



COURSE CODE: POL 313

COURSE TITLE: HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT 1

CREDIT UNIT: 3

COURSE DURATION: 3 HOURS PER WEEK

LECTURE ONE

TOPIC: NATURE AND ORIGN OF POLITICAL THOUGHT

Expected outcome

At the end of the topic, students should be able to;

1. Describe the nature of political thought
2. Highlight basic points about political thought
3. explain the development of political thought

Readings

George, H. Sabine and Thomas L. Thorson, (1973). *A History of Political Theory*. Hinsdale, Illinois: Dryden Press.

Lewis, E. (1954). *Medieval Political Ideas*. New York:

Okoh, A.O. (2005) *History of Political Thought Classical to Modern: An Introduction*. Lagos: AMFITOP books.

What is Political Thought?

Political thought also called political philosophy or theory is concerned with the study of fundamental questions about the state government or governance, politics, liberty, justice, rights and law. Political philosophy is a rational enquiry into all that concerns man and his life in relationship with his fellow men in the state (Okoh, 2005:33).

Political thought is thought about the state, its structure, its nature and its purpose. It seek to answer basic questions bothering on what is the state and why should citizens obey the state. What is the nature of man and what are his basic political needs for living etc. the study of political philosophy is kind of intellectual no man's land .i.e. it is a subject of boarder dispute between at least the adjacent territories of politics,

philosophy and history. It is neither entirely politics nor is it entirely philosophy nor history but it is certainly transverse these three major discipline in presenting its subject matter.

Okoh, (2005) list the following as basic points about political philosophy

1. Every theory is limited in application by environmental conditions.
2. Some theories have more relevance to some states than others.
3. Every thought contains ideas of permanent validity in the sense that each theory tends to contain some elements of truth.

Origin of political thought

A proper way of studying political philosophy is to examine the subject in its phases of development. We can classify the history of political thought into the classical and modern era. We can further breakdown the classical into the Medieval, Renaissance and Enlightenment era. The modern era can be classified into Modern and Post Modern era.

Political thought was the invention of the Greeks. The following factors facilitated the development of political thought in Greece;

1. The Greeks were a race of seekers after the unknown.
2. They also allied great faith in reason
3. The Greeks attachment to intellectual truth was as great as their curiosity.
4. They had great propensity for criticism
5. The Greeks engaged in rational der of discussions (Okoh 2005:37-38).

Plato and Aristotle pioneered political thought and their writings informed the development of early scholarship in the subject matter of politics, political thought and governance. The works of Plato “The Republic” and Aristotle “Politics” present initial documentary impetus upon which classical and modern political thought developed. The Republic described a utopian political system in which good and gifted people are selected at infants and trained. Plato’s state was an ideal one whose realization was doubtful. Aristotle searched for the best constitution that would govern the society where justice would prevail.

During the Roman Empire, not much was done in the development of the Greek philosophy ideals due to political instability. Roman Emperors depended on national

laws and the Greeks ideas. With the exception of the works of Marcus Cicero (Okoh, 2005:xxi). In the first AD, a new period of activity began at this time, the church grew so powerful. Some political issues at this time include what should be the degree of obedience and obligation the people own to an earthly ruler or what should be the relationship between the state and the church. Early Christian philosophy is traced to St Augustine of Hippo whose work, the “City of God” provided an answer. He argued that government was made necessary by humanity sinfulness. Government was therefore necessary to ensure a peaceful and ordered society to enable man to prepare himself for the heavenly city. In combination with St Thomas Aquinas contribution to political theory in the medieval period. Theological supremacy and the doctrine of divine right of kings put forward by writers such as Robert Filmer’s help to consolidate papal supremacy and naturalism, orthodoxy and authoritarianism into medieval Europe.

Certain events occurred during the middle ages which helped to shape political thoughts. These include the crusades, the renaissance and the reformation. In the renaissance, secular political philosophy began to emerge after about a century of theological political thought. One great scholar of the Middle Ages, who writings challenge the church’s political ascendancy, was Niccolò Machiavelli and Italian political philosopher. He wrote the prince a primer of how to be a successful king, and how a king should be ruthless and pragmatic, not swayed by sentiments or morality. The reformation prepared the ground for conflict between the church and secular powers. The prince together with the “Discourse”, a rigorous analysis of the classical period did much to influence modern political thought.

Reference

- George, H. Sabine and Thomas L. Thorson, (1973). *A History of Political Theory*. Hinsdale, Illinois: Dryden Press.
- Okoh, A.O. (2005) *History of Political Thought Classical to Modern: An Introduction*. Lagos: AMFITOP books.

LECTURE TWO

TOPIC: GREEK POLITICAL THOUGHT BEFORE PLATO

Expected outcome

At the end of the topic, students should be able to;

4. Explain Greek political thought before Plato
5. Explain the kernel and method of Socrates teaching

Readings

George, H. Sabine and Thomas L. Thorson, (1973). *A History of Political Theory*. Hinsdale, Illinois: Dryden Press.

Lewis, E. (1954). *Medieval Political Ideas*. New York:

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Three outstanding landmarks can be noticed in an attempt to trace the early origins of political thinking in ancient Greece. According to Okoh, (2005) the landmarks are;

1. Greek proverb philosophy: moral philosophy was expressed in wisdom-loaded maxims tensely sentences. It existed in the works Homer and Hesiod. It is from such sentences that one can find the first insight into the working of Greek political mind.
2. Work of Elegiac writers: the next stage of Greek political thinking can be identified in the works of elegiac writers like Solon and Theogris.
3. Natural philosophy: the next milestone is the one characterized by the dominance of natural philosophy. At a stage in Greek history people started to wonder at the riddle of the physical world such as the rotation of the earth and revolution of the sun.

At this point in the growth of political thinking in ancient Greece, political thinking did not exist as an independent and coherent body of knowledge until the 5th century C. By the 5th Century BC most Greek scholars turned their attention to social and political issues as they affect man in the society. This time also witnessed the trend in the dominance of individualism in Greek thought. The set of people who peddled this new individualism were the sophist.

Sophism

Sophism emerged as a separate body of philosophy in the Greek city-states during the 5th century B.C. it arose out of two main factors that emerged in ancient Greece at that time. These are; the rise of individualism and great changes in politics, government and economy taking place in Athens and other city-state. The sophist were noted for their role as teachers of sons of the rich or anybody who could pay for their services. Their political thought focus was on man, on the moral plane, they tended to believe that might is right (Okoh 2005).

Socrates

The most outstanding sophist known to history was Socrates. Socrates represent the golden age of Greek philosophy. He was great because of his personal character which influenced his pupils, contemporaries and subsequent generation. Socrates was born in 469 BC, had a military and political career. He was primarily a moralist. He lived and died according to his principles. He deliberately withdraw from public affair and devoted himself to philosophical discussion with anyone and at any time. Although a sophist, he differed from other sophist in two respect; he did not teach for money but for the purpose of spreading knowledge; he did not concentrate his teaching on the sons of the rich hut was prepared to talk and teach all those who were prepared to listen to him.

Socrates method

Socrates method was dialectic i.e. question and answer. He believed in inductive reasoning. He never lectured a large group of people rather he converse with them asking them questions and helping them to find answers. According to Socrates, man by nature has knowledge but is like a pregnant women needs a midwife to bring out the child.

Kernel of Socrates teaching

The kernel of Socrates teaching was “man know thyself”. He insisted that man should be pre-occupied with the search for knowledge. Socrates knowledge is not that of science, physics or chemistry but that of virtue. He argued that ignorance is the cost of wrong doing and that wickedness is due to ignorance, that if a man knows what is right he will do it and if he knows what is evil he will reframe from doing it.

He believed that the right conduct is only possible as a result of the acquisition of true knowledge and conversely wrong conduct stems from wrong knowledge.

The Socrates irony

Socrates argued that everybody could be ignorant. That he himself knows nothing and so was eager to know and so every other person should seek knowledge to overcome ignorance. Though he pretended ignorant but he led people to knowledge. He also claimed that both he and his interlocutors were seeking knowledge together to avoid ignorance. This is the Socratic irony.

Socrates trial and death

Socrates criticism and ridicule of the Athenian system of government became intolerable for the political leaders. Charges were framed up against him and he was arrested. He was accused of corrupting and misleading the youths and spreading sacrilegious ideals. At the end of his trial he was found guilty and condemned to death. Before his execution his friends found an escape route for him to go into exile but he said no that as long as the law of the land had protected him, if the law want him to die, he will oblige. While he await execution, he still taught philosophy to his friends who came to see him. He was given hemlock (poison) to drink and he died instantly.

Reference

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