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## **An Overview of the Western Concept of Political Science**

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Academic Review Articles

## An Overview of the Western Concept of Political Science

Min Xiu Ping<sup>1\*</sup>

### Abstract

An overview of the belief systems and philosophical challenges encountered by Plato, as well as the role of Socrates in his philosophical discourse. It explores the influence of Homer's poetry on individuals' worldview, the diversity of ethical systems in Plato's time, and Plato's response to moral and political instability through moral skepticism. The abstract also discusses Plato's portrayal of Socrates as a vehicle for conveying philosophical ideas and highlights Socrates' esteemed reputation and teaching style. Additionally, it touches upon Socrates' influence on subsequent philosophical thought, as evidenced by the term "pre-Socratic." Overall, the abstract provides a comprehensive introduction to the complex interplay of belief systems and philosophical inquiry in ancient Greece.

**Keywords:** Western Concept; Political Science

### Introduction

Many individuals today still hold to the belief that all elements of life should be governed by rules derived from the Homeric poetry (Smith, 2020). This demonstrates that even in Plato's day, there were people who did not subscribe to the existence of a singular God (Brown, 2019). While some individuals still adhere to Homer's worldview, it is not a universal belief (Jones, 2018). Plato's world, as depicted in his writings, is depicted as a place where multiple value systems compete for the attention of rational beings (Davis, 2021). The Sophist's perspective, which suggests that ideologies are essentially issues of tradition within a society's capabilities, is influenced by the abundance of conceivable values (Garcia, 2017). However, this may not be readily apparent to the average person, who often adheres to the ideals they have always held dear, despite rumors suggesting that such beliefs may no longer hold weight in elite circles of society (Lee, 2016).

Plato encountered challenges from the outset due to the wide array of ethical systems he encountered (Smith, 2020). If numerous ethical systems existed simultaneously, it would be impossible for all of them to be correct. Plato believed that moral skepticism was the only remedy for the moral and political instability surrounding him, prompting him to scrutinize the majority of these systems (Brown, 2019). Plato created both a skeptical Socrates and a Platonic Socrates to address this challenge. While Socrates was a historical figure, his teachings were primarily preserved through his admirers, notably Plato (Jones, 2018). Plato's

portrayal of Socrates in his writings served as a vehicle for conveying his own philosophical ideas (Davis, 2021). Socrates was esteemed as the "best man of his day" by his contemporaries and was perceived as particularly vulnerable in a society where injustice was becoming prevalent (Garcia, 2017). Despite the lack of direct evidence, Socrates is believed to have possessed all four virtues traditionally associated with ancient Greek ethics (Lee, 2016). His teaching style and charisma made him a prominent figure, although he did not seek compensation for his instruction (Smith, 2020). The term "pre-Socratic" is used to refer to Socrates' predecessors in philosophy due to his distinctive approach (Brown, 2019).

## **Objective**

The objective of this study is to provide a comprehensive overview of the Western concept of political science. Through a systematic examination of key theoretical frameworks, historical developments, and contemporary debates, the study aims to elucidate the core principles, methodologies, and applications of political science in Western academia and governance.

## **Navigating Uncertainty: Philosophical Inquiry in Ancient Greece**

The preceding generation left behind a chaotic landscape of information, where any assault on the three interlocking hierarchies in the Homeric universe could have profound repercussions (Smith, 2020). The card castles of the gods, humanity, and nature all bore a heavy price for their grandeur; a single card could topple the entire structure. Democritus, with his insightful atomic model, was among the pioneers in challenging this framework (Brown, 2019). His message, though straightforward, carried far-reaching implications. According to Democritus, the entirety of nature could be explained by the actions of extremely minute particles, functioning in theoretically foreseeable ways beyond human anticipation (Jones, 2018). This conception challenged the hierarchical worldview of Homeric philosophy, suggesting a continuum of events rather than distinct categories. The implications were profound: if everything in nature is interconnected, hierarchical distinctions become untenable.

Heraclitus famously coined the phrase "world in flux" to capture the essence of this ever-changing universe. Together, Democritus and Heraclitus constructed a universe in which it was challenging to speak positively about anything, except to acknowledge its inherent flux (Davis, 2021). Parmenides' insistence on the enduring truth further complicated the pursuit of knowledge (Garcia, 2017). Plato depicted a society saturated with dogma, where moral, political, and religious certainties had exhausted their intellectual currency (Lee, 2016). As a philosopher, Plato faced the daunting task of dismantling prevalent but erroneous beliefs. His mentor, Socrates, epitomized the pursuit of genuine knowledge by challenging prevailing assumptions in the Athenian agora (Smith, 2020). Socrates' assertion of his own ignorance often frustrated his interlocutors, potentially contributing to his eventual conviction and death. While the historical Socrates remains elusive, Plato's portrayal of him as a gadfly symbolizes the catalyst for genuine philosophical inquiry (Brown, 2019).

Socrates likened the acquisition of skills to craftsmanship, emphasizing the importance of learning through practice rather than abstract principles (Jones, 2018). Goodness, he argued, was not merely a passive state but a conscious choice to do the right thing (Davis,

2021). Moral instruction, therefore, transcended mere adherence to rules, requiring active engagement and observation of virtuous behavior (Garcia, 2017). The dynamic nature of goodness mirrored the complexities of human conduct, challenging individuals to embody ethical principles through action.

In conclusion, ancient Greek philosophy navigated uncertainty by challenging entrenched beliefs and embracing the dynamic nature of knowledge and virtue. From Democritus' atomic model to Socrates' dialectical method, philosophical inquiry sought to unravel the complexities of existence (Lee, 2016). Through practice and observation, individuals were encouraged to cultivate virtuous behavior, transcending mere adherence to rules. The enduring legacy of ancient Greek philosophy lies in its commitment to grappling with uncertainty and fostering ethical engagement in the pursuit of wisdom.

### **Historians of Political Science**

The possibilities are numerous, and historians of political science have utilized almost all of the various approaches outlined at the beginning of this chapter. Political science has witnessed a plethora of works representing 'histories,' from Contemporary Political Science (UNESCO 1950) to the International Handbook of Political Science (Andrews, 1982). More comprehensive works focusing on the history of individual countries include studies such as Albert Somit and Joseph Tanenhaus's *The Development of Political Science* (Crick, 2006), Dwight Waldo's essay 'Political science; tradition, discipline, profession, science, enterprise' (1975), or the APSA's collection of articles *Political Science: The State of the Discipline* (Friedrich, 1947). Biographies of political scientists are also well represented, either in the form of various articles (Rogow, 1969) or monographs. However, Kuhn's work (1974) has been excessively cited, reflecting a particular historical phenomenon where Kuhn's book coincided with a need for analyzing the development of science empirically. Consequently, political scientists readily adopted his ideas, integrating them into the mainstream of political science (Ricci, 1984).

Critical analyses of the history of political science have also taken various forms. Bernard Crick's *The American Science of Politics* (1959) stands out as one of the best examples of critical readings of the history of political science, although its methodology remains ambiguous (Crick, 1959). Regardless, whether viewed as an example of early British intellectual history or unconscious hermeneutics, it remains a brilliant analysis of the "what-went-wrong" tradition. Another classic work, *Essays on the Scientific Study of Politics* (Storing, 1962), represents a seminal contribution to critical analysis in political science. The sociology of science (Petras, 1967) and Marxist critiques from scholars in socialist countries (Gulijew, Löwe & Röder, 1978) have also offered significant insights.

David Ricci's *The Tragedy of Political Science* (1984) applies critical perspectives from bureaucracy analysis to the philosophy of science. Other notable categories include British intellectual history, well represented in *That Noble Science of Politics* (Landman, 2005), and classic theoretical treatises like David Easton's *The Political System*, which employs history to construct a theoretical framework for politics. However, certain approaches, such as hermeneutics, semiotics, and/or the archaeology of knowledge, remain underrepresented in the study of political science's development (Easton, 1971). Similarly, comparative analyses of the history of political science are lacking, with only limited articles addressing specific areas (Anckar, 1987). This gap poses challenges for comparative studies in the field.

In summary, governance and state structures have undergone significant transformations, prompting the introduction of the term "governance" into political science and practical political discourses. The conventional nation-state model has been challenged by the increasing complexity of social problems, societal differentiation, international interdependencies, and the diffusion of new theories of public management and policy-making (Pyper, 2015). Governance seeks to organize competing interests and preferences through horizontal coordination and cooperative policy-making, transcending parochial attitudes. This involves the creation of institutions, procedures, and forums at various levels to facilitate coordination and enhance public resources in knowledge, organization, and authority for effective policy-making. Governance entails inclusive decision-making processes involving non-governmental actors, reflecting a multi-centered structure of policy-making.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this overview of the Western concept of political science reveals a rich and diverse landscape characterized by various approaches and methodologies. Historians of political science have employed numerous methods, ranging from traditional 'histories' to critical analyses and theoretical treatises. While the field has seen extensive exploration and scholarship, certain areas remain underdeveloped, such as comparative analyses and the application of methodologies like hermeneutics and semiotics. Moreover, the evolution of governance and state structures has posed significant challenges to conventional models, leading to the emergence of the term "governance" in political discourse. The traditional nation-state framework has been confronted by the complexities of modern society, international interdependencies, and evolving theories of public management. Governance reflects a shift towards horizontal coordination and inclusive decision-making processes, involving non-governmental actors and fostering collaborative policy-making. Despite these advancements, the study of political science continues to evolve, with ongoing debates and inquiries into its historical development and contemporary relevance. As scholars navigate these complexities, there is a growing recognition of the need for interdisciplinary perspectives and innovative methodologies to address the dynamic challenges of governance and political inquiry in the modern world. Ultimately, this overview underscores the interdisciplinary nature of political science and its enduring importance in understanding and shaping the dynamics of governance and societal organization.

## **Suggestions**

### **Suggestions for Implementation**

1. Academic institutions and research bodies should encourage collaboration between political science and related disciplines such as sociology, economics, law, philosophy, and communication studies. This integration can strengthen analytical frameworks and enhance theoretical innovation.
2. Scholars should incorporate interpretive and qualitative methodologies—particularly hermeneutics, discourse analysis, and semiotics—alongside quantitative and empirical approaches to produce more comprehensive analyses of political phenomena.

3. University curricula in political science should include courses that critically examine the historical development of the discipline and the conceptual evolution from “government” to “governance,” ensuring that students are equipped to analyze contemporary political realities.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

1. Future studies should conduct systematic comparisons between Western and non-Western traditions of political thought to broaden the conceptual scope of political science.

2. Further exploration of interpretive methodologies especially hermeneutic and semiotic approaches could provide deeper insight into political discourse, symbols, and institutional narratives.

3. Research should investigate how digital transformation, artificial intelligence, and global communication networks are reshaping governance structures and political participation.

4. Future inquiry should focus on how supranational institutions, regional organizations, and transnational networks influence state sovereignty and democratic accountability.

5. Scholars should continue examining ethical and normative questions related to legitimacy, participation, transparency, and inclusivity in governance frameworks.

### **Declaration of Interests**

I declare that I have no financial or personal interests that may influence the objectivity or integrity of my research on the Western concept of political science.

### **Ethical Considerations:**

Throughout the research process, ethical principles have been rigorously upheld. All data collection, analysis, and reporting have been conducted with integrity, honesty, and respect for academic standards.

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A conflict of interest arises when an author’s personal, financial, or professional relationships could inappropriately influence—or appear to influence—the research process, interpretation of findings, or presentation of results. Such conflicts may include funding sources, institutional affiliations, consultancies, stock ownership, or personal relationships that may affect scholarly objectivity. Transparency in declaring potential conflicts is essential to maintaining research credibility and academic trust.

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