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BOOK REVIEW

Peri ROBERTS and Peter SUTCH (2012) *An Introduction to Political Thoughts: A Conceptual Toolkit.* ***Edition****: Second.* **Publisher**: Edinburgh University Press. **Sections**: Four **Parts**: Two (Historical and Conceptual). **Chapters**: Eleven. 340pp. Price: Not Stated

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The introductory part of the book was an attempt to characterize political thought. Political thought consists in conscious effort to explain questions that arise in normal run of things in human society and people's judgment of such questions and the reasons for them. Political thought introduces readers to the complexities of questions in social formations and the conceptual tools for addressing them. The book therefore does not aim to provide answers to these questions but it provides conceptual toolkits to help readers engage with political ideas. It hoped to achieve this by exposing the historical development of these thoughts and the critical grasp of the theoretical and philosophical issues in the heart of politics. Thus, the book is arranged chronologically and conceptually. In the former, it runs along the history of political thought and in the later, it runs along the theoretical questions and issues that theorists dealt with and this allows readers to lend their voices to the debates. The authors intentionally avoided political thought of the medieval thinkers arguing that they can be expressed more clearly in the works of Plato or neo-Aristotelianism. Thus, political thought is more normative than scientific as it pays attention to the very nature and possibility of knowledge.

The authors emphasized that political thought is more normative than empirical since it seeks standards to judge human actions or prescribe the best course of human action. Hence, it is the study of values rather than facts that was strengthened following the introduction of the scientific paradigm between 1920s and 1970s. At this time, empiricism became the mainstay of logical positivism based on the works of the Vienna Circle. This was further refined in the behaviorist's movements of the 1950. Contrary to the position of both positivism and empiricism, the authors argued that societies are built and structured on normative judgments and they provide the core for politics and its related activities. This is further amplified by the fact that the standard by which people live cannot be measured scientifically even though they are usually subject to contestation. These contestations give rise to relativism which supports the idea of non-permanence or general acceptability of ideas, belief or practices. The role of political thought therefore is to criticize bad standards and search out for good ones upon which societal life would be structured. It does this by subjecting the core principles of political and social life to critical scrutiny based on moral, religious, epistemological, historical, or sociological considerations. Thus, political thought provides a life-long engagement with the world around u and the values on which they are built.

The book begins with a broad assertion that Political thought is an essential part of understanding how societies organize power, authority, justice, and freedom. The book provides a structured and accessible introduction to major traditions in political philosophy by combining historical discussion with conceptual analysis. Thus, the book is structured into four parts to facilitate the flow of thought and ease comprehension. These four parts are: classical origin of political thought, modern development of political thought, contemporary development of political thought and challenges to universalism and foundationalism. The authors aimed to help readers understand not only what political thinkers argued but also how these ideas shape modern political debates. Sections

1 and 2 of the books formed the intellectual foundation of the work. The section introduced readers to the historical development of political thought. It combined historical context with conceptual analysis to help readers understand how philosophical ideas emerged in response to specific political challenges in the evolution of political systems.

Section 1 focused on the Classical Origins of Political Thought, primarily examining the ideas of Plato and Aristotle. These thinkers laid the groundwork for Western political philosophy by asking fundamental questions about justice, human nature, and political organization. In section 1, the origins of Western political theory through the works of the ancient Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle were surveyed. The philosophers attempted to explain how societies should be organized and what principles should guide political life. Their ideas emerged from the political environment of ancient Greece, where independent city-states experimented with different forms of government such as democracy, oligarchy, and tyranny. Accordingly, the authors showed that the central question of classical political thought at this time, is the search for justice and moral order in society. The philosophers examined whether political authority could be justified by reason and whether there existed universal moral principles that should guide political institutions. Thus, classical thinkers believed that politics was not merely about power but about achieving the good life for citizens. As such, political institutions were therefore evaluated based on how well they promoted moral virtue and social harmony.

The first major thinker examined by the authors in this section is Plato, whose ideas remain among the most influential in political philosophy. Plato lived during a period of political instability in ancient Athens, which included the Peloponnesian War and the execution of his teacher Socrates. These events deeply influenced his distrust of democratic politics. His political philosophy is mainly presented in his famous work: The Republic, where he explores the question "What is justice?" This question is central to the entire discipline of political theory. For him, justice occurs when every class performs its role without interfering with the others. One of Plato's most controversial ideas is the concept of the philosopher-king. Plato argues that political power should be held by philosophers because they possess knowledge of truth and justice. Ordinary citizens, in his view, lack the education and wisdom necessary to govern effectively. According to Plato, societies will only achieve justice when philosophers become rulers or rulers become philosophers. This argument challenges the assumption that democracy is always the best form of government. Plato believed that democracy could easily lead to poor decisions because it places political power in the hands of individuals who may lack knowledge or virtue. Plato's argument, as presented by the authors encourages readers to question whether democratic systems always produce wise decisions and how societies can ensure that political leaders possess the necessary knowledge and virtue.

The second major thinker discussed in Section I is Aristotle, a student of Plato who developed a different approach to political philosophy. While Plato focused on ideal political structures, Aristotle emphasized the practical study of existing political systems. He famously argued that human beings are naturally political animals. This statement means that people naturally form communities and political institutions because cooperation is essential for survival and well-being. He believed that a mixed political system, combining elements of democracy and aristocracy, would produce the most stable government. By these discourses, the authors demonstrate how classical philosophers established the fundamental questions of political theory. They shaped later political philosophy by emphasizing that political institutions must be justified according to moral principles. Their ideas continue to influence modern discussions about democracy, leadership, and civic responsibility.

In section 2, the authors dwelt on modern developments in political thought. The section explores Modern Developments in Political Thought, focusing on thinkers such as Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Owen, and Marx who reinterpreted politics in light of modern social change, introducing ideas such as natural rights, freedom, social contracts, and critiques of capitalism. Theorists here moved from the ancient Greek world to the early modern period in Europe. During this time, dramatic social and political changes occurred, including the rise of modern nation-states, religious conflicts, and the emergence of capitalism. These developments forced political thinkers to reconsider earlier ideas about

authority and social order. Instead of assuming that political systems were natural or divinely ordained, modern philosophers began to view them as artificial constructions created by human agreement. The key theme of this period is freedom and the social contract. Accordingly, the authors discussed the works of Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Robert Owen and Karl Marx. Hobbes wrote during the English Civil War, a period of intense political instability. He was convinced that strong political authority was necessary to maintain order. He described a hypothetical situation called the state of nature, where no government existed.

According to Hobbes, life in this condition would be extremely dangerous because individuals would constantly compete for power and survival. To escape this condition, individuals agreed to form a social contract, surrendering some of their freedom to a sovereign authority who can enforce laws and maintain order. John Locke, whose ideas differed significantly from Hobbes described an optimistic state of nature where individuals possess natural rights even without government. In Locke's view, governments exist primarily to protect these natural rights and when governments fail to fulfill this responsibility, citizens have the right to overthrow them. By this, Locke's political theory strongly influenced modern democratic principles and constitutional government. Roseau, according to the authors interpreted the social contract differently. Rousseau believed that modern societies had corrupted human freedom. He argued that legitimate political authority must be based on the general will of the people. His theory of popular sovereignty inspired the French Revolution. On the other hand, Robert Owen and Karl Marx challenged the assumptions of liberal political theory by arguing that economic inequality undermines freedom and justice. Marx, in particular, argued that capitalist societies create class conflict between workers and owners of capital. He believed that political institutions primarily serve the interests of the ruling economic class but this system, Marx predicted, would eventually collapse and be replaced by collective ownership of resources.

In section two, the authors also delved into the artificial nature of Political Systems. The central idea in this section is that political institutions are human creations rather than natural arrangements. Accordingly, modern thinkers emphasized that governments exist because individuals agree to form them through social contracts or collective decisions. This perspective shifted political theory from classical ideas to illustrate how political theory adapted to social change and new political realities. Taken together, sections 1 and 2 shows that political thought is an evolving conversation about how societies should organize power, protect freedom, and promote justice. Understanding these philosophical traditions helps readers develop the critical tools needed to evaluate political institutions and participate meaningfully in political life.

In section 3, the authors presented explanations to contemporary political thought. The section covered three major areas: Utilitarianism and Rights (Chapter 6), Distributive Justice (Chapter 7), and Multiculturalism (Chapter 8). The first chapter in the section introduced Jeremy Bentham's utilitarian philosophy and its fundamental principle: for Bentham, the right action is the one that produces "the greatest happiness for the greatest number. Thus, utilitarians judge actions based on their consequences rather than on abstract moral rules. For them, the morality of an action depends entirely on its results. The authors employ a helpful conceptual distinction to clarify the difference between utilitarian and rights-based thinking. For utilitarians, the good is prior to the right while for rights-based thinkers (deontologists), the right is prior to the good. Utilitarianism can be both appealing and troubling. It is appealing because it seems democratic and fair but troubling because it can justify terrible things.

How society distributes resources and opportunities was also discussed in chapter 7. Roberts and Sutch examined four (4) major thinkers with different answers: John Rawls, G.A. Cohen, Robert Nozick, and Michael Walzer. For John Rawls in his theory of justice as fairness, rational people would choose two principles. First, everyone should have equal basic liberties. Second, social and economic inequalities are acceptable only if they benefit the worst-off members of society (the difference principle) and are attached to positions open to everyone under fair conditions. For Robert Nozick, in his libertarian challenge to Rawls, distributive justice is not about patterns or end-states at all. It is about how holdings come about. Through his entitlement theory, Nozick argues that distribution of property is just if everyone acquired what they have through legitimate means. Nozick demonstrated that

patterned principles of justice violate liberty and any attempt to maintain a specific distribution would mean constant interference with people's freedom. For Cohen, Rawls is not really an egalitarian because he allows inequalities based on incentives. The authors also introduced Michael Walzer's pluralist approach. Walzer argues that both Rawls and Nozick make the same mistake: they look for a single principle to govern all of distributive justice. But different goods should be distributed according to different principles. Political power should be distributed democratically. Jobs should be distributed based on qualifications. Healthcare should be distributed based on need. Money should be distributed by market exchange. Walzer calls this "complex equality." The key is to prevent any single good (especially money or political power) from dominating all the other spheres.

The last (8) chapter in this section addressed a question that has become increasingly important in contemporary democracies: How should liberal societies respond to cultural diversity? Roberts and Sutch examined this through the work of John Rawls (in his later work), Will Kymlicka, and Bhikhu Parekh. The chapter begins by explaining the tension between liberalism and multiculturalism. Liberalism emphasizes individual rights and freedoms, treating individuals as autonomous agents who should be free to choose their own way of life. But many cultural and religious groups have practices that conflict with liberal values. Some religious communities restrict the freedoms of their members, especially women. Should a liberal state tolerate these practices or intervene to protect individual rights? According to the authors, Rawls, in his later work, developed the idea of "political liberalism." that requires that political arguments be made in terms of "public reason" rather than sectarian religious or philosophical view. Since they can agree on political principles for governing their shared society, Rawls argues that political principles should be based on ideas that all reasonable citizens can accept, regardless of their comprehensive doctrines.

The authors then turned to Will Kymlicka's liberal defense of minority rights. Kymlicka argues that membership in a cultural community is important for individual freedom and identity. People make meaningful choices within a cultural context that provides them with options and gives those options meaning. Therefore, protecting minority cultures is actually consistent with liberal values, not opposed to them. Kymlicka distinguishes between "internal restrictions" (limiting the freedom of group members) and "external protections" (protecting the group from outside interference). He supports external protections but not internal restrictions. A minority group should have the right to protect its language, culture, and institutions from being overwhelmed by the majority culture, but it should not have the right to restrict the freedom of its own members. Roberts and Sutch also present Bhikhu Parekh's critique of liberalism from a multiculturalist perspective. Parekh argues that liberalism is not as neutral as it claims to be. Liberal values themselves reflect a particular cultural tradition. Rather than assume that liberal values are universally correct, it should be seen as one cultural perspective among others.

In section four (4), the authors dealt with the challenges to universalism and foundationalism. The section begins with the internationalization of political thought with emphasis on the principles in the society of state. The internationalization of political thought reflects the growing recognition that political theory must address issues that transcend national boundaries. These issues include inter alia, terrorism, humanitarian crises, economic inequality, and climate change etc. They require ethical frameworks capable of guiding political action beyond the state boundaries.

For them, the internationalization of political thought represents a major development in contemporary political theory. Traditionally, political philosophy focused primarily on the internal organization of states, including questions of sovereignty, citizenship, and justice. However, globalization and increasing interdependence amongst states have broadened the scope of political theory to include questions concerning international justice, human rights, war, and global moral responsibility. Through the works of thinkers such as Michael Walzer, Peter Singer, Thomas Pogge, and John Rawls, the chapter explores whether moral principles can meaningfully guide international political action. Modern international political thought increasingly recognizes the existence of universal moral principles that apply to all human beings regardless of nationality or political community. Nevertheless, tensions persist between universal moral standards and the principle of state

sovereignty, which traditionally grants states authority over their internal affairs. A key contribution to this debate comes from Michael Walzer, who attempted to reconcile universal moral principles with respect for cultural and political diversity. Walzer argues that international morality is based on a "minimalist morality." These minimal moral rules are widely recognized across cultures and societies because they form the moral foundation of international political order. Aside this, the authors discussed the Just War Theory based on the principles of jus ad Bellum and jus in Bello. One of the most controversial issues discussed in the chapter is anticipatory self-defense. It rests on the fact that traditional international law recognizes the right of a state to defend itself against armed attack. However, debates arise when states claim the right to strike before an attack actually occurs. Accordingly, Walzer discuses two forms of anticipatory military action: the first occurs when a state attacks an enemy that is about to launch an imminent attack while the second occurs when a state attacks a potential enemy to prevent a future threat that is not yet imminent. In the former, the military action may be morally justified because the threat is immediate and unavoidable while in the later, military actions are generally morally unjustified because they undermine the stability of the international order and make war easier to justify.

Roberts and Sutch also examined the ethical challenges posed by terrorism and the global war on terror. For them, terrorism presents a unique moral problem because, in the fight against terrorism, states must maintain moral limits on violence and ensure that their military force does not result in severe human rights abuses in another country which is likely the case with powerful states. This may cause the misuse of humanitarian arguments to justify political or strategic interests and interference in the domestic affairs of other states. On the discussion on global justice and moral responsibility, thinkers such as Peter Singer argue that individuals in wealthy societies have moral obligations to help alleviate global poverty. In his famous "drowning child analogy", singer argues that individuals who can help reduce global poverty through donations or aid may have a moral duty to do so and failing to do so may be morally wrong. Another perspective is offered by Thomas Pogge, who argues that global poverty results partly from unjust international institutions. According to Pogge, wealthy countries benefit from global economic structures that disadvantage poorer nations. Hence, addressing global poverty requires reforming international institutions.

The section examined the relationship between reason and tradition in political organization. It critiques the rationalist approach that seeks to reconstruct society through abstract reasoning and contrasts it with the conservative perspective articulated by Edmund Burke and Michael Oakeshott. Rationalism assumes that political arrangements can be evaluated and redesigned according to universal principles derived from reason. In this tradition, philosophers attempt to abstract from historical circumstances in order to formulate ideal political systems. Theorist here include: Plato, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Bentham's modern normative theories and John Rawls' original position, which uses hypothetical reasoning to determine just political arrangements. The conservative perspective argue that political institutions should evolve through historical experience, inherited practices, and social continuity rather than through radical theoretical reconstruction. The discussion situates conservatism as a reaction against the Enlightenment belief that human reason alone is sufficient to design optimal political institutions. Edmund Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France (1790) remains one of the striking foundational texts of modern conservatism. Burke criticized the French Revolution for attempting to dismantle long-established institutions in favour of theoretical ideals such as liberty, equality, and universal rights. In Burke's view, the society itself is an organic entity, developing gradually over time and embodies the accumulated wisdom of generations which the revolutionaries underestimated. This perspective leads to Burke's famous conception of society as a partnership between the living, the dead, and the unborn. Political authority therefore involves preserving institutional continuity while allowing for cautious reform.

In the same vein, Michael Oakeshott develops Burke's insights in his work: Rationalism in Politics (1962). Oakeshott argues that modern political thought has been dominated by a rationalist mentality that exaggerates the role of abstract reason in political decision-making. As such, political life relies heavily on practical knowledge embedded in traditions and institutions. Thus, Political actors

should exercise prudence, judgment, and respect for inherited institutions rather than pursuing grand ideological schemes. From the foregoing, one must emphasize the fact that excessive reliance on tradition may also legitimize unjust social arrangements. Traditions themselves may perpetuate inequality or oppression, and rational critique may sometimes be necessary to challenge entrenched practices.

Traditional liberal political philosophy assumes that moral and political principles such as justice, equality, and rights can be formulated as universal and impartial principles applicable to all individuals. The debate around this assertion occupied the discourse in chapter eleven. Feminist theorists like Carol Gilligan, Joan Tronto, Susan Moller Okin, and Richard Rorty challenged the dominant ethic of justice by introducing the ethic of care. They argue that many dominant traditional theories of justice claim neutrality while actually reflecting male-centered assumptions. They believe that the universal principles proposed by liberal theorists fail to adequately address structural gender inequalities embedded in social institutions such as the family and the labour market. Thus, strong proposals were made to address structural gender inequalities. One of such theoretical submissions was Gilligan's "ethic of care which emphasized relationship, empathy, responsibility, compassion and care for others rather than abstractions. Accordingly, Gilligan noted that moral dilemmas are often not simply conflicts between abstract rights but complex interpersonal situations involving responsibilities to others. Therefore, moral reasoning must consider the particular relationships and contexts in which decisions occur.

The authors emphasized the political significance of the ethics of care by citing the works of Joan Tronto. Tronto argued that care is not merely a private or domestic matter but a fundamental aspect of human life that should be recognized in political theory. She defined care broadly as: everything that we do to maintain, continue and repair our world so that we can live in it as well as possible. To the authors, this is the broad essence of political theorizing that brings theory close to real-world relationships and concrete moral experiences. This submission collapses the traditional distinction between public and private spheres because as more women enter the workforce, their responsibilities increasingly become shared between families, markets, and the state.

Roberts and Sutch further examined the political theory of anti-foundationalism. These theorists challenge the belief that moral and political principles must rest on universal philosophical foundations. Ricard Rorty for instance, argues that philosophy should not attempt to discover universal truths but should instead engage in practical conversations about social problems. Thus, he shifted political theory away from abstract epistemological debates to practical political concerns. Thus, both feminist and anti-foundationalist theorists challenge the idea that political theory can rely on abstract, universal principles detached from social realities. Both emphasized historical context, social relationships, lived experience and moral pluralism with the overall aim of exposing gender inequalities and transforming social institutions. These perspectives provide valuable insights into the limitations of traditional Universalist political theory. By highlighting the importance of relationships, care, and social context, the perspectives broaden the scope of political philosophy and expose hidden inequalities within social institutions. Accordingly, if universal principles of justice are rejected entirely, it may become difficult to establish common standards for evaluating political institutions and protecting human rights especially, in view of the fact that universal principles have historically played an important role in struggles against injustice, movements for gender equality and human rights. The foregoing, makes it expedient for a balanced approach that retains the normative power of universal principles while remaining attentive to the particular contexts and social relationships emphasized by care ethics. Ultimately, the challenge for contemporary political theory is to integrate insights from both perspectives in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of justice that recognizes both universal moral commitments and the importance of care, relationships, and social contexts.

Evaluation and Conclusion

The book, An Introduction to Political Thoughts: A Conceptual Toolkit provides a rich and intellectually engaging exploration of some of the most important debates in contemporary political

theory. The authors successfully demonstrated how political thought has evolved over time in response to changing political realities and moral concerns. The book highlights how political theory has moved beyond the traditional boundaries of the state to address global ethical issues such as human rights, humanitarian intervention, global justice, and the moral limits of war. By engaging with thinkers such as Michael Walzer, Peter Singer, and John Rawls, it illustrates the growing importance of universal moral principles in shaping international political discourse. The discussion of **conservatism and the debate between reason and tradition particularly,** offers an important critique of rationalist political theory. Through the works of Edmund Burke and Michael Oakeshott, the authors emphasized the importance of historical experience, tradition, and practical knowledge in political decision-making. This perspective highlights the value of gradual political change and challenged the assumption that societies can be reconstructed purely through abstract reasoning. Similarly, the chapter (11) on **feminism** provided a powerful critique of traditional political theory by exposing the gender biases embedded in many supposedly universal theories of justice. Feminist thinkers such as Susan Moller Okin, Carol Gilligan, and Joan Tronto argue that political philosophy has historically overlooked the experiences of women and undervalued the moral significance of care and social relationships. Taken together, the book demonstrated that political theory is not static but constantly evolving as scholars attempt to address new social, political, and moral challenges. The book therefore provides an important contribution to the study of political thought.

One of the greatest strengths of the book is its ability to bring together **different traditions of political thought** including conservatism, feminism, and cosmopolitan theories of global justice within a single analytical framework. By examining these perspectives side by side, the book encourages readers to critically reflect on the assumptions underlying political theory and how **political ideas are shaped by historical context and social realities**. For example, the conservative emphasis on tradition emerged partly as a reaction to revolutionary attempts to reconstruct society through abstract principles, while feminist critiques arose in response to the marginalization of women within political institutions and philosophical discourse. The authors also thrived in their effort to connect **philosophical arguments with contemporary political issues** such as humanitarian intervention, terrorism, global inequality, and human rights. This makes the discussion highly relevant for understanding the moral challenges facing the international community today. In our view, the book effectively shows that political theory must engage with both **normative ideals and practical political realities**. While philosophical theories provide important moral guidance, their application in the real world often involves complex ethical dilemmas and political constraints.

Despite these many strengths, the book is not without limitations. One notable limitation is that much of the discussion is rooted in **Western political philosophy**, with relatively limited engagement with non-Western intellectual traditions. Given the global scope of many of the issues discussed, such as international justice and human rights, a broader inclusion of non-Western perspectives would strengthen the analysis and provide a more comprehensive understanding of global political thought. Again, while the authors provide extensive theoretical discussion, they sometimes give less attention to the **practical challenges of implementing these theories in real political contexts**. Take for instance, the discussion on cosmopolitan theories did not fully address the political and institutional barriers that often prevent effective international cooperation. Furthermore, the authors' presentation on humanitarian intervention and universal moral principles raises important ethical questions that needed deeper exploration. In practice, powerful states may sometimes invoke moral justifications to pursue strategic interests, which complicates the application of universal ethical principles in international politics. This was not properly discussed. Similarly, the theoretical discussions on anti-foundationalism and complex philosophical debates presented by the authors, appear somewhat abstract and nonfigurative. This makes it challenging for readers without a strong background in political philosophy to fully engage with the arguments. Despite these criticisms, the book remains a valuable and insightful contribution to the field of political theory as it successfully demonstrated the continuing relevance of philosophical inquiry in understanding the moral and political challenges of contemporary society. Even in a complex and often conflict-ridden chaotic international system, moral

principles such as justice, human rights, and respect for human dignity remain essential for guiding political action.

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