



Principles of Political Science

(PPA 1101)
Semester 1/2565

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Studying politics

- Approaches to the study of politics
- The philosophical tradition
- The empirical tradition
- The scientific tradition
- Recent developments
- Can the study of politics be scientific?



The philosophical tradition

- The origins of political analysis date back to Ancient Greece and a tradition usually referred to as 'political philosophy'. This involved a preoccupation with essentially ethical, prescriptive or normative questions, reflecting a concern with what 'should', 'ought' or 'must' be brought about, rather than with what 'is'. Plato and Aristotle are usually identified as the founding fathers of this tradition.(Andrew Heywood,2002,13)



The empirical tradition

- The empirical approach to political analysis is characterized by the attempt to offer a dispassionate and impartial account of political reality. The approach is 'descriptive' in that it seeks to analyse and explain, whereas the normative approach is 'prescriptive' in the sense that it makes judgements and offers recommendations. (Andrew Heywood,2002,14)

The scientific tradition

- In the 1870s, 'political science' courses were introduced in the universities of Oxford, Paris and Columbia, and by 1906 the American Political Science Review was being published. However, enthusiasm for a science of politics peaked in the 1950s and 1960s with the emergence, most strongly in the USA, of a form of political analysis that drew heavily upon behaviouralism. For the first time, this gave politics reliably scientific credentials, because it provided what had previously been lacking: objective and quantifiable data against which hypotheses could be tested. (Andrew Heywood, 2002, 14)

Can the study of politics be scientific?

- Although it is widely accepted that the study of politics should be scientific in the broad sense of being rigorous and critical, some have argued, as has been pointed out, that it can be scientific in a stricter sense: that is, that it can use the methodology of the natural sciences. The key to achieving this is to distinguish between 'facts' (empirical evidence) and 'values' (normative or ethical beliefs). Facts are objective in the sense that they can be demonstrated reliably and consistently; they can be proved. Values, by contrast, are inherently subjective, a matter of opinion. (Andrew Heywood, 2002, 17)