Political Theory And Political Philosophy: Differentiating The Terms

Political Theory

Political theory is about things which exist practically in political world as ideas, theories or values, whereas, political philosophy deals with presumptions and judgements entrenched in explanatory theories. The term ‘political theory’ should be reserved for conceptual ventures which sort and systematize the content about political world for explanatory purpose and theories that are seldom used as pictorial ‘maps’ of political world instead of explanatory powers of theories that are more often used as limiting cases and counterfactuals to contribute to the simplicity of the political world. Political theory handles the conceptual consistency of illustrative schemes that practically enter into political actions and this facet of political life is attainable through customarily used methods in humanities.

Political Philosophy

The term ‘philosophy’ should be earmarked for affairs that are not promptly explanatory. Political philosophy usually includes questions dealing with the notional preconceptions of theoretical orientations and probes into truth and value. Political philosophy can be understood through three distinct yet interrelated categories of questions i.e. (a) Ontological (b) Epistemological (c) Normative.

Ontological questions

Ontological questions investigate the nature & fundamental properties of reality. In a bid to avoid misassumptions, Ontology is resurged in political philosophy to examine if reality is knowable or not. Ontological assumptions are an important aspect of ontological questions and form basis of logical conclusions used to determining reality. Most assumptions are so fundamental that they are taken for granted. The assumptions are based combinations of human conditions and are governed by disciplinary domain. Each disciplinary domain has criteria based on either logical association forming the knowable part of political reality or domain based on rational choice or domain based on intentional actions thus helping us to create an explanation. For example, while voting is a process, it can be evaluated as (a) behavior (b) an action (c) structured manifestation of social interaction. All three assumptions have their own theoretical approach and criteria of adequacy helping one to narrow down voter’s action. Additionally, the parameter that defines voter’s action is the social structure in which the voter is i.e. how messages are communicated, social intricacies and how laws vs rules are segregated. Therefore, ontology helps us determine the domain as well as other criteria to conceptualize the possibilities through justifiable analysis.

Epistemological questions

These questions deal with the dominance of theories with respect to the world they intend to explain and lend balance to ontological assumptions by challenging the authority of theories

used therein thus helping establish those assumptions with authority. Considering voting example, considered as an action, epistemological questions establish the bridge between action and behavior by linking it to one's understanding of democracy and bringing in an interpretive component to an explanation. However, Positivists, in absence of verifiable touch points, don't consider interpretations as scientific as they feel that the theory itself is based on assumptions thus promoting a law like regularity. Current political world is an amalgamation of post-positivists account & interpretation of intersubjective dimensions.

Normative questions

These questions set the stage for feasibilities and viewpoints available in a situation. While normative judgements & explanatory concerns are logically different, they are closely related by the specific way that political science is defined as a discipline. This logical articulation has an empirical correlation and is used by political philosophers to formulate their dimension of politics when they revamp & valuate the normative dimension of political discourse. For example, study of voting presumes that it is problematic, it in turn implies a normative theory of liberal democracy within which voting is a prime and essential element. Various normative tendencies also descent from ontological decisions.

Thus, the objective of political philosophy is to make normative judgements into problems that one can treat systematically while being aware of interrelationship between normative orientation and tacit confusions of "scientistic" political science.