

POLITICAL THOUGHT AND ITS ROLE IN THE FORMATION OF SOCIETIES

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Abstract:

Political thought is regarded as one of the most significant fields that explains the relationships among the individual, society, authority, and, consequently, the state. Among the most prominent expressions that summarise this relationship is Aristotle's assertion that "man is by nature a political animal," which underscores that politics is not merely an external activity but rather the essence of human nature. It is founded upon a system of intellectual conceptions that embody both the moral and material needs of humanity. This system has played a pivotal role in shaping the paths of human communities and determining the forms of authority, as well as material and institutional domination. Political thought, therefore, is not simply theoretical speculation but rather a mechanism that lays down the foundations of empires and civilisations, both Eastern and Western, across the globe. It has been associated with a set of values and standards through which political orders seek to justify their existence and regulate their relationship with individuals, reflecting diverse and fundamental conceptions of freedom, justice, virtue, equality, and belonging. These conceptions later evolved into principles such as citizenship, the social contract, and human rights. Principles and values are addressed in this article to analyse the role that political thought has played and continues to play in shaping them and contributing to the founding of societies.

Keywords: Political thought, political values, political authority, liberalism, socialism

Introduction:

Because human beings are by nature social and cannot exist in isolation, they need to assume social responsibility to preserve the community, which remains constantly threatened by disintegration as long as its members surrender to their instincts and dominant aggressive impulses. For this reason, humanity has endeavoured to safeguard its stability by drawing upon intellectual conceptions and rational faculties. In doing so, it establishes a set of symbolic rules to manage relationships and regulate the social order. These symbols and intellectual constructs played a formative role in establishing political thought, developing forms of authority, and determining the standards associated with the collective order and its institutions.

The evolution of human societies cannot be understood without recognising the role of political thought in directing their trajectories, determining patterns of authority, distributing resources, and building institutions. Political thought has never been merely an abstract theoretical exercise; rather, it has been a driving force that has shaped civilisations, laid the foundations of states, and influenced legislation and social values.

Political thought is not confined solely to reflection on authority and governance; it also constitutes a means of understanding how individuals interact with one another both within and beyond society, from the earliest human gatherings to modern democracies. From Plato to Marx and from Rousseau to Hannah Arendt, political thinkers have contributed to the shaping, critique, and establishment of civilisations.

How, then, has the role of political thought manifested through authority and philosophers in the shaping of societies?

To answer this question, a synthetic framework is constructed on the basis of the following assumption:

- Political thought is not confined to mere theorising; rather, it exerts a tangible influence on political decisions, rendering the relationship between political thought and authority interactive.
- Modern political thought, founded upon conceptions of the social contract, has played a decisive role in the transition from theological conceptions of authority to the establishment of political legitimacy on the basis of general will and social reason, particularly in Western societies.
- Political thought constitutes a system of values that delineates the political behaviour of governance and domination.
- The development of political thought is closely tied to historical and social contexts, which coordinate intellectual representations and the phenomenon of authority.

To test these propositions, sources of political intellectual heritage will be utilised across historical contexts, as provided through research.

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- First: Political Thought: From Philosophical Reflection to the Function of Authoritative Organisation:

- Definition of Political Thought:

Political thought refers to a set of ideas, theories, and reflections aimed at organising authority, positions, roles, and responsibilities within society. It is based on a collection of concepts, including justice, liberty, legitimacy, power, and rights. It is not a rigid set of abstract ideas but an intellectual product deeply rooted in the historical, social, and cultural realities of human societies. It was developed by philosophers, economists, and even political leaders in response to social, economic, religious, and cultural challenges, evolving according to historical contexts from the sacred to the rational and from absolute authority to participatory democracy.

➤ Political thought is defined as "the mental representation of a specific phenomenon; it is a reflection on power and its mechanisms of transfer, relying on intellectual concepts of governance and constitutional law. "¹

➤ It also refers to "the body of work concerned with ideas and principles that shape political institutions and practices. "²

➤ It is "the study of questions related to government, politics, liberty, justice, rights, and the application of laws by authority. "³

¹ Oxford Dictionary of Politics and International Relations, Oxford University Press.

² Cambridge Dictionary of Political Thought, Cambridge University Press.

³ Encyclopædia Britannica, britannica.com.

➤ Political thought is "the disciplined investigation of political values, ideologies, institutions, and political behaviour. "⁴

➤ It is "the expression of the conflict between legitimacy and power, reflecting historical transformations in society. "⁵

➤ According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica, political thought is "an attempt to understand the nature of the state (its fundamental structure) through philosophy," aiming to understand social life on the basis of philosophical anthropology. It concerns what distinguishes political facts without being confined to empirical science. "⁶

Political thought is viewed in much of the literature as a branch of philosophy or political theory that depends on analysing the principles of governance and authority, justifying legitimacy, and organising the relationships between the state and society. It constitutes a fundamental pillar of human history. It is not merely a simple theoretical discourse but rather an active force that builds and structures societies, determines models of governance, and nourishes social movements.

2-Political Thought as a Tool for Organising Authority

As previously indicated, understanding societies, the nature of authority, and the mechanisms of its exercise is only possible through an analysis of political thought. Political thought is regarded as a referential framework or, as some scholars consider it, a theoretical structure aimed at organising collective life, including the relationships among individuals themselves and their relations with the state and its institutions. Hence, political thought functions as a practical tool to regulate the legitimacy of authority and its practices.

Political thought has consistently responded to the challenges faced by societies within the framework of inevitable transformations and changes, whether through theorising concepts such as legitimacy, sovereignty, social contracts, participation, and obedience or through critiquing existing forms of governance and proposing alternatives.

From its earliest epochs, humans have manifested a need for a theoretical intellectual conception that justifies political authority and grants it legitimacy, endowing it with a rational or religious character to serve the social necessity that requires the existence of authority. Thus, the sacred totem (Totem), with a political background and encompassing a set of rituals and practices, was invented to embody the legitimacy and dominance of authority through the belief in a supreme force above individual will, represented by the totem deity. As Émile Durkheim demonstrated in his study of primitive forms of religious life, "the relationship between authority and society does not essentially differ from the relationship between the totem and the clan; this relationship is charged with sanctity. "⁷

⁴ Andrew Heywood, *Political Theory: An Introduction*, 2015.

⁵ Anwar Abd al-Malik, *Arab Political Thought*, Arab Centre for Research.

⁶ "Political Philosophy," Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica.

⁷ Émile Durkheim, *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (The Elementary Forms of Religious Life).

Sanctity is, therefore, nothing but an intellectual construction employed to organise, establish, legitimise, and exercise authority, that is, intellectual conceptions fulfilling the function of political thought, albeit symbolically religious.

The relationship between authority and the sacred is not a natural or inevitable one but rather a symbolic intellectual construction created within specific cultural and historical contexts. It employs elements of religious or mythical discourse to present conceptions that organise authority and justify its exercise. As Michel Foucault noted, power is exercised not only through laws and institutions but also through "systems of representation that produce truth,"⁸ making the sacred system used to consolidate authority within the collective imagination.

Marcel Gauchet observed that "religion was the first form of politics and that primitive societies did not distinguish between temporal authority and sacred authority but linked them through an organic bond that granted governance and authority divine legitimacy." ⁹Thus, the mobilisation of the sacred to legitimise authority is a method of symbolic political thought that works to regulate the relationships between the ruler and the ruled, drawing on religious and spiritual representations akin to philosophical political thought in modern societies.

Political thought also manifested in the construction of the sacred within ancient Eastern civilisations, such as the Pharaonic and Babylonian cultures, where the king was regarded as a god or a divine emissary on earth. Authority was not merely exercised but also worshipped. This reflects an intellectual conception of the nature of political authority that was entrenched for an extended period in both ancient and modern civilisations, laying the foundation for a political concept in shaping societies. This aligns with Max Weber's views on the human propensity to seek elements of stability, often established through belief systems that regulate social, economic, and political relations within a framework of ideas and conceptions grounded in mythical thought. Such systems aim to manage the physical forces among group members and foster a sense of kinship and tribal unity. Social stratification thereby emerged not on the basis of natural (physical) strength but through the measure of ownership and the association with rights to privileges, which mythical narratives continually invoked as grounds for legitimacy.

Bronisław Malinowski's study of Trobriand society illustrates this: the local people believed themselves to have totemic origins, living underground in a socially stratified, clan-based system of privileges grounded in the division of property and economic activities that resembled their terrestrial life. The mythical emergence of their ancestors, half-animal beings such as reptiles, dogs, pigs, and snakes, served as the mythical reference legitimising the clan hierarchy among the Trobrianders and thus justified the differentiated social, economic, and political privileges according to the nature of the totem animal and its position at the moment of emergence from

⁸ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 1975.

⁹ Marcel Gauchet, *Le Désenchantement du Monde: Une Histoire politique de la religion*, Gallimard, 1985.

underground. Political thought also manifested in the construction of the sacred in ancient Eastern civilisations such as the Pharaonic and Babylonian, where the king was viewed as a god or a divine agent on earth. Authority was not only exercised but also worshipped. This reflects an intellectual conception of political authority that was entrenched in both ancient and modern civilisations for an extended period, establishing a political concept in the formation of societies. This aligns with Max Weber's views on human nature's search for elements of stability, often founded through beliefs that regulate social, economic, and political interactions within a system of ideas and conceptions on the basis of mythical thought. This served to manage the physical forces among group members and foster a sense of kinship and tribal unity. Social stratification thus appeared not through natural (physical) power but through ownership and association with rights to privileges, which the myth continually invoked as evidence.

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Myth is an intellectual and organisational tool that establishes authority, legitimises the existing social order, and justifies inequality and the distribution of power within society. It is often employed to explain the origins of law, legitimacy, and justice, embodying concepts such as rights, fairness, war and peace, and rebellion and obedience.

Roland Barthes argues that "myth is a historical truth and a distinctive discourse... used to embellish social reality and conceal social or class conflict, making the existing state of affairs appear natural."¹⁰ Similarly, Claude Lévi-Strauss analyses myth as a linguistic and symbolic structure composed of themes that function not only as stories but also as conceptual frameworks for organising social and political relationships.¹¹

In the founding of Rome, which presented theological models of political authority ranging from polytheistic to totemic beliefs as well as the deification of rulers, the role of political thought was no different from that in other societies. However, Roman political thought was not directly founded on a specific Roman religious orthodoxy but rather on popular doctrines whose references varied with social, political, and economic dynamics. Roman political thought lacked a sacred book (a religious philosophy) that conveyed teachings of virtue and moral rectitude, revealed the secrets of nature, or explained the cosmos. Religion in ancient Rome remained utilitarian, with gods fulfilling roles for individuals and the Roman order, whether as natural forces or anthropomorphic idols. The concept of the sacred was closely linked to social and political realities, primarily associated with the spirit of the gods, "whom the Romans transformed into diverse civic teachings owned and monopolised by the ruler, the military commander, and even the

¹⁰ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, Éditions du Seuil, 1957.

¹¹ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Mythologiques: Le Cru et le Cuit* (1964). See: *Mythologies* (Vol. 1), The Raw and the Cooked.

father within the family, where each was responsible for the religious teachings about their group or sphere of influence. "12

In this administrative framework, political thought is interpreted as being linked to the doctrinal teachings of the political and military ruler. It also revealed a social necessity within the family among its members, who would become direct participants in the political construction process, whether as citizens or subjects of the great Roman Empire. The clergy or priests formed a priesthood serving the god ruler, who was directly responsible for conducting rituals and assisting magistrates and citizens in their religious duties. They act as guardians of religious traditions in the field and play a role in managing authority.¹³ This confirms the political dimension of religion, demonstrating that it is nothing but a practical political conception that contributed to shaping the society of the Roman Empire and, more broadly, that of Greece.

Historical sources indicate that political thought has had a profound and continuous influence on the formation of societies, whether complex or straightforward, states, or empires, across their institutional structures, collective values, and social norms throughout the ages. The political ideas proposed by prominent political thinkers have not only sparked intellectual debates but also shaped tangible models of governance, thereby bestowing legitimacy on the exercise of power and defining the fundamental rights of individuals. For example, the social contract ideas put forth by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his *Social Contract* (1762)¹⁴ played a central role in the emergence of modern democracies.

Rousseau's political concepts directly inspired the French Revolution, encompassing the sovereignty of the people and the principle that legitimate authority can be exercised only through the general will, that is, through a collective agreement aimed at achieving the common good. This is evident in Article 1 of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (1789): "Men are born and remain free and equal in rights." Rousseau defended the notion that laws are just if they arise from the consent of the citizens: "Obedience to the law one prescribes for oneself is freedom."¹⁵

Social contract theory, particularly the ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, has had a profound influence on the foundation of modern European society. This political thought is central to understanding the transition from absolute monarchies to modern democratic systems in Europe and many other countries worldwide. Montesquieu's political thought, particularly through his work, *The Spirit of the Laws* (1748), made a significant contribution to the development of the

¹² Tomas LePeltier, in *La religion unité et diversité*, Ed. Sciences Humaines, 2005.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Book One, 1762.

¹⁵ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract* (Du contrat social), Book One, Chapter Eight ("The Civil State"), page (from an English translation).

theory of separation of powers, including executive, legislative, and judicial branches, aimed at preventing the despotic concentration of power. The American judge Louis Brandeis commented on this by stating, "The greatest dangers to liberty lurk in insidious encroachment by men of zeal, well-meaning but without understanding. "¹

Montesquieu's political thought profoundly influenced European parliamentary systems by 1787, where the principle of limiting authority became a fundamental tenet of the rule of law. From this foundation, political ideologies such as liberalism, socialism, and nationalism emerged as extensions of these essential philosophical and political ideas. Liberalism, as a modern and contemporary social system, bases its ideologies on the political thought of John Locke, who emphasises individual liberty and private property. His work, *"Two Treatises of Government"* (1690), fundamentally shaped civil rights movements and the development of representative government.

The formation and establishment of a socialist society, on the other hand, was advocated by Marxist thought, which called for the abolition of private property and the establishment of collective ownership. The *Communist Manifesto* (1848) articulated a new political concept known as class struggle. This inspired socialist ideology, which pursued comprehensive social reforms in the twentieth century, such as the establishment of social security in Europe after World War II.

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Democratic and reformist socialist thought, which emerged as a response to revolutionary Marxist radicalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries under Eduard Bernstein, sought to achieve socialist goals such as social justice and equality, collective or public ownership of the means of production, the role of the state in economic planning and wealth distribution, class solidarity, and collective labour.¹⁷ These ideas subsequently evolved into strong democratic socialist parties in Europe and America, which aimed to build democratic societies and promote the rotation of power. This political thought was not limited to theory but also manifested in political activism, social struggles, and institutional transformations that reshaped societies and altered the notion of authority.

This is evident in the speeches of Martin Luther King Jr., who drew inspiration from political philosophy, theology, and the principles of liberalism and natural justice, advocating for racial equality in the United States. In his famous speech "*I Have a Dream*" (1963), delivered on August 28, 1963, during March in Washington for Jobs and Freedom, King condemned racism, social exclusion, discrimination in education, unemployment, and violence, declaring that such conditions were intolerable. He invoked the American Declaration of Independence and humanistic values to demand profound political change.¹⁸

Political thought also formed the ideological foundation for many social revolutions in history, such as the French Revolution of 1789, which is considered a practical embodiment of enlightening ideas about liberty, justice, and equality, influenced by the works of Rousseau, Voltaire, and Locke. Likewise, modern Arab revolutions drew inspiration from contemporary liberal and democratic political discourses, demanding constitutional reforms and equitable distributions of wealth and power.

Many social and political movements have called for the establishment of democratic societies founded on liberatory political thought, free from imperialist control and imperialism, which had extended its political and economic dominance. Among the most prominent of these movements were the anticolonial struggles led by Jawaharlal Nehru in India, Nelson Mandela in South Africa, and Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana. Similarly, nationalist liberals in the Arab world emphasised not only individual freedoms but also modern political thought principles such as constitutions, nationalism, and political justice as tools in the struggle against colonialism and

¹⁷ Eduard Bernstein, *Marxism in The Preconditions of Socialism and Their Criticism*.

¹⁸ King, Martin Luther Jr., August 28 1963. *I Have a Dream* [Speech]. March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, Washington, D.C. <https://www.archives.gov/files/press/exhibits/dream-speech.pdf>

tyranny.¹⁹ Leaders such as Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt, Ahmed Ben Bella and Houari Boumédiène in Algeria, Omar Mukhtar in Libya, and Habib Bourguiba in Tunisia were among those who liberated their countries from foreign colonialism, established political parties, and assumed new powers under civil and political rights regimes. These movements led to the emergence of new societies in Africa and Asia after World War II, which incorporated liberal values, including multiparty systems, freedom of expression, and the separation of powers, into their constitutions.

Through this dynamic process, political thought becomes a driving force for social transformations, often in response to the inevitability of change and as an expression of individual awareness of their social and natural environments. It fuels struggles for equality, minority rights, and liberation from despotism and colonialism, as exemplified by Frantz Fanon's thought.²⁰ Particularly in his book *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), Fanon calls upon colonised peoples to reclaim their political and cultural sovereignty. Political thought, therefore, not only shapes legal and electoral institutions but also forms the values and norms of society, such as freedom, justice, solidarity, and human dignity. It constructs a conceptual framework to analyse social and political realities, including rights, inclusive culture, collective consciousness, and international awareness, all of which serve as tools and mechanisms to regulate the concept and exercise of authority.

Political thought is thus regarded as a cumulative construct and a definition of political identity that manifests throughout history as a mechanism for foundation, critique, and rebellion. It enables societies to reflect on themselves, challenge the prevailing system, and envision new models of coexistence. At the same time, political thought serves as a repository of the past and a guide for shaping and managing the future. It is not merely philosophical intellectual reflection but also a foundational historical force that shapes the nature of authority and renews its philosophical, legal, religious, and ideological systems within specific contexts across stages of societal development, such as wars, revolutions, economic crises, the Renaissance, globalisation, and other dynamics such as liberation movements, uprisings, and civil disobedience. These various movements, despite their differing references, rely on a set of common political ideas.

- Second: Formation of Political and Social Values

Regardless of the ideology guiding political thought—whether conservative or progressive, individualistic or collectivist, secular or religious—it requires a conceptual framework that transforms into a system of values, composing the identity and sovereignty of a community. Political thought not only establishes authority but also shapes the governing values of relationships within society, such as equality, freedom, pluralism, and justice. These values define the connection between political thought and the social structure.

Since the earliest manifestations of political thought, authority has always been linked to a set of values that justify its existence. For thinkers, authority was not merely an instrument of

¹⁹ On Authoritarianism and Democratic Liberalism in the Arab World, <https://archive-forum.aljazeera.net/forum-2015/programme/plenary-sessions/authoritarianism-and-future-democracy-arab-world>

²⁰ Frantz Fanon, *Les Damnés de la Terre* (The Wretched of the Earth), Gallimard, 1961.

domination but also a mechanism embodying and actualising human needs for belonging, virtue, morality, and justice. Aristotle is one of the most prominent political thinkers who founded this conception by linking human political nature to the inevitability of authority and the state as a means to achieve perfection. The importance of value formation associated with the emergence of authority and the state is thus evident, not only as theoretical concepts but also as tools that contribute to constructing the social order and defining the individual's position within it. Whether classical or modern, political thought is tied to reality and effective in producing social values, such as virtue and the common good, as fundamental to authority. These later evolved into concepts such as citizenship, the social contract, and human rights, all of which work to regulate collective behaviour.

- Political Values to Strengthen the State and Authority in Classical Political Thought

Aristotle affirmed long before the Common Era that “Man is by nature a political animal, and those who live outside the state are either above it or below it.”²¹ This statement underscores that humans cannot exist or persist except within a politically organised community that establishes standards and refines social values such as virtue, justice, fraternity, and citizenship. Political organisation is not an innate or inherent matter but rather the outcome of political thought arising from the social necessity of authority and the establishment of the state.

Aristotle contends that authority (the state) is not merely a social contract, as later enlightenment philosophers would argue, but a natural extension of individuals' inclination toward association and order. As such, it must rest on foundational pillars that are a set of enduring values grounded in a specific culture, shaped by political thought, and observable and measurable in everyday life.

- Virtue as the Goal of Authority

Recognising political authority as an existential necessity, it exercises coercion to enable humans to attain their perfection and moral character, that is, a virtuous life unattainable in isolation from the political community. Outside it, one merely survives, whereas within it, one has the potential for good (virtuous) life.

For Aristotle, virtue is not merely an ideal moral quality but a continuous practical mode of serving reason, balancing emotion, intellect, and will. It also mediates between the self and others within a framework of freedom and moral responsibility.²² Virtue is educational because the role of authority extends beyond mere management of state interests; it also involves cultivating

²¹ Aristotle Thales, *Politics*, translated by Ahmed Lotfi El-Sayed, Al-Jamal Publications, Beirut, 2009, pp. 95–100.

²² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by Ahmed Lotfi El-Sayed or Imam Abdel Fattah Imam.

citizens in virtue. A good state produces virtuous citizens to achieve justice. Aristotle stated, "The purpose of the city is not mere companionship but the good life." ²³

- Educational Value and Justice as Foundations of Political Authority

Plato also links authority with education in his book *Laws*, asserting that the state is responsible for educating the individual from birth to cultivate obedience and virtue.²⁴ He considers education in the state as the process that shapes souls and prepares them for their roles. Thus, authority bears the responsibility of reproducing moral and political values across generations. The state is not merely a force but an institution dedicated to producing the "good citizen."

- Justice: The Basis for Legitimising Authority

In Aristotle's political thought, justice is the foremost value in organising authority and legitimising the distribution of positions, functions, and wealth. He states, "Justice is the principle upon which the state stands to maintain the unity of the city." He distinguishes between two types of justice:

- **Distributive Justice:** Allocates to each member of society what they deserve on the basis of their status and virtue.
- **Corrective Justice:** Rectifies injustice among members of the same society.

Justice thus functions as both a moral value and a political criterion, making authority an instrument to regulate differences and a sphere for achieving equality, albeit relative to the political thought of that period and for building state institutions without domination.

Before Aristotle, Plato had considerable influence on the analysis of values related to authority and the state, particularly justice, which he explored in the structure of the state to answer his central question in *the Republic*: what is justice?²⁵ For Plato, the establishment of justice within the state necessarily implies its establishment within the individual self, thereby anchoring the value of authority as a mechanism that guarantees stability and harmony, not merely an instrument of governance. The state does not distribute rights but fosters internal harmony among social classes, much like the harmony among appetite, spirit, and reason within the human soul.

The political thought of these philosophers bases their conception of just authority and the state on dividing society into three classes related to justice and the ethics of governance. Plato summarises sociopolitical values.²⁶ As follows:

²³ Aristotle Thales, *Politics*, translation referenced above.

²⁴ Plato, *Laws*, translated by Mohamed Hassan Daza, Egyptian Book Authority Press, Egypt, 1986.

²⁵ Plato, *The Republic*, Book IV, Stephanus 433a.

²⁶ Plato, *The Republic*, Book V, Stephanus 473c.

- **Rulers:** The distinguished class (the elite), associated with reason and wisdom.
- **Guardians:** The soldiers, associated with spirit and courage.
- **Workers (Producers):** Associated with moderation.

These class-based values established societies founded on social hierarchy legitimised by the authority of philosophers, where rulers must possess knowledge of the good and the just according to Plato's conception. Plato states, "Cities will not enjoy rest until philosophers become kings, or kings become philosophers." Thus, the fundamental value for the legitimacy and establishment of authority is wisdom, not power, lineage, or wealth.

Aristotle similarly believes in the existence of a natural hierarchy among people who imposes specific forms of authority. He argues that some are born to rule, whereas others are born to be ruled, as in the relationship between man and woman, master and slave. He states, "Some people are by nature free, and others are by nature slaves, and it is just that the latter be enslaved."²⁷ This intellectual conception bases authority on the nature of individuals and their capacities for obedience and participation, not solely on contracts, reflecting an understanding of individual inequalities as justifications for authority.

Hence, authority in classical political thought is reinforced by a system of values that renders governance an expression of intellectual and moral harmony (virtue and justice), rather than merely a technical or military exercise. These values are not mere philosophical ideas but institutionalised political thought that contributed to shaping the social structure of the Greek city-state, where the individual was not conceived as an independent self but as a citizen whose worth was defined by their participation in public affairs.

Consequently, authority has become not only a domination but also an ethical practice governed by values that make it legitimate and socially acceptable.

2. Political values in modern thought

A defining characteristic of political thought is its historical development; it is not fixed but evolves across historical periods and stages and is influenced by culture, imported concepts, and new ideas such as liberalism and socialism. This evolution occurs as part of a cumulative epistemic continuity rather than through rupture.

From the classical era to modernity, political thought underwent a transformation characterised by a shift from values of moral and political virtue in constructing society and the state to those of individual liberty and equality as the foundations for political legitimacy and

²⁷ Aristotle Thales, *Politics*, translated by Ahmed Lotfi El-Sayed, referenced above.

justice. Politics was reconstructed upon rationality, law, natural and social rights, and the understanding of authority as a voluntary contractual agreement among individuals.

Because political thought responds to the social and political environment it inhabits and reflects its realities and conditions, it inevitably poses questions to provide knowledge and explanations for human societal crises. The classical values on which authority and dominance were founded began to fade and even obstruct change, especially as traditional authority became complicit in causing suffering across many societies, where insecurity and political injustice increased. Virtue lost its normative status, and justice lost its standard meaning.

A-From virtue to liberty and contract

While virtue established the societies of empires and aristocratic monarchies, it could not persist as a political value that immortalised these systems. Political thought, as previously noted, began addressing the deficiencies and flaws of authority by reimagining it through the historical analysis conducted by pioneers of contractarian political philosophy, such as Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. These thinkers founded new values that evolved into ideologies that not only transformed the order within their societies but also reshaped the global order.

- **Security and Stability:** Thomas Hobbes places security and absolute authority at the core of the social contract, given the inherent selfishness of humans. In his work, *Leviathan* (1651) described the state of nature as chaotic and brutal, stating, "Man is a wolf to man."²⁸ This natural condition was characterised by insecurity and constant fear, prompting individuals to enter into a social contract whereby they surrendered part of their freedoms to political authority in exchange for protection and security. Security and stability thus become central values and the fundamental purpose of authority, which Hobbes views as absolute and unaccountable as long as it provides security and stability. This conception laid the intellectual foundation for authoritarian authority and justified its practices.

- **Liberty and Property:** John Locke, in his *Two Treatises of Government*, defines the state of nature not as absolute chaos but as governed by "natural law" based on reason and equality.²⁹ He asserts that "men in the state of nature are free and equal but lack the authority to enforce this law." The social contract is thus not an acceptance of absolute authority but a means to protect natural rights, liberty, property, and natural law. These values represent a shift from virtue and hierarchy to liberty and property rights as the basis of legitimacy. They also constitute the foundational concepts on which liberal ideology builds and consolidates modern societies.

- **Equality and Social Sovereignty:** Jean-Jacques Rousseau prioritises the general will and equality as foundational values in legitimising authority. In his *Social Contract*,³⁰ he argues that humans were free in their natural state but became enslaved in society. He

²⁸ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan, or the Matter, Forme and Power of a Common-wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civill*, edited by Richard Tuck, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

²⁹ John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (edited by P. Laslett), Cambridge University Press, 1988 (original work published 1689), Second Treatise, Chapter II.

³⁰ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Du Contrat Social ou Principes du droit politique*, Amsterdam, Marc Michel Rey, 1762.

critiques the social inequalities in existing systems arising from the accumulation of power and wealth by a select few, which leads to the expansion of injustice.

Rousseau redefines the social contract as an agreement among the community to unify their wills within what he calls the general will (*volonté générale*), which serves as the basis of sovereignty. This general will represent the collective interest rather than a mere aggregation of individual opinions. Rousseau states, "True freedom is obedience to a law we prescribe for ourselves."³¹ Through this political conception, Rousseau establishes a set of political values, including equality, freedom as participation rather than isolation, popular sovereignty, and others, which laid the foundation for the construction of modern democratic societies by linking political authority to collective will rather than to property or lineage. This shift also reflects a transformation in the conception of the human being from a moral entity within a community to a rational, independent individual with rights and interests.

B-From Contractual Values to Constitutional and Parliamentary Values

The ideas and values of social contract theory form the philosophical foundation for constructing concepts of state, authority, and rights. However, this philosophical basis alone proved insufficient to address the questions raised by the Industrial Revolution, the formation of social classes, and the expansion of the capitalist system.

Political thought began to shift from merely affirming contractual legitimacy to material inquiries concerning the mode of production, property distribution, and reassessment of the state's role in socioeconomics. In this context, liberalism and socialism evolved as modern ideologies, each carrying a system of newly introduced political values reflecting its respective visions of the individual, state, society, and justice.

1-Political Values in Liberal Thought

• Individual Liberty

Liberals drew inspiration from John Locke's idea that humans possess natural rights such as the right to life, liberty, and property and that the function of the state is to protect these rights rather than violate them. However, they reformulated these rights as foundational values in response to rapid social and political changes. Liberty became the central pillar of liberal thought, evolving from Locke's concept of negative liberty to the notion of positive liberty, as developed by John Stuart Mill and Isaiah Berlin.

According to John Stuart Mill, liberty is the freedom from external constraints and a necessary condition for the progress of the individual and society. He defines it after distinguishing between the role of the state and individual autonomy as "individual liberty in

³¹ Ibid.

thought, expression, and conduct, so long as it does not harm others. "³² Isaiah Berlin, after offering a philosophical distinction between two kinds of liberty—negative and positive—contends that liberty is "the actual capacity to control your life and determine your destiny... meaning the absence of interference or coercion from others, particularly the state. "³³

Since values emerge from transformations in political and ideological thought, liberty has taken on a critical turning point in the development of modern liberal thought, becoming a social norm grounded in historical and philosophical contexts that shape modern societies. The construction of liberty as a value in modern political thought is founded on goals such as protecting individuals from state and majority tyranny, exercising freedom of opinion as a means for scientific and moral progress, and acknowledging liberty as essential for human development and creativity.

-Human Rights and Citizenship

Human Rights:

The significant transformations that emerged after the collapse of the feudal system, the French Revolution, and the religious reform movements raised fundamental questions, such as the following: What is the source of authority? What are the rights of the individual in relation to the state? Who is the Citizen? What is the individual's role in governance? The answers to these questions gave rise to the development and flourishing of liberal thought as a political ideology based on natural rights, such as individual liberty and property. The concept of rights expanded to encompass civil and political rights, followed by social and economic rights.

The *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* of 1789 proclaimed that "Men are born and remain free and equal in rights." This marked a shift in political thought from religious conceptions of authority and rights to the idea of fixed, natural rights endowed to human beings by reason. These came to be known later as "human rights," as articulated in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* in 1948.³⁴

- Citizenship:

Building on modern political thought that redefined the individual's relationship with authority by granting natural rights, the individual transformed from a subject and dependent to a member of the community and a political agent, that is, a citizen "with full membership in society, manifested in a set of rights: civil, political, and social. "³⁵ Citizens also bear duties such as paying taxes, serving in the community, and participating in civic life. John Stuart Mill called for active

³² John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, London: Longman, Roberts & Green, 1859.

³³ Isaiah Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958.

³⁴ *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, December 10, 1948. Adopted by the 58 Member States of the General Assembly at the Palais de Chaillot in Paris (Resolution 217 A (III)). <https://www.un.org/fr/>

³⁵ T. H. Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class*, 1950. <https://delong.typepad.com/marshall-citizenship-and-social-class.pdf>

citizenship, asserting, "It is not enough for the individual to enjoy rights; he must participate in public life and engage in public affairs. "³⁶

This modern conception of political thought is based on the rule of law and the equality of all members of society before it, including state organs, authorities, and Parliament. Citizens participate in determining their destiny through voting, candidacy, freedom of expression, and such mechanisms constitute the building blocks of the modern state. Thomas Paine emphasised this, stating, "It is the character of a citizen, not of a subject, that should be the foundation of a free state. "³⁷ Citizenship is grounded in participatory democracy, governed by civil, not religious, ties, as in theocratic states, since citizenship is based not on religious beliefs or ethnicity but on allegiance to the state and prevailing law.

Modern political thought integrates human rights and citizenship, asserting that citizens must enjoy human rights through the abolition of absolute authority. It establishes the concept of a political contract between citizens and the state, viewing authority and therefore the state as a guarantor of rights and freedoms rather than a tool of coercion. This foundation was translated into constitutional charters, legal systems, and democracies that shaped modern societies, led liberation movements, and later restored civil rights.

2-Political Values in the Construction of the Socialist State

Marxist political thought contributed to restructuring societies on socialist foundations, leading to the emergence of new political systems in the twentieth century that profoundly influenced the distribution of wealth and power.

The principles on which this political thought was founded were not far removed from those initiated by liberal thought, such as justice, equality, and the rejection of social inequality. Socialist ideology is based on communist theory, which returns humanity to a stage of communal ownership where property and possession are not yet understood by humans. Marxist thought built upon this idea by introducing the concept of class struggle as the central factor in sociopolitical transformations. It identified property ownership as the source of conflict between those who own and those who do not. This material basis creates the working class without ownership, in contrast to capitalist owners. This forms the foundation from which socialist thought interprets the concept of class exploitation.

Consequently, influenced by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who argued that inequality in property corrupted the "original contract," socialists defended equality and the public interest, prioritising an organised and just society over absolute individual liberty.

³⁶ John Stuart Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government*, London: Parker, Son, and Bourn, 1861.

³⁷ Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man*, 1791. <https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/paine-the-rights-of-man-part-i-1791-ed>

-Primacy of the Collective over the Individual

Marxist political thought emphasises the concept of the collective by abolishing private ownership of the means of production and transforming them into public property. This reflects the primacy of the collective over the individual, where land, factories, and productive resources are managed for the benefit of society as a whole rather than for the benefit of individual capital owners. As stated in *the Communist Manifesto*: "The proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie... and centralise all means of production in the hands of the state, i.e., the proletariat organised as the ruling class. "³⁸

Central planning of economic activity replaces the free market mechanism and capitalist individual competition. Production and resource distribution are organised to meet basic collective needs such as food, housing, education, and healthcare, aiming to achieve justice and equality. Socialists reject the idea that the market should determine resource allocation, advocating instead for collective ownership and central planning to ensure the fulfilment of fundamental human needs.³⁹

Marxism, through this planning, does not negate the existence of the individual but situates the individual within a collective framework where their freedom and development are linked to the progress of the community or society as a whole. Socialism, as described by Karl Marx, is "the unity of free individuals," freeing the individual from dependencies, whether personal or material, and achieving what Marx called "free individuality. "⁴⁰ That is, socialism, referred to by Marx and Friedrich Engels as communism, is a system that allows individuals to realise themselves freely in a society free from relations of dependency or exploitation.

This principle underpinned the German ideology that restructured the culture of socialist societies through the redistribution of wealth and the pursuit of social justice. In contrast to liberal ideology, which focuses on the individual, socialism advocates for values of cooperation, solidarity, and the common good, viewing society as a unified entity rather than a collection of competing individuals. This is made clear in *The Communist Manifesto*, which states, "The free development of each is the condition for the free development of all. "⁴¹ This phrase, found at the end of the second chapter of the Manifesto, emphasises that the liberation of individuals is not achieved individually or in isolation but through collective liberation. Far from a mere slogan, this expression encapsulates the essence of the Marxist socialist vision of social justice, the individual, and society, becoming a central value on which socialist societies are built.

- Social Justice and Equality

Social Justice

³⁸ Marx & Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 1848.

³⁹ Michael Newman, *Socialism: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press, 2005.

⁴⁰ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, edited by C. J. Arthur, New York: International Publishers, 1970.

⁴¹ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, translated by S. Moore, Penguin Classics, 2002 (original work published 1848).

While socialists embraced Jean-Jacques Rousseau's idea that the social contract should not serve only the wealthy but aimed to achieve justice for all, they differed from liberal or traditional views in their conception of justice, approaching it as a political value.

In Marxist thought, justice is not understood through normative principles but through the analysis of class and productive relations. Marx stated in *Capital* that relations in capitalist society are based on "an exchange equal in form but unequal in substance," indicating that what appears legally "just" conceals an exploitative essence.⁴² Justice, from the Marxist perspective, can be achieved only through the abolition of exploitative relations arising from private ownership of the means of production and the reorganisation of society on the basis of actual equality in the conditions of labour considered fundamental in "realising the material conditions for human freedom and development. "⁴³This goes beyond mere equality of rights or opportunities as articulated by A. Wood.

Therefore, justice is a central political value in Marxist thought. Although not formulated as a direct ethical concept, it is not simply legal fairness but rather material and historical liberation that ends class inequalities and establishes the conditions for the development of free human beings.

- Equality in Marxist Political Thought

Marxist thought emphasises equality as a foundational principle and condition for constructing a just system, as well as a political value that establishes a socialist society. Since wealth disparities lead to inequalities in rights and opportunities, socialists reject the liberal principle that "all are equal before the law." They oppose what they call formal equality and instead propose a radical alternative of actual equality to restore balance.

True equality, from the Marxist view, involves providing the material and social conditions necessary to make the equality of opportunity a reality. Marx asserts, "What is called 'equal rights' is supposed to govern unequal individuals... Equal law in a society based on economic inequality can only perpetuate that inequality. "⁴⁴ Engels also states, "Eliminating social inequality requires eliminating economic inequality, which in turn cannot happen without abolishing private ownership of the means of production. "⁴⁵

Accordingly, socialist equality is not merely a moral ideal but also a political tool for restructuring society and redistributing power and wealth fairly without class differentiation. Thus, equality in Marxist political thought is not a legal value. However, a structural condition for

⁴² Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume I* (trans. B. Fowkes), Penguin Books, 1990 (original work published 1867), p. 344.

⁴³ A. Wood, *Karl Marx*, Routledge, 1995.

⁴⁴ Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (original work written 1875), 1970 edition, p. 10.

⁴⁵ Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, International Publishers, 1972, p. 178.

building a socialist society is one where human liberation depends on removing the material causes that produce inequality.

With such political values and others introduced by Marxist political thought, social movements escalated and triggered revolutions that successfully established international societies grounded in the cultural references contained in *the Communist Manifesto*.

Both liberal and socialist political values reflect modern intellectual interaction, with profound transformations experienced and still ongoing in the structures of societies and states. While liberal ideologies focus on freeing the individual from state constraints, socialist ideologies aim at emancipating the individual from exploitation through state mechanisms.

Understanding these values not only aids in interpreting the political history of traditional and modern societies but also provides foundational knowledge for analysing contemporary challenges, ranging from global inequality and democratic crises to digital transformation and disruptions to cultural and sovereignty identities.

Conclusion

Political thought has played a decisive role in shaping societies, not only by establishing forms of authority and models of governance but also by constructing values and institutions, guiding revolutionary movements, and planning political futures.

Since its inception, political thought has not been merely theoretical speculation about power and governance; instead, it has served as a scientific mechanism for shaping social values that regulate the relationship between the individual and the state, fostering political and ethical consciousness. From ancient Greek philosophy, both Plato and Aristotle viewed the state not merely as an administrative apparatus but also as a moral space that establishes justice and virtue and educates citizens about hierarchy and order. In classical thought, authority is founded on values such as harmony, the common good, and duty.

Modern political thought, however, brought a radical transformation to these cultural assumptions by shifting the justification of authority from virtue or nature to freedom, individual rights, and the social contract. Thomas Hobbes elevated "security" as the supreme value justifying a strong state; John Locke connected legitimacy to the protection of property and liberties, whereas Jean-Jacques Rousseau placed the general will and equality at the heart of a just political order.

These new political values did not remain confined to theoretical texts and intellectual debates but permeated social structures themselves, reshaping and evolving concepts such as obedience, citizenship, education, and belonging. Obedience transformed from passive submission to conditional legitimacy, citizenship evolved into active participation in political decisions rather than class privilege, and the function of education shifted from producing obedient individuals to forming critical citizens aware of their role in democratic systems.

Thus, it becomes clear that political thought, as an intellectual construct and a field of value conflict, paved the way for the emergence of modern societies characterised by their values and institutions. Understanding the social order is impossible without analysing this thought, which was not merely theoretical but comprised social values influencing the relationship between the individual and the state.

From classical virtue and hierarchy to modern freedom, contracting, and equality, the values governing authority, obedience, and citizenship have evolved. The contemporary challenge remains to reformulate these values in a world undergoing rapid social and political changes.

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