Definition: Political philosophy from *Leadership Glossary: Essential Terms for the 21st Century*

The philosophical field devoted to the study of politics, law, justice, liberty, and authority.

Summary Article: Political Philosophy
From *The SAGE Glossary of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*

A discipline that is concerned with the ethical and moral standards of states, societies, and individuals. Scholarly debate in this discipline evaluates the facts about social organization in a society, particularly government. There are thus two distinctive aspects of political philosophy: (1) the ethically normative aspect and (2) the more descriptive-explanatory aspect. Within its normative concerns, we find themes such as justice, community, and political responsibility. Some of the questions scholars confront are the following: What features does a good government have? Should citizens have the right to oust their government? If so, which methods should be used? What should be the relationship between the individual and society? When should the government intervene in the lives of its citizens?

Among the founding fathers of Western political philosophy were Plato and Aristotle. During medieval times, St. Thomas Aquinas was an extremely influential philosopher, whereas during the European Renaissance and the Age of Enlightenment, Rousseau's *The Social Contract* and the works of Locke and Hobbes were quite prominent.

Contemporary political philosophers include feminists, certain minorities in the developing world (called subaltern), and scholars from the developed world, among others, who have made a compelling case for reassessment of the traditional paradigm set up by the founders of the discipline. Among these are the neo-conservatives, who follow the philosophy of Leo Strauss.

Feminist political philosophy is a field of inquiry that emphasizes the systematic study of historical conditions and social practices that produce and legitimate gender inequality. Feminist political theorists have together forced classical political theory to encompass what was once considered apolitical—the family, child-rearing practices, gender, the body, sexuality, and human relationships. Simone de Beauvoir (France) and Iris Young (United States) are examples of contemporary feminist philosophers. For more information, see Berlin (1958), Boucher and Kelly (2003), Constant (1988), and Hirschmann and Di Stefano (1996) in the bibliography.

See also
Politics (political science), Social Contract

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