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MEANING AND SCOPE OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

Your course in Political Science begins with this lesson. This lesson tries to explore the meaning of Political Science. Political Science, traditionally, begins and ends with the state. So considered, it is the study of the state and government. The modern view of Political Science lays emphasis on its being the study of power and authority. Political Science also explains its ever-widening scope. Its scope includes study of the state and the study of political system; covering the study of government, study of power; study of man and his political behaviour and study of political issues which influence politics directly or indirectly. In this lesson, you will study some of the core concepts like Justice and its relevance to citizens.



Objectives

After studying this lesson you will be able to

- explain the meaning of Political Science in the light of some standard definitions;
- distinguish between Political Science and Politics;
- describe the scope of Political Science in terms of role of the State, functions of government and its relationship with citizens;
- recognize the relevance of Justice for citizens and State.

1.1 Meaning of Political Science

Political Science is that part of social science which deals with the foundations of the *state* and the principles of the *government*. According to J W Garner, “Politics begins and ends with the state.” Similarly, R G Gettel wrote that Politics is the “study of the state in the past, present and future”. Harold J Laski stated in the same vein that the study of Politics concerns itself with the life of men and women in relation to organized state. Thus as a social science, Political Science deals with those aspects of individuals in society which relate to their activities and organizations devoted to seeking of power, resolution of conflicts and all these, within an overall framework of the rule and law as laid down by the state.

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1.1.1 Changing Meaning of Political Science

The term Politics is derived from the Greek word *polis* which means city-state. That is why many commentators, as you saw, rightly define Politics in terms of the state or government. However, this definition does not exhaust the meaning of Politics. Politics also deals with *power*. Harold D. Lasswell and Abraham Kaplan define Political Science as “the study of shaping and sharing of power”. In a word, *Politics deals with both state and power*. However, the power that Political Science deals with is, more often than not, the legitimate power. Since science is the systematic study of any phenomenon through observation and experiment, it follows that Political Science studies the state and power in all their aspects. You will learn more about the state and power later in this lesson.

Political Science deals with both empirical facts and normative issues. Facts are in the domain of “what is” and value preferences are in the domain of “what should be.” For example, if somebody says India is a parliamentary democracy, he or she is making a statement of empirical fact. This is what India today actually is. But if she or he were to make a statement like the one that India should switch over to presidential form of democracy, the statement would be a normative one. Political Science is not satisfied with describing the state of affairs, it wants to change or improve upon them. Empirical statements are true or false by virtue of what observation shows to be the case. Evaluative statements are ethical/moral imperatives, which are often said not to be true or false in any sense at all. Formal statements (such as the propositions of mathematics) are true or false by virtue of the meanings of their constituent terms alone. Political Philosophy deals with formal statements. Political Science deals with empirical statements and also evaluates the existing political institutions, practices and focuses on how to improve them.



Intext Questions 1.1

Fill in the blanks :

- Political Science deals with both and issues (empirical, normative, formal).
- Political Science studiesand (society, state, nation, power, class).
- The term Politics is derived from the word..... (*polis*, police, state).
- said Politics begins and ends with the state (Gettel, Garner, Lasswell).
- defined Political Science as the study of shaping and sharing of power. (Kaplan, Easton, Garner).

1.1.2 Growth of the Discipline of Political Science

Systematic study of Politics started with the Greeks in the fourth century BC. Philosophers like Plato and Aristotle used it in the most comprehensive sense. Aristotle called Politics a “master science”. For him, it comprised of not only the institutions of state or government but also family, property and other social institutions. Politics, for the Greeks, was an all-encompassing activity.

The ancient Greek view about Political Science was mainly *ethical*. In contrast, the ancient

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Romans considered the *legal* aspect of Politics more important for their governance. During the Middle Ages, Political Science became a branch of religious order of the Church. Political authority was, then, subordinated to the authority of the Church.

Normally a lay man associates Politics with party politics. But as students of Political Science, we know that Politics is much larger than that: it is systematic study of state and power.



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As the state grew in size and became more complex, Political Science acquired a realistic and secular (non-religious) approach. After the Industrial Revolution, the role of the State, which was limited to maintenance of law and order and providing defence against external aggression, underwent considerable changes with the emergence of the new economic system called capitalism.

In the twentieth century, after the Second World War, the 'behavioural approach' offered a new dimension of Political Science. The behavioural movement in American Political Science in the 1950s and the 1960s placed a lot of emphasis on the 'science' part of Politics. It wanted to model Politics after the methods followed by natural sciences like Physics, Botany, etc. The behaviouralists built theory inductively from empirical propositions. Those who follow inductive method would come to the conclusion after study, observation and experiment. For example, when some behaviouralists saw African-Americans (Blacks) of the southern United States of America (USA) voted for the Democratic Party of the United States, they came to the conclusion that the African-Americans do vote for the Democrats.

This behavioural approach shifted the focus of its study from political institutions and structures to their functions. It placed stress on political activity and the behaviour of men and women who control these institutions. It replaced the study of ideas by the study of facts, evidence and behaviour. It considered political activity manifested in behaviour as the true subject of Political Science.

A political activity may be in the form of an individual contesting an election. It may be the activity of a group seeking the adoption of a particular policy in its favour by the government. As different people pursue different interests, such activities tend to generate disagreement, competition and conflict. But the distinctive quality of Politics is that it includes *physical coercion* or *force* by the government. It may and usually does involve the persuasive influence and effort of the government to resolve conflicts through its balanced policy decisions.

Politics is also viewed as a process whereby individuals, groups or communities seek to achieve their specific but conflicting goals. Politics, as the process, seeks to allocate resources (Easton calls it, values) authoritatively.

Politics, as the study of structures, institutions, processes and activities, recognizes the possibility of the use of power. The Marxist approach, which is derived from the writings of the nineteenth century German philosopher Karl Marx, views Politics as a study of irreconcilable conflicts between the two classes 'haves' (those who have private property, or simply the rich) and the 'have-nots' (those who do not have any private property, or simply the poor); in other words, the exploiters and the exploited. The emancipation of the have-nots will come only through a revolution which would put an end to the institution of private property, thus changing the class society to the classless society. But Politics, as against the Marxist view, has another view also, the liberal view, according to which

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Politics is considered as an effort for conciliation and accommodation to bring about rule of order and Justice. Incidentally, the Marxist view of politics comes as a reaction to the liberal view of politics.

1.2 Distinction between Political Science and Politics

The terms 'Political Science' and 'Politics' are often used interchangeably. However, the distinction between the two needs to be understood. Some scholars define Politics to be "the science and art of government." But this is only a part of the total explanation of the subject of Political Science. Now-a-days the term Politics is used to mean the problems of the citizens interacting with the instrument of political power in one form or the other. Sometimes, Politics was and still is used as the technique of compromise or the method to capture power and retain it.

According to many political scientists, the study of Political Science comprises theory of the state, concept of sovereign power, forms and functions of government, making and execution of laws, elections, political parties, rights and duties of citizens, policy functions and study of welfare activities of the State and government.

There is another aspect of Politics that needs to be emphasised. Politics, many a time, implies practical politics. Practising politics is different from studying it. Practical politics includes actual formation of government, the working of government, administration, laws and legislation. It also includes international politics including matters such as peace and war, international trade and economic order, protection of rights, etc. All these also comprise the subject matter of the study of Politics.

While the knowledge of Political Science as a discipline is acquired through study, the skill of practical politics is acquired through politicking or manipulations and craftiness or by exploiting caste and regional loyalties and religious sentiments. Practical politics is often described as the 'dirty game' and a 'corrupting' process in the common people's mind.

But we find that there are hardly any human groupings or societies, which are free from 'politics' and hardly any individual who does not know the implications of the "game of politics".

Practical Politics also has many positive aspects. In this era of welfare state many positive programmes such as removal of untouchability, land reforms, release of bonded labourers, prohibition of trafficking in human beings and *begar* (forced labour), introduction of minimum wages, employment generation programmes, empowerment of the other backward classes are all examples of positive aspects of practical politics.

'Politics' refers to the process of actual happenings in society and in institutions, which Political Science refers to its understand in a systematic manner.



Intext Questions 1.2

Fill in the blanks :

- (a) called Political Science a 'master science' (Plato, Aristotle, Laski).
- (b) Behaviouralism stressed on the part of Political Science (science, philosophy, political)



- (c) The view Politics as a conflict between two classes of the haves and the have-nots (Greeks, Romans, Marxists).
- (d) Skill of practical politics is acquired through (honesty, morality, craftiness).

1.3 Scope Of Political Science

Here we shall learn about the scope of Political Science in terms of role of the State, functions of government and its relationship with citizens.

1.3.1 Role of the State

The term 'State' in its modern sense was first used by Machiavelli (1469-1527), the Italian statesman. The study of the State has since remained the focal point for the political scientists.

The State consists of four elements. These are: (a) the people; (b) the territory on which they live; (c) the government to rule and regulate the lives of the people and (d) sovereignty, which implies unrestricted authority to take decisions and manage its own affairs. You will read in detail about these four elements in the second lesson.

The role and nature of the State have been interpreted differently. Modern western liberal thinking, about which you will study more in the fourth lesson, arose with the commercial (Mercantile) Revolution in Western Europe in the sixteenth century and became prominent with the Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth century. These Revolutions brought into focus a new economic system called capitalism.

Market is a place where goods and services are sold and bought. It operates on the basis of demand and supply. Many people regard it as a self-regulating, self-correcting place, provided there is no interference by the state. Competition is the chief hallmark of market. Capitalism and market are considered two sides of the same coin.

The social group consisting of traders, merchants and businessmen and later the industrialists (also known as the bourgeois) was the major beneficiary of this system. The liberals emphasized that the consent of the people is the true basis of the state. Early liberal thinkers also considered the state as a 'necessary evil'- an evil but necessary for the purpose of protecting the individual from the external and internal enemies. According to this view, that government is the best which governs the least. In other words, the state should be a 'police state' and hence a limited one. It should also be limited in a different sense: as John Locke, the famous English liberal philosopher of the seventeenth century, said it is there to protect the individual's natural right to life, liberty and property.

Rights are claims by an individual on the state. Natural rights are those rights with which an individual is supposed to have been born. These are, so to say, God-given rights. More importantly, individual is supposed to have acquired them even before the state came into existence. The important implication is that since the state has no role in the creation or granting of these rights, it cannot take away or abridge these rights.

By contrast, the Marxist view, about which you will study more in the fourth lesson, does

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not consider the State as an impartial institution. It asserts that, throughout the centuries, the state has been a tool in the hands of the “haves” for exploiting and dominating the “have-nots.” In the future classless society like the communist society, the state would “wither away.” In Gandhian view, the State would justify its existence, by acting as a “trustee” of the people. It should help the poorest and the weakest one. It should restore to him or her, a control over his or her own life and destiny.

The Welfare State, which slowly emerged during the 1930s, tries to promote the well being of its citizens, especially the poor, the needy, the unemployed and the aged. It is now generally agreed that the Welfare State exists to promote common good. So the functions of the state have increased manifold.

The state to act as ‘trustee’ of the people means that it should hold people’s power as a trust for welfare of the people. It should not consider people as helpless subjects, but as co-rulers in its governance.

Power refers to the ability of one person affecting the attitudes or action of another. I have power over you if I can make you do what you would not have done otherwise. But power is not always exercised openly. It can be exercised in unseen way, as in controlling the agenda. However, power can be best exercised when I can convince you about what is good/bad for you. To that extent, my power over you would be complete. And this dominance would always go unchallenged.

By power of the government, we think of the different aspects of government. We think of ministers who have departments under them for the exercise of power over the area of their domains. There is the bureaucracy and the enormous structure of governmental administration, which has power over us. It can control our lives in various ways by making, administering and implementing laws.

Here, one thing is to be noted. Power does not lie only in the highly publicized areas of social life, like government, administration, elections, etc. It also exists in small institutions like family etc. Many feminists are of the opinion that inside the private world of family man exercises power or dominance over woman. Hence, it is very aptly said, “even the personal is political.”

Another thing to be noticed is that there is a distinction between legitimate and illegitimate power. There can be power, which is considered right or proper, while another may be improper. A dacoit’s power over me is very real, because if I do not comply with his wishes, I might lose my life or limb. But it is not proper power as is generally understood. Contrary to it the power that the government’s representatives, policemen or judges exercise over me is proper power. The dacoit’s power is illegitimate power while the government’s is legitimate. And the power of constitutional authorities over me is called authority. Authority contains the two ideas of power and legitimacy. Authority is that form of power which is legitimate. It is power plus legitimacy.

1.3.2 Citizens and Government

The government is the most important instrument of the State through which the latter realizes its objectives. Through its three organs i.e; the Legislature, the Executive and the

Judiciary, it makes laws and rules, implements them, maintains peace and order in the country and resolves clashes of interests. It also tries to ensure territorial integrity or unity of the country.

Modern democratic governments perform many other functions for the development and welfare of citizens and the society, as a whole. This is especially so in a developing country like ours.

The relationship between citizens and the government is reciprocal. The citizens are members of the State. The state recognizes certain rights of the citizens and in turn expects certain duties from them.

So far as the rights of the citizens are concerned, they can be divided into three: civil, political and social. **CIVIL RIGHTS** are those rights which are necessary for the freedom/liberty of the individual. They include the right to life and personal liberty, right to freedom of speech, expression and thought, right to own property, right to enter into contract, right to equality before law and equal protection by law. Equality before law means absence of special privileges; equal protection of laws implies equals should be treated equally. **POLITICAL RIGHTS** include the right to vote and the right to contest election. **SOCIAL RIGHTS** include the right to some degrees of economic welfare and security and the right to live the life of a civilized being according to standards prevailing in the society.

It is the primary duty of the citizens to pay taxes to the government. They should co-operate with the government and abide by the laws and rules; should help in preventing diseases by immunization and by keeping neighborhood clean. They should have small families to help the government check the population growth. They should preserve public property, help in catching and punishing anti-social and anti-national elements. Further, the citizens of different castes, religions, languages and regions should solve their problems by understanding and agreement and not by violent means. In this way, a lot of resources, energy and time of the government can be saved for constructive purposes.

1.3.3 Liberty

The term liberty is derived from the Latin word *liber* meaning free. Thus liberty means freedom. Freedom is of paramount importance for the development of an individual's personality. Historically speaking, the term liberty was initially defined as absence of all restraints on an individual. This is known as the negative concept of liberty. Early liberalism championed negative liberty. John Stuart Mill, the nineteenth century English political philosopher, described, "Restraint as an evil". Mill was especially worried about the restraints coming from the state and society.

However, since individuals live together in a society, complete absence of restraints would be neither possible nor desirable. Further, differentiating between the self-regarding and other-regarding action is not always possible. It has been very aptly said that your liberty to swing your arm ends there where my nose begins. For liberty to be enjoyed by everyone, it should have reasonable restraints. This is the concept of positive liberty. This concept further means freedom to be a master of one's own self. Harold J Laski supported this concept. Freedoms are opportunities which history has shown to be essential to the development of personality. The freedom of many requires restraint of law on the freedom of some. Later liberals supported the positive liberty.



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1.3.3.1 Safeguards of Liberty

Declaration of rights of the individuals in the Constitution is considered as an important safeguard of liberty. This way the government can be prevented from encroaching upon the freedoms of the people.

Impartial judiciary is rightly called the watchdog of liberty. Without it the liberty of the individuals would be meaningless.

Decentralization of powers is another important safeguard of liberty. History is witness to the fact that concentration of power has very often led to despotism.

Separation of powers, i.e. the executive, the legislature and the judiciary being separate, is a great ally of liberty. Montesquieu said, "Power should be a check on power."

Rule of law or equality in the eyes of the law is also an important safeguard of liberty. This is the bulwark against discrimination based on caste, class, colour, creed, etc.

A large measure of social justice or diffusion of social and economic privileges is a prerequisite for liberty. If privileges become the prerogative of the select few, then effective liberty would be denied to a vast majority.

A well-knit party system is also indispensable for the preservation of liberty.

All these institutional safeguards are inadequate to preserve liberty if the citizens themselves do not possess the proud spirit to preserve it. People should always be on their toes to ensure that their liberty is not encroached upon. Eternal vigilance, it has been rightly said, is the price of liberty.



Intext Questions 1.3

Fill in the blanks :

- (a) The term 'State' was first used by (Plato, Machiavelli, Kautilya).
- (b) The term Liberty is derived from the word *liber* (Greek, Roman, Latin).
- (c) liberalism advocated negative liberty (Early, Modern, Libertarian).
- (d) Your liberty to swing your ends there where my nose begins (nose, arm, head).
- (e) The freedom of many may require restraints of law on the freedom of (all, some, none).
- (f) Eternal is the price of liberty (vigilance, liberty, freedom).

1.4 Justice and its Relevance for Citizens and State

The term Justice is derived from the Latin word *jus*, which means a bond. Thus the word Justice means joining or fitting. "Justice", says E Barker, "is the reconciler and the synthesis of political values."

The best general definition of Justice is to “render to everyone his/her due.”

1.4.1 Aspects of Justice

When we turn to the broader question of Justice, it has other constitutions, we find a number of views. Herein comes the concept of distributive Justice – *what is the proper way of distribution of income or social position in a given society*. There are two major conceptions of distributive/social Justice, one involves the notion of merit and the other involves need and equality.

1.4.2 Merit

The first conception argues that each person’s social position and (material) wealth must be decided on the basis of merit. When people talk of careers open to talents and equality of opportunity, they have merit in view. However, the question arises as to how to measure merit or talent? The liberals say that the price that someone can command in a free market is the reasonable indicator of his/her value to others. The socialist critics are of the opinion that market receipts are often affected by chance and social background which have nothing to do with merit.

1.4.3 Need and Equality

The second conception views that goods, positions, etc. should be allocated on the basis of a person’s needs. But how to define needs? Everybody agrees on food, shelter and clothing. Beyond this, there is no agreement. Communism (Marxism) believes that each person should define his needs and sufficient resources can be created under communism to meet all the needs of all individuals. However, others are of the opinion that needs can be satisfied by two agencies – welfare state and the market. Some needs can be satisfied through the welfare state and others being allocated through the market.

1.4.4 Equality of Opportunity

Equality does not mean identity of rewards or identity of treatment, i.e. same reward or treatment for everybody, regardless of efforts and circumstances. For example, there would be no equality if all the students were awarded sixty marks regardless of the quality of answer. Ideally, those who write better should get higher marks. And this is compatible with equality. Likewise, in a society some people have more income and some have less. However, this state of affairs does not violate equality provided two conditions are met: (a) *absence of privileges* and (b) *equality of opportunity*

- (a) Absence of privileges strengthens equality; the existence of privileges would, conversely, promote inequality. This means that no one be given facilities/opportunities more than those given to others. Privileges create a situation of inequality, and in the process, harms equality.
- (b) Equality of opportunity means everybody should have the same chance to access public position and office. An example of the working of the equality of opportunity in India is the Civil Services examination conducted by the Union Public Services Commission (UPSC). Any Indian graduate from any university of India can take the examination.

Allied to the concept of equality of opportunity is *equality of (starting) conditions*.



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Everybody should get a chance to be at the initial starting line; then the race of life could begin. Some would come first, some, second and others would fail. But this would not be a violation of equality. Many people are convinced that equality of conditions can only be achieved when the historically disadvantaged groups (like the Dalits/the Scheduled Castes) are compensated through reservation of jobs or (as is known in the United States of America) affirmative action.

Equality is closely connected to equity, i.e., even-handed treatment. Equity demands like cases to be treated alike. Relevantly similar cases are to be treated in similar ways.

1.4.5 Overall Results (Communitarian Justice)

There is the other kind of theory of Justice that does not take either merit or need into account. It takes into account the overall results. John Rawls' theory belongs to this category. In his book *A Theory of Justice* he argues that inequalities in the allocation of goods are permissible *if and only if those inequalities work to the benefit of the least well-off members of society*. In other words, a society having income inequality is just if and only if that inequality benefitted the least advantaged members of that society. For example, a professor's higher salary can be just if and only if it, directly or indirectly, benefits, so to say, the bricklayer.

On the other hand, scholars like Nozick argue in favour of traditional meaning of Justice: as respect for law and *entitlements*. Entitlements mean established/ conventional rights. According to this theory, individuals have natural rights, especially the right to property. These entitlements accrue to the individuals because they are human beings. Nozick says nobody, not even the state, can override these entitlements. Putting simply, Nozick is arguing against excessive taxation imposed by the (welfare) state. He thinks that taxation interferes with rights of the individual to dispose of the income as she or he thinks fit. Taxation is an instance of curtailment of liberty of the individual.

Justice is a dynamic concept. It has been undergoing changes from the ancient times till today. So no final word can be said about Justice. Justice is concept which keeps evolving.

1.4.6. Justice and its Relationship with Liberty and Equality

The nineteenth century scholars like Lord Acton and Alexis de Tocqueville considered liberty and equality as incompatible. They thought that too much of stress on equality would lead to the dilution of liberty. Many later scholars also agreed with them. Progressive taxation by the welfare state was considered violative of the liberty of the propertied people. However, it remained a fact that proceeds of tax went towards financing the programmes to ameliorate the plight of the poor, the unemployed, the needy, the handicapped and the aged. A largely egalitarian society was made possible by these programmes. In times of conflict like this, prevailing notion of Justice decides what should be the right mix of liberty and equality. Thus freedom and equality are two aspects of Justice. The ultimate objective of both freedom and equality is Justice.



Intext Questions 1.4

Fill in the blanks :

- (a) According to..... Justice is the reconciler of political values (Plato, Aristotle, Barker).

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- (b) Equality does not mean (identity of treatment, equality of opportunity).
- (c) Justice for Nozick meant respect for..... (entitlements, duties, need).
- (d) According to Rawls, inequality is permissible if and only if it benefits the (the richest, middle class, least well-off).
- (e) Equality means (absence of special privileges, identity of rewards, freedom).



What You Have Learnt

1. The ancient Greeks thought of Political Science as Political Philosophy. They laid stress on the ethical aspects of Politics. During the Middle Ages, Political Science became a branch of the Church, subordinating political authority to the authority of the Church.
2. In modern times, Political Science acquired a realistic and secular approach. As a result of the emergence of capitalism following the Industrial Revolution, the role of the State underwent considerable changes.
3. The subject of Political Science became a specialized science of the state. It studied about different forms of government and its organs like Legislature, Executive and Judiciary.
4. Laski stated that the study of Political Science concerned itself with the life of men or women in relation to organized states.
5. In the twentieth century, the behavioural approach shifted the focus of study from political institutions to their functions and to the study of political activities and behaviour of men and women.
6. The scope of Political Science includes the study of the role of the State, functions of Government and its relationship with citizens.
7. Political Science is distinct from Politics. While the former deals with the study of Politics, the latter refers to the problems of man and woman which interact with political power and conflict with each other.
8. Power is the ability to control others. It is the capacity to get things done as one would like others to do. Power in combination with legitimacy is called authority.
9. Generally, freedom is defined as absence of restraints in the behavior of a person. But positive freedom means self-realization and that individual should be free to act only to the extent that others' freedom is not curtailed. Law protects freedom. Generally it is considered that there is Justice in society if it rewards people on the basis of merit without being oblivious of the needs of the worst-off. Further, freedom and equality are considered important pillars of Justice.



Terminal Exercises

1. Explain the meaning of Political Science.

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2. Write a note on the growth of the Discipline of Political Science.
3. Describe the scope of Political Science in terms of role of the State and functions of government.
4. Distinguish between Political Science and Politics.
5. Write a note on the rights and the duties of an individual.
6. Define Liberty in their negative and positive dimensions.
7. What do you mean by Equality of Opportunity ?
8. Explain the term Justice and bring out the different conceptions of it.



Answers to Intext Questions

1.1

- (a) empirical, normative
- (b) State, power
- (c) polis
- (d) Garner
- (e) Kaplan

1.2

- (a) Aristotle
- (b) science
- (c) Marxists
- (e) craftiness

1.3

- (a) Machiavelli
- (b) Latin
- (c) Early
- (d) arm
- (e) some
- (f) vigilance

1.4

- (a) Barker
- (b) identity of treatment

- (c) entitlements
- (d) least well-off
- (e) absence of special privileges

Hints of Terminal Exercises

1. Refer to Section 1.1 and 1.1.1.
2. Refer to Section 1.1.2
3. Refer to Section 1.3.1
4. Refer to Section 1.2
5. Refer to Section 1.3.2
6. Refer to Section 1.3.3
7. Refer to Section 1.4.4
8. Refer to Section 1.4



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