

End-Semester Exam: Social & Political Philosophy

Questions Answered:

Q1. Power is the capacity to make others act in ways they would not otherwise if not for the interference caused by power. Both the subject of power and the agent who wields power is not always known to those upon whom the power is exercised. Discuss this in the light of your reading of power with appropriate examples.

Q2. Secularism requires a strict separation between politics and religion. Discuss this in light of your readings on secularism.

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The notion of power in its most simplistic form can be understood as a measure of a person's ability to control their surroundings. The philosophical concept of power can be related to the capacity or ability to influence others actions and behaviors including making them act according to one's own will. A common and simple example of the exercise of power in a society could be that of a king of the past centuries who used his authoritarian powers to make decisions related to his kingdom and its people. His actions include making decisions that have varied consequences capable of making certain people work in particular ways for his kingdom, taking decisions on geographical and political matters in the interest of his kingdom or an extreme case of declaring war on another empire. Another trivial example of power could be the case of a teacher and his students. A teacher exercises his power and influences the students to learn by making them do multiple tasks including homeworks, tests etc. which otherwise the students may not have done without a teacher's intervention. The consequence of such an exercise of power here is to create a learning impact on the students.

By virtue of power one (subject A) makes the other person or a group of persons (subject B) do whatever subject A demands. In this case, normally the subject on whom the power is wielded is unaware/ignorant of his rights and believes that submission to demands of the power-holder is

the only natural way to work or execute things. Is execution of power dictatorial? Can we question the agent who is instrumental in implementing a given set of acts owing to his power? However, from a number of perspectives and examples it is safe to say that power is guided by rationality and the desire to achieve specific predetermined goals in a thoughtful manner. This makes power a central factor in many philosophical and political debates in society. A number of intriguing thoughts arise while thinking along these lines.

Execution of power that is unquestioned and dictatorial, this can be exemplified by the relationship between a slave and his master, where slave completely is in shadow of the power wielded by his master. There is complete unquestioning obedience displayed by the slave who simply follows all instructions of his master. Here, the relationship is fluid and whoever is the slave, the fact remains that he will be governed by the power executed by the master. Slave may change and master can change but their relationship is statusquo, i.e one by virtue of power can enforce his ideas on the other. Then there is this example of a contractor who made the laborers work day and night with minimum wage. The contractor executed his power and the laborers irrespective of their relationship with the contractor looked upon the contractor as the agent who could demonstrate his ability to control them. Here, the laborers were not known to the contractor and the only way they were connected was one wielding power to get his things done and the other bowing down to the beholder of power by exercising control. Here there is complete lack of reasoning displayed by the contractor and laborers execute the demands made by the contractor unquestioningly.

However, one may emphasize at this point that power, executed with rationality is another side of my viewpoint, where the subject of power, the agent who displays power and the one on whom power is exercised may not be known to this powerful agent. This can be exemplified by the judge passing his judgment (based on evidence and logical unbiased decisions). So the subject i.e. judgment is being passed by the judge who is the agent and the people on whom the judgment is enforced are not known to the agent or the subject. It can be reiterated here that although the judgment is passed owing to the power exercised by the judge, the power is not enforced blindly but is based on rationality that arises from evidence that is presented.

Thus to summarize here the suppression of ideas or opinions or thought processes that are crushed and not allowed to be initiated at all by exercising power or by virtue of power can be

between the agent who wields power and an unknown subject and further can be based on rationality or dictatorship.

Q4. Secularism requires a strict separation between politics and religion. Discuss this in light of your readings on secularism.

The principle of Secularism in today's society can be understood as a philosophical concept pertaining to the belief that an institutional framework should be free of religious biases. The essence of Secularism emphasizes the separation of the state, public institutions, and decision-making in the government from religious institutions. Political Secularism is the separation of religion and state in the political realm. Thus, a state's political framework should not be based on or linked to any religious, spiritual, or sectarian affairs. Further, a state does not have a religion of its own; henceforth, it must not promote any particular religious beliefs or practices or endorse one religion over another. For instance, Secularism is an integral principle and concrete element of the Indian constitution that guarantees its citizens the right to freedom of religion and prohibits discrimination based on religion.

Political Secularism intends to maintain a neutral stance on religious matters by giving all religions an equal status such that people with diverse religious beliefs can coexist peacefully and live harmoniously in society. A very good example of the separation of the political system and religious matters contributing to harmony and peace is the case of Belgium, where initially, after numerous religious, cultural, and linguistic differences among different sects of the population, a new secular state and power-sharing model in the political system came into existence that prevented majority groups from dominating the minorities or imposing their will on them. It also helped prevent the religious majorities from single-handedly making religious or spiritual decisions that favored one religious group over the other. Instead, the government was constantly focused on making and implementing policies for the betterment of all members of society, regardless of their religious beliefs or practices.

The separation of Church and State concept originated in the western world and has been adopted in several modern societies, where the 'church' refers to the religion and 'state' refers to the government/political system. It demands that the government remain impartial and

unprejudiced in religious matters and ensures freedom of religion. The model is arguably one of the most coherent and consistent models since its success shows how important the separation of politics and religion is in a secular state for Secularism to be ensured and checked. Further, keeping religion and politics separate ensures that the political system and the state can take up more important issues concerning all its citizens, irrespective of their religious or cultural beliefs, and work towards the welfare of the entire society while maintaining an unbiased stance on religion. On the other hand, individuals or religious institutions are free to operate and propagate their respective beliefs and culture. Therefore, this also helps to safeguard and protect an individual's right to freedom of religion, as religion in such a model is treated as more of a personal belief or matter. The church and state model efficiently ensures that politics and religion are two separate and independent ends and are not mixed.

The segregation of religion from politics becomes even more important for extremely diverse countries, especially India, with a diversified population representing almost all major religions, from Hindus, Muslims, and Christians to followers of Jainism, Sikhs, and Parsis. Naturally, if the state adopts one particular religion, let's say Hinduism, as the official religion, it is only bound to create differences among the existing religious groups. Decisions taken by the state on religious matters will be largely influenced. They would probably favor Hinduism and its culture more, which would offer a disadvantage to the other religious groups as they may feel that their interests are being ignored and neglected. Favoring a particular group would also lead to tensions among the different religious groups disrupting the society's harmony and peace. Such a scenario will only make the existence of India's rich and diverse culture extremely difficult and would ultimately shrink the co-existence of other religions. Thus, it becomes imperative to keep religion and politics separate. Another example demonstrating the ill effects of mixing religion and politics that has been very common in multiple countries nowadays is Vote Bank Politics. Vote Bank Politics often involves exploiting religious issues by political parties and their leaders to mobilize support for their parties, especially during elections, to increase their vote share. Several such instances of parties appealing to specific groups by exploiting religious sentiments just for the sake of amassing votes lead to tension and conflict in society which is obviously undesirable. Moreover, since such actions prioritize the interests of one religious group over the other, they give birth to new differences and divisions in society. Hence, it is safe to conclude that the separation of politics and religion is integral to the success of Secularism.

