294-295) submitted that, "political analysis often requires looking behind actions into probable motives generating behaviour patterns. Although motives are not in the realm of observable phenomena, to overlook them in political research would in many cases result in rather superficial analysis." The quest by empiricists to model all political studies after the natural sciences faces the problem of taking the apparent as real. Empirical conclusions are made based on calculated, observable uniformities, and the interactions of men are often believed to not just be identical but same with the interactions of the parts of a machine. This mechanistic view of society considers man as a soulless being with no spiritual essence.

Empiricism does not reach into the realms of values and therefore do not have the ability to *improve* society. The importance of Political Theory is that it is a conscious endeavour to improve society by revealing its weaknesses and subsequently prescribing what ought to be. Political Theory draws up pictures from which society is assessed. Moreover, politics being an important, continuous process must be given some backward and forward jerks through moral evaluations, to keep it away from degeneration. As Gewirth (1965, p.1-2) rightly observed, "whatever be the aims of particular political agents or groups, their acts can and should be subjected to moral criticism simply because they have such enormous consequences for human weal or woe." The goal of Political theory is to offer such moral criticisms.

Political theory is therefore a guide to practical politics. It explains what is realisable under what circumstances, and therefore offers a philosophical model for political practices. On this point, Marxism is a good example. When Marx wrote the theory of his communist state, many people saw his theory as utopian and one that cannot be realised. Even though it has not been realised two centuries after, his theory has helped to shape people's understanding of the many failings of the capitalist system. In fact, the capitalist welfare state (welfarism) could be seen as a half-hearted implementation of the ideas of Marxism. It is in this sense that Bluhm (1978, p.499) observed that, "political theories are not (or at least not only) objects of aesthetic contemplation, but representation of practical truth. By 'practical truth' I mean images of reality which lead to practice."

One may wonder what befalls the society after the empiricists have discovered and identified its problems. We cannot stick with the empirical because it cannot adequately suggest the whole range of options from which to choose the solution to social problems. Political theory goes beyond the simple counting of shreds of evidence to revealing speculations about the ideal political order for man. Writing generally about theory Nixon (2004) submitted thus:

Theory, I suggest, has three aspects that are indispensable resources for professional practitioners. Theory, in other words, faces outwards in three different directions: toward the analytical interpretation of

intent and actions; towards the speculative evaluation of alternative courses of action; and toward the explanatory justification of the principles underlying practice.

Being purely empirical, or rather, excessive hold on empiricism kills the innovative and thinking ability of man; it narrows the scope of man's creative genius by limiting him to the doctrines/dogma of scientific laws. Core empiricists tend to be so preoccupied with scientific models and principles that they are unable to appreciate some simple uncalculated (unmeasurable) values of social existence. Empiricism in its purest form is meaningless, uninteresting and lacks attraction. This is because facts are meaningless without the support of values. Facts exist and gain meanings from and within specific social contexts, and every social context is packed with loads of values. There cannot be a meaningful social study that is not laced with some sort of values; values are what give meaning to human actions and inactions! There is no need to stress that the language by which facts are reported is itself a product of values. This is too obvious to require any length of explanation.

By the way, the social empiricist always develops some pre-conception from which he takes off his inquiry. They do not just set out into the field to get data; they always develop pre-research notions and mental constructs, which have come to be known as hypotheses. These notions are predictions of the nature of the problem and attempts to establish the relationship between variables, and this helps to guide the course of the research. Those mental logical constructs are often not products of any scientific principle, but are rather reasoned or philosophic predictions. This thus shows that philosophy forms the base for the development of science; nearly all empirical studies start from abstractions. It is in this light that Watson (1960, p.226) reminds empiricists that, "At first we operate only with thought abstractions, mindful of our task only to construct inner representation –pictures with as much clarity as possible and to draw from them all possible consequences. Only subsequently, after the entire exposition of the picture has been completed, do we check its agreement with experiential fact."

Therefore, despite the empiricist dislike for values and metaphysics, science itself is an offshoot of abstraction and metaphysics. Science and metaphysics do not have clear-cut differences as empiricists claim; the foundation upon which science is built is itself metaphysical. Let us consider an instance. The empiricist insists on observations, data gathering, and careful analyses in the production of his propositions or theories. But the same empiricist would use numbers, letters and frames that are all mental constructs to record and report about his research. He represents 1+1 with the figure 2 because he agrees that 1 + 1 should be represented with 2. Yet there is no scientific or experiential justification for representing 1 + 1 with 2. And then he pretends as though he is unaware that figures 3, 4, 5 or 9 could be used as the product of 1+1 and everyone would still be happy. Needless to stress that the empiricist sometimes makes approximations, borrow values, when handling numerical variables. And those are all mental experiments with no evidence to back them. Mill (1990, p.445) stresses this point thus,

The truth which are ultimately accepted as the first principles of a science, are really the last results of metaphysical analysis, practiced in the elementary with which the science is conversant; and their relation to the science is not that of foundations to an edifice, but of roots to a tree, which well though they are never dug down to and expose to light.

Another function of political theory is to show the worth of the link between political facts and values for the proper appreciation of the nature of political realities. To be sure, the success of any political inquiry is anchored on the appreciation of social facts and values. It is only with the full grasp of the relationship between facts and values that one would be able to meaningfully understand realities and then contribute to the stock of human knowledge. Note that facts are incomplete without values, and values are also incomplete without fact. The worth of political theory is its recognition of the place of values in the matrix of the political system. Man is a value-agent, and it would be pathetic if no study attempts to examine the values man hold at the highest realm of his social existence –the political community. Hoffman and Graham (2006) have observed that the reason people find political theory boring is that they ignore the link between facts and values.

One of the greatest charges against political theory is that it is concerned with values – and values are subjective –thus knowledge gotten from it cannot stand the *objectivity test*. That is, all value-judgement, whatever comes from an abstract inquiry, which does not pass through the science test, cannot be a

complete truth. The argument goes that values are subject to the preferences, biases and experiences of people par time, and cannot be used to determine the common good. There also exists the problem of the ranking of values. Social relations are packed with a number of values and the political theorist may have the difficulty of appropriately establishing the hierarchy of values. These arguments against political theory are not strong enough. This is because the accumulation of normative thought can form “objective reality” or objectivity. Objectivity must be understood as a phenomenon of facts, rather than the products of evidence or experience. Being an issue of fact rather than real-life experiences observable by empirical testing or sensual apparatuses, objectivity may thus be established even without evidence so long normative thoughts match with reality. Every reality cannot be reduced to empirical testing, some realities are beyond empiricism.

Many a time political theory has been accused of being only or overly concerned about the use of political concepts, their meanings, their origins, their subtleties and their dynamics. (By political concept is meant any generalised name or word or vocabulary that describes a particular set of political objects, ideas or issues.) Proponents of this view consider political theory as largely political semantics, and only useful for philosophical/theoretical analysis. This view of political theory is mistaken. It is true that the political theorist is careful with the meanings and uses of concepts. Their sensitivity to the subtlety of concepts is built out of their knowledge of the importance of concepts in the accurate transfer of information and the appreciation of the world. Language or concept has, since time immemorial shaped, the nature of politics and human lives generally. Without appropriate grasps of concepts, human interactions would be cyclical and peace would be impossible to establish. Precise concepts are needed for focused reflections on political phenomena. Political values create tensions and disagreements; students of politics have never agreed on the most important virtue of social life. The fine-tuning of concepts helps to give form to political discussions, and helps to clarify political values, events and realities, and thus gives sanity to the practical world of politics. Therefore, there is nothing wrong if the political theorist gives us insight into the subtleties and dynamics of political concepts, for “concepts are the cornerstone of human communication” (Welsh, 1975, p.98).

Even hardcore empiricists need concepts to make intelligible sense of things. As Anikpo (1986, p. 8) puts it, “Concepts are vocabularies with which the scientist talks about the world.” Political Theory offers the opportunity for the development of concepts and handles for the appreciation and communication of political realities. Concepts are powerful tools for the explanation and interpretation of political phenomena by serving as verbal handles for the communication and the storage of information. Without adequate concepts the communication and expansion of the knowledge of political events, attitudes and actions would be minimal.

By the way, political concepts are yet to be precise enough to support scientific analysis. For instance when a chemist talks about boiling point, every other chemist would easily understand what he means and would agree with his measurement. But when a political scientist uses the concept “power” –which is a central concept in political science – a thousand and one inferences may be made from such use. It is possible to see two political scientists who have directly opposite views of the meaning of power. The political theorist helps political science by attempting to give it more precise with which to convey the meanings of political conducts. Note that Ekekwe (2015) has explained that the reason for the disagreements on the meaning of political theory is anchored on the inherent contestability, disagreements on the meaning of politics itself.)

Political theory because of its freedom from the rigours of science has the capacity to develop new concepts by which greater knowledge of politics can be achieved. When it is recalled that knowledge is an activity and/or process rather than just an end product, it would become glaring that whatever propels or direct conscious research to a particular front is knowledge itself. Knowledge is not always a complete block or bulk of ideas or information about a particular phenomenon; it can be in part. It is also the conditioning factors that necessitate and guide the pooling together of ideas, information into a specific bulk. Therefore, political theory even when considered as essentially a conceptual enquiry or the linguistic analysis of political ideas is important even today!

Again, because political theory stresses the clarification of issues, especially the often dim concerns of political life, critics often assume that the political theorist is just in the habit of exaggerating things to continue some circle of debates. Such critics are mistaken. The political theorist emboldens issues so that they would be better understood or so that we would better appreciate their complexities in such highlights. Their emboldening of issues is akin to the biologist's placement of his specimen under a microscope. He does this not because he is obsessed with largeness but rather because he wants to see the minutest features of his specimen. The political theorist highlights the supposed small issues of society because they are important for understanding the whole gamut of civil life. He is also aware that the supposed small issues of society such as, morality, virtue, merit, free will, agency, freedom, rights, among others, if not properly managed are actually the little foxes that spoil the vine.

It may be true that the ideas of many political theorists have not been able to come to fruition since their creation. But that does not invalidate the lessons that have been learnt from them –lessons that have and continues to shape political life for centuries. One of the often referenced is the ideas of Plato. His Republic has not been implemented 2400 years after it was designed, and it does not seem to have any prospect of being implemented. As Roseman, et al (1966, p.8) rightly observed, “In particular, traditional political science [Political Theory] has concentrated on the formulation of utopian systems, i.e. ideals states or societies that have never existed and are unlikely to exist, but whose hypothetical workings represent the philosopher’s logically organised recommendations about how the world ought to be constructed. They are thus both a goal toward which to strive and a set mark by which to judge the politics of the real world.” Plato's Republic may not have been realised but it has shaped political ideas, conversations and practices ever since it was written. For example, the popular principle in modern democracies which bar leaders from running private businesses is traceable to the recommendations of Plato for good governance. Plato had argued that if rulers are allowed to own private properties or businesses they would be distracted from governing justly and would become co-competitors with those they are supposed to rule.

Corollary to the foregoing, political theory serves as the radicalised wing supporting the discipline of Political Science. It interrogates the complexities and contradictions in power relations, and builds new conceptualisations of the many dimensions of social life. Conceptualisations which may not be considered right in themselves but can create fertile grounds for the development or evolution of the good society. This radicalised view to the study of social objects and events is important as it helps in the construction and the breaking of new grounds in the knowledge of social existence. The political theorist offers an alternative to existing society on the basis of some preferred principles or values. He creates his notion of the purpose of the political community and consequently offers guides to perfecting social existence.

The political theorist knows no bounds; he is neither limited by dogma nor by established principles. He pries into political realities, exploring their depths and breadths in a manner that is unrestricted by convention. Variables of all sorts are collected and placed into tight mental compartments, and analyses are often made with no predetermined criteria. Therefore to the question of whether Political Theory is important today, we shall affirm strongly. For Political Theory is the description of political realities. It tells the story of how people interact in the political community and the nature and character of political life.

Political Theory also explains the essence or meaning of politics. It helps to tell the story of the connection of men, objects and events with the public good, and why political realities are the way they are. It is in this sense that Sabine and Thorson (1973, p.5) submitted that “...political theory is not only to show what a political practice is but also to show what it means”. By the way, note that what political practice or the state is and what the state means are not the same thing. What the state is means the manifestation of the state, that is, its manifest reality, its observable essence and functions. What the state means is the high purpose of the state in the whole order of the universe, that is, what the state represents, the function of the state beyond just the maintenance of order. The question of what the state means covers the ontology and deontology of the state. That is, it demands not only answers on the maintenance of political order, but also the origin and moral values of the state, especially in relation to the realisation of the full human person.

To be sure, the political theorist explains the deontological dimension of the state by taking up the evaluation of the moral essence of politics. He tries to subject the state or politics to moral judgements. He pries into the ethical fountain of the state, its processes and institutions and the moral basis of its continuous validity and even existence. This function of political theory is of no small significance, for, with respect to the state, the framework for dispensing justice must be itself subjected to some moral test to know whether it is itself just. Political theory moulds the frame for the determination of the moral value of political exchanges. This is why political theory is considered a branch of moral philosophy, focused on the moral evaluation of political power, actions and structures.

This is why the political theorist prescribes or proposes how society may best be organised. He suggests goals, policies and actions that would improve society only because he has been able to see beyond the ordinary meaning of politics, he has looked into the deep meaning of politics. His proposal must not be seen as some intellectual exercise aimed at some philosophical goals, but a very concerned effort at reforming practical politics. He criticises and recommends out of sheer understanding and love for the improvement of the lives of men in the political community. Therefore, even though it is true that political theory may have some abstract, speculative bend, it has very practical significance; it is the abstract treatment of concrete subjects. For instance, one of the big questions political theory tries to answer is: what is the supreme purpose of government? When this question is considered deeply, one would be furnished with knowledge about the rights and duties of the government. Therefore, political theorist evaluates the essence of the state and makes some sort of mental calculus of the true goal of social living. And all these help for the improvement of practical politics. It is in this light that Heinemann (1996, p.21) explained that “political theory provides a guide to political action and public policy and offers explanations of political behaviour and the existence of power.”

Another value of political theory is that it allows for a peep into history and the value of historicism. As Laski (2010, p.1) has rightly observed, “No theory of the state is ever intelligible save in the context of its time. What men think about the state is the outcome always of the experience in which they are immersed”. To understand political ideas, one must take a look at history, that is, the historical circumstances that gave rise to such ideas. Studying ideas outside their historical contexts is to deprive such ideas of their practical meanings. And political theory gives plenty of insight into historical circumstances as it is very historical. Political theory gives someone knowledge of history, yet in another sense, namely, it is impossible to appropriately study the theory of any political theorist without taking a look at the historical circumstances that warranted his/her thought. For instance, John Locke may not be fully understood without an appreciation of the Glorious Revolution of 1688, and Karl Marx may not be fully understood outside the nature and character of early capitalist Europe. And in fact, it is true that within the body of the political ideas of a theorist consists of a handful of information as regards the social realities of his time. When Thomas Hobbes wrote that his mother gave birth to him and fear, he gave us an insight into the war-ridden nature of 17th century Europe. Therefore in studying political theory one is not only furnished with ideas but also with historical facts and knowledge.

A critical question that must be asked at this point is whether truth should be forfeited for empirical realities. This question is anchored on the fact the truth does not always take the form of the apparent, that is, truth is not always empirical. In fact, many a time, truth has been misrepresented in empirical realities. Hardcore empiricism neglects the fact that even though truth is always truth, the manifestation of truth is a contingency. Valid knowledge should, therefore, be the search for truth, not the search for empirical evidence. As Ndu (2016, p.3) has rightly observed, “Over time political philosophy and political philosophers from Socrates have in different ways striven to establish the fact that the object of this discipline is the pursuit of the truth.” Political theory/philosophy is about political truth, no more, no less. Hence, when the theorist theorises, the concern should not be whether he has evidence to prove his point, rather the concern should be whether he is pursuing the truth about political life.

Again people expect that the philosophies of political theorists have to be some very absolute truth. And therefore if any aspect of his theory is weak or invalid his entire theory should be discarded in haste. This is mistaken. Any serious minded social scientist knows that “truth is a tricky and relativistic thing to pin down” (Petre & Rugg, 2010, p.120). There is no absolute truth about social life. New information or a

flaw in an argument detected later or new realities may bring about the revision of truth-claims. The truth that a political theorist postulates may be context dependent and therefore limited to specific times and places.

CONCLUSION

This paper has been concerned with the importance of political theory. It was built against the backdrop that even though Political Theory is not under direct attack as it once was, it faces the risk of being attacked with the cloak of neglect. Many people have come to assume that Political Theory is outdated and has outlived its usefulness. They, therefore, do not bother themselves with the issues with which political theory is concerned. This paper has argued that political theory is normative and ethical, and therefore can never go out of value.

It traced the history of this wrong assumption about Political Theory. It made a brief sketch of Political Theory, especially under the rise of logical positivism with its excessive hold on empiricism. It explained that in the 19th century with the rise of logical positivism, Political Theory experienced some major confrontations. Studies that were not grounded on empirical observations were regarded as not potent enough to give valid knowledge. Only studies that dealt with material objects were admitted into the realms of worthy studies. The aim of logical positivism was twofold. The first was to show why metaphysical knowledge was faulty. The second was to develop tools and methods that would help the social sciences to attain the status of true science, as exemplified by the natural sciences. This paper argued that core empiricism is bogus and pompous, and does not tell the true nature of political realities.

The paper made a case for a value-driven political theory. It argued that humans are value-agents, and hence, all social conducts bear deep-seated values. Human conduct cannot be adequately understood without an appreciation of the values that underlay them. The importance of political theory is in the fact that it gives an insight into the values that propel or shape man's political conduct. It gives knowledge on the deep meanings of man's political concerns and therefore gives a broader view of the scope of politics. Another value of Political Theory is that it is normative, that is, it tells what ought to be in society as against what is. It prescribes how society may transcend beyond the problems and challenges that confront it. It tells how society is supposed to be arranged and who should get what, when, how and why. This prescription helps society to develop better notions of justice and fairer frameworks for the realisation of the good society.

This paper debunked one of the oft-repeated arguments against Political Theory, namely, it is excessively concerned with the subtlety of political concepts. Proponents of this opinion argue that such concern is only useful for intellectual and theoretical enterprises. This paper argued that political concepts are the handles through which political realities are understood and communicated and that political concepts are very subtle and fragile. Without precise concepts, the clear communication of political realities would be impossible. And poor communication of political concerns holds dire implications for not just politics but for all other aspects of social interactions. Therefore, no amount of attention given to political concepts should be considered as excessive or useless.

Yet To Develop Areas/Ideas

Note that it is easy to confuse the ethical and normative function of political theory. In fact, many scholars do consider them one and the same. But they are slightly different and their difference holds significant implications in the formulation and implementation of public policies. On the one hand, the normative dimension of political theory pertains to question of what ought to be, as against what is. It asks whether certain political practices and policies conform to acceptable or proper conducts of social exchanges. The ethical dimension of political theory, on the other hand, pertains to judgments about whether and to what extent certain political practices and policies are good or bad, wrong or right. Hence, we refer to the ethical function of political theory when the identification of the goodness or badness, wrongness and rightness of political rules, actions and inactions are involved.

By political values is meant the normative or ethical judgements about practical objects, that is, they are judgements on what is desirable and what is not desirable in politics of a society.

There is yet another reason why the political theorist is concerned about political concepts. Concepts, such as justice, law, right, equality, power, government, to mention but few, are important for Political theory is the marriage of politics and moral concerns. This marriage is important because politics has huge consequences for a large number of people in society. In discussing feminism, for instance, the political theorist goes back in time to assess the ideas of people like J. S. Mill or even Plato and the conditions that gave shape to their theory. And it may be asked why we have to go back in time to discuss an issue. The first answer to this is that helps for the appreciation of how the political ideas developed. That is, it gives an insight into the socio-economic and political conditions that sowed the seed for the propagation of such ideas. The second is that it helped for the appreciation of how such ideas have impacted on subsequent political activities and thinking.

One of the problems that may be observed with the theories of some political theorists is that they often forget that they take the substance of their theories from practical realities. They therefore present their theories so abstractly that it becomes difficult for the average mind to follow the train of their logic. As Hoffman and Graham (2006, p. xxxiii) put it, “what gives concepts and theories a bad name is that they are all too often present abstractly (in the pejorative sense). Thinkers may forget that our thoughts come from our experience with objects in the world around us . . .” it is in this sense that it was argued earlier that the fast distinction between facts and values are unnecessary.

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