

GUIDE TO SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

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Meaning of Social Philosophy

Social philosophy, as its name indicates, is the meeting point of sociology and philosophy. The branch of knowledge which discusses and evaluates the fundamental postulates of the various

social sciences, decides as to which of the conclusions of the social sciences are acceptable, deliberates how the various social sciences can be synthesised and tries to solve whether the social evolution is mechanical or teleological is characterised as social philosophy.

Social philosophy determines the ultimate value of social life or the highest social ideal and evaluates the various aspects of social life in the light of that ideal.

Two aspects of social philosophy: Accordingly, social philosophy consists of two parts—*epistemological* and *axiological*. Epistemological is concerned with the questions of knowledge; axiological with the questions of value. In its epistemological aspect, social philosophy has three functions, e.g., *ontological*, *criteriological* and *synthetic*. The ontological function of social philosophy is to deal with the fundamental concepts of social life such as man, society, justice etc. The criteriological function is to enquire into the validity of the pre-suppositions principles and the conclusions of the various social sciences. The synthetic function of social philosophy is to synthesise the results of the social sciences. In its axiological aspect social philosophy deals with the ultimate values of social life and the means of attaining them. Social philosophy is a pointer to the way in which the '*common good*' or '*Social good*' can be attained in keeping with the highest moral ideal.

Mackenzie's view: According to Mackenzie, social philosophy concentrates its attention on the social unity of mankind and tries to interpret the various aspects of human life in reference to that unity. Social philosophy is the study of values, ends and ideals. It does not deal with what exists, or has existed or may be expected to exist. It deals with the meaning and worth of these modes of existence.

In fine we may say that the key-word of social philosophy should be progress and further progress towards and ever-expanding ideal.

Scope or province of Social Philosophy

The scope of Social Philosophy is not as wide as that of Sociology. Mackenzie says that "Social philosophy has a much more restricted province. It differs from the special branches of sociology—or from

the other branches of sociology—in the way in which philosophy in general is distinguished from the particular sciences.”

Common good: Man lives in Society. Man's social nature, man's place in this universe, the relation between the individual and society, common good, the relation between common good and the good of the individual etc., are the subject-matters of social philosophy.

Social groups: Social philosophy includes in its fold the discussion of the psychological as well as philosophical basis of the different social groups of human beings that are found in society. It is the function of social philosophy to deal with the nature and ideal of family, educational institution, state and other social institution.

Social ideal: Social philosophy enquires into the nature of social ideal and evaluates its merit. Social philosophy is mainly concerned with the ideals, ends and values.

Social progress: Social philosophy also enquires into the nature of social progress and determines whether the social progress is in conformity with the social ideal. It has, moreover, to ascertain the conditions that are indispensable for social progress.

Religion: Religion occupies a prominent place in the social life. Religion is the basis of social unity. Hence, the meaning of religion, its characteristics, its social value and its relation to education, state, etc., are included in the subject-matter of social philosophy.

Social evils: There are many social evils. Just as the body has its peculiar diseases, so has the society. Social philosophy has, therefore, to deal with the social maladies and also with the conditions that lead to such evils. It is also incumbent upon social philosophy to point out how these social evils can be eradicated.

Other topics: Social philosophy includes within its scope of discussion the social evolution, the social self of man, the ethos of people etc.

Social philosophy is related to other social sciences. Thus it has to deal with the social sciences in so far as they are related to it. So we find that psychology, biology, politics, history, theology etc., are dealt with in social philosophy. It is for this reason that Gisbert has said, “Social philosophy is bound to be the golden crown of the social sciences.” Social philosophy takes into conside-

ration the field of study of the various social sciences and investigates into its moral value.

Conclusion : We may conclude by saying that social philosophy deals with the primary causes of social unity and social disintegration. The mutual relation of men living in society and the basis of their behaviour also come within the scope of social philosophy. It is only social philosophy that is competent to say why a particular society decays and how it can be checked. The influence of modern science on human civilisation, its merits and demerits can be weighed fully by social philosophy. Social philosophy can determine the true nature of culture and can also point out the possibility of man in this world. We thus find that the scope of social philosophy is not "much more restricted" as has been held by Mackenzie. On the contrary, the scope of social philosophy is wider than that of sociology. The scope of social philosophy includes everything which has human and social significance.)

Relation of Social Philosophy to Political Science

Social philosophy enquires into the value of the social customs and the basic laws which operate in human society. It enquires into the nature of common good and sets before us the idea of the ideal society in which the ideal of common good may be realised. Political Science on the other hand, studies the States politics, studies all forms of government and administration ; it studies the fundamental basis of State, its ends and ideals. Political Science is a practical science for the correct administration of the state.

Similarity: Social philosophy and Politics are normative sciences. Both are concerned with the ideal of common good. Just as we cannot ignore the practical value of social philosophy so we cannot also ignore the practical aspect of politics. Politics is a *practical science*. Politics or political philosophy gives us a suggestion with regard to the requirements of an ideal state with reference to which the different states should be governed. Both social philosophy and politics deal with social life, and as such belong to 'social sciences'. The subject-matter of study in both of them is the collective mind.

Difference: Though they are similar in some respects they have their *differences* too. Social philosophy studies the society in all its aspect. The society as a whole is the subject-matter of social philosophy. State, family, different social institutions—all these are studied in social philosophy. But Politics is concerned with the study of state only. It is obvious, then, that the scope of Politics is much more limited than that of social philosophy. Looked at from another angle, we shall see that the scope of Politics is wider than that of social philosophy. Politics or political science is concerned with the study of (a) actual forms of government and the conditions of their origin, persistence and change; (b) the nature of the ends which should be served by the governments and with the moral basis of government; and (c) the technique or art of administration. Social philosophy is interested in the second, viz., the ends and moral basis of government. Social philosophy is not directly concerned with the other two problems of political science. Hence, in this respect the scope of social philosophy is narrower than that of political science.

Mutual relation: In spite of the aforesaid differences between the two, the *relation between social philosophy and politics is direct and very intimate*. It is true that man lives in society; it is also equally true that he is a citizen of some state. Every state enacts certain laws for safeguarding its unity and sovereignty and for ensuring social harmony and co-operation. These laws are binding upon every citizen of state. The state is a part of the society. So the good of the state cannot be opposed to the good of the society. If the good of the state is opposed to the good of the society, it is sure to be ruined.

Therefore, Politics is guided by the very same ideal of social philosophy. The ideal of social philosophy is also the regulative ideal of the State. Politics, thus, cannot afford to neglect the requirements of the ideal society laid down by the social philosopher. A politician who has no vision of the ideal of social common good might plunge the whole nation into anarchy. According to J. W. Garner, the relation between social philosophy and political science is reciprocal. Social philosophy gets some information regarding the structure and function of the state from political science. Political science also gets a lot of information regarding the nature and origin of political authority from social philosophy. Social philosophy is of great value for the clarification of political thought. A political thinker, if he is a social philosopher at the same time, will be able to think ahead of time. Thus there is a reciprocal relation between social philosophy and politics.

Value or Uses of Social Philosophy

There are some sociologists who deny the possibility of social philosophy. According to them social philosophy cannot satisfactorily explain social facts. The reason of holding such opinion is a false idea about philosophy. These sociologists think that philosophy deals with abstract ideas which bear no relation to facts.

But this objection is not justifiable. Philosophy does not deal with abstract ideas and concepts. The aim of philosophy is to give a synoptic view of world and life. Ethics, philosophy of religion, to speak only some of the branches of philosophy, are intimately related to human life. Philosophy makes its appearance under the influence of a particular culture of human society. Hence it is evident that philosophy exerts influence on man, on his customs and behaviours. It is not, therefore, possible to give a comprehensive explanation of any social events by ignoring philosophical influence.

Some sociologists think that a problem remains an unsolved problem even after philosophical discussion about it. Hence social philosophy is of no avail in solving social problems.

To this object, we may say that there are some social problems which require analysis before making an attempt at their solution. A knowledge of the real nature of the problems is *sine quanon* to

its solution. It is an undeniable fact that social philosophy helps solution of social problems by delineating the nature of the problems.

There are again some sociologists who say that when the social philosopher cannot reform the society, social philosophy should have no value in the study of society.

To this objection it may be pointed out that the field of social philosopher is different from that of a social reformer. Social philosopher is not really a reformer. But his study of social facts may help social reforms. If philosopher studies the world as a whole, then study of human society falls within the jurisdiction of philosophy.

The objectionists say that sociology and social sciences study the social phenomena as they are, whereas social philosophy studies the value and ideals. Valuation is subjective. Hence the social philosopher's study of social phenomena is prejudiced by his subjective ideals. If we are to get a scientific view of society and its phenomena we are to keep above personal prejudices. Social phenomena can best be understood in social sciences and not in social philosophy.

But these objections cannot repudiate the value of social philosophy. Facts and value, social facts and social value are intimately related and one cannot be studied without any reference to the other. Society comprises of human beings. Social facts and phenomena cannot be studied without mentioning the hopes, aspirations, aims and ideals of the human beings behind these social facts.

The above discussion points to the values of social philosophy which are:—

(1) Philosophy gives us a comprehensive knowledge of the world by studying different types of knowledge. In like manner, the social philosophy gives us a total view of society after studying the different departments of society.

(2) Social philosophy interprets the significance of the social facts and critically evaluates them. It also tries to effect a synthesis of the result obtained in different social sciences.

(3) It is not that social philosophy studies only the significance and justifiability of the concepts used in social sciences, it also makes a comparative study of the different social ideals. Different societies

have different ideals. It is the duty of social philosophy to critically evaluate these ideals.

There are some persons who, while admitting the theoretical utility of social philosophy, are averse to attaching any practical value to it. Though social philosophy bakes no bread, it cannot be said that it has got no practical utility. Social philosophy studies social relations, and determines the real meaning of social laws, customs, institutions and associations. The knowledge obtained from social philosophy helps us in getting a deeper insight into the significance of social life. The practical value of social philosophy lies in helping us to see what are the guiding principles by which our course has to be directed. It gives the social reformer a direction, a goal, an ideal in the light of which he may reform the society.

Social philosophy finds out the factors which help social unity, the factors which disrupt this unity and gives us a guideline following which we may establish social harmony. It is social philosophy that clearly lays bare the nature of social maladies and also indicates the way of removing these maladies. Thus social philosophy helps the society to stand on stable basis by removing the social evils. It is therefore evident that the value of social philosophy cannot be belittled.