concepts. Conceptual analysis, therefore, has two purposes; one, to arrive at as clear a meaning embodied in the concept as possible so as to facilitate unambiguous communication among scholars by 'disciplining talk' or obviating 'loose talk', and second, to examine and lay bare the contest over the meaning of a concept with a view to provide the complexities of political arguments in question and thus, enrich our understanding of politics. There can be a third purpose of conceptual analysis, namely to alert us against the subtle ways in which concepts can put blinders on our perceptions about reality and obfuscate critical perspective or impede alternate visions of political practices. At the most general level, the different traditions can be identified as the **normative** and **empirical** traditions. But within the normative tradition, the justification of truth claims, which is the purpose of argument, is based on different criteria, and therefore, we divide internally this tradition in terms of **foundational** and **post-foundational** theories. Thus, the nature of political arguments, we argue would be different even within a particular tradition; for example, political arguments within the normative tradition would differ between the foundationalist and post-foundationalist theories.

NATURE OF ARGUMENTS IN THE CLASSICAL TRADITION

From Plato to Marx, there are several philosophers, whose writings have been broadly accepted to constitute what is called as the **Western Classical Tradition**. Political arguments, in this tradition, have generally been of a normative nature due to the fact that the subjects of concern and reflection have been matters such as: what is justice? Are there human rights and if so, what are they? What is the role of the state? Do individuals have definable needs and if so, who has an obligation to satisfy them? Should the government seek the greatest happiness of the greatest number and, if it should, what is the place of the minorities within this rubric? What gives government legitimacy and a state sovereignty? What sorts of claims on resources does the recognition of merit or desert embody? How far is the majority justified in imposing its moral outlook on the rest of society? Can we give an adequate account of the social and political institutions? What is the best form of government?

By and large, the classical tradition has been concerned with the nature of good life, with the institutional arrangements that would be necessary for human beings to flourish, for their needs to be met or their rational capacities realised. At the same time, there has been a preoccupation with what is **politically right**-with the nature of law, justice, the best form of government, the rights and duties of the individuals, and with the distributive organisation of society. Political theories were about the right and the good and so were, the political arguments. Seen in this way, the subject matter of political philosophy was very much a part and parcel of moral philosophy. Political arguments assumed the form of moral reasoning with a clear purpose of settling moral issues or claims of moral and political truth on a rational basis.

Political arguments purported to convey some truths about the fundamental nature of politics, to make claims which could be regarded as objective and inter–subjectively valid. This truth and objectivity was based upon different assumptions: sometimes about reason, sometimes about empirical experience, sometimes about intuition, and occasionally, revelation. At the same time, some epistemological authority was also invoked such as reason or experience so that ultimately claims about fundamental human needs, goals, purposes, relationships and the forms of rule appropriate to these which entered in the political philosophy were supposed to be true. For example, Plato, Hobbes, Hegel and Mill, worked out, at least in part, the cognitive basis on which the claims in political philosophy were advanced.

Political arguments in this tradition, thus, proceeded from certain self-evident truth, axioms, or assumptions about the nature of truth or knowledge, towards conclusions about political truths or claim to truths. Since the philosophers themselves set up the standards of cognitive truth, the validity of their political arguments could only be judged internally. Appeal to some theory or independent criterion was out of question. If you accepted the premise of the philosophy or the theory, there was no way to escape from the validity of the conclusion. It would, however, be a different matter if the disputes were over the premises –if its cognitive claims were challengeable.

Indeed, the history of the classical tradition shows that there were major differences in the conclusions reached by political philosophers, on account of the fact that their premises or epistemology were different. Such being the case, a point emerged with regard to the significance of such philosophies. It began to be asked what is the relevance of all such rival theories of politics, each of which claimed to embody the truth about political morality, when there was no criterion to decide the adequacy of the cognitive basis of these political and moral theories. Positivists were in the forefront to pose such a question.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: i)   Use the space given below for your answer.

      ii)   See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1)   Bring out the nature of political arguments in the western classical tradition

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POSITIVIST CRITIQUE OF NORMATIVE THEORY

Positivism, especially logical positivism that was influenced by linguistic philosophy, rejected much of the normative political theory as irredeemably subjective, lacking in cognitive basis and even meaningless or outright nonsense.

Wittgenstein, who inspired logical positivist theories, had advanced three theses, which are of interest to us here, in explicating the case against normative theory. The first was that logic and mathematics consist of tautologies; second, that language has truth-functional structure and that its basic elements are names, and third, no ethical or moral statements can convey definite cognitive information.

Elaborating the first, he said that the basic structure of mathematics could be derived from logic and in that sense, the truths of mathematics are conventional rather than revealing 'facts' about numbers and their relationships. That is to say, given certain definitions of the basic terms, and a particular understanding of the rules of inference, the whole structure of mathematical truth could be generated. But these forms of

1   truth depend upon their definitions of basic terms and the rules of inference. In a sense, they are true by definition. It may appear that we make new discoveries in mathematics, but this is only because the remote consequences of definition are difficult to foresee and have to be teased out with great complication and elaboration.

The second thesis is that language has a structure that can be laid bare by logical analysis. This analysis will reveal language as being truth-functional. That is to say that, complex propositions in language, which we use to convey information, can be shown to be analysable into component propositions. Obviously, this process has to stop and we are left with the basic building blocks of language, that he calls 'Elementary Propositions'. These elementary propositions consist of names. Names are important, because they give meaning to elementary propositions for (a) they give meaning directly rather than being mediated by other propositions, and (b) they relate directly to the world.

Consequently, if meaningful uses of language have to turn upon the fact that names refer directly to objects, then this has clear consequences for moral and political thinking. If the propositions contained in the normative political writings are not susceptible to this analysis, then they are not meaningful. Objects are either material objects or direct sense experiences. Political language, thus, gets in deep trouble, for in what sense terms like good, justice, right could be analysed so as to refer to objects?

The final thesis draws this above conclusion. Moral and evaluative languages generally do not admit of this truth-functional analysis and moral 'objects' cannot be spoken about in a cognitively meaningful manner. Thus, there can be no theory of values. Only those propositions describing basic experiences of material objects could be meaningful. It followed from this that, a proposition to be valid must be verifiable empirically, for which the proposition must refer to direct sense experience or the nature of that experience could, in principle, be specified if directly available sense experience was not involved.

It may be argued that some political theories of the classical tradition were based upon factual premises, such as those of Hobbes, Aristotle and Mill. Their theories were based on facts of human nature .To the extent the factual premises were empirical, they could in principle be verified and then be meaningful. Positivists would accept these premises as meaningful, but would rather concentrate on the nature of the support which these empirical propositions are supposed to give to normative and evaluative conclusions. And in this context, they invoked Hume who had argued that factual premises in an argument cannot yield normative, moral or evaluative conclusions to dismiss such theories. Hume's argument is usually known as the principle that 'ought' cannot be derived from an 'is'.

NATURE OF ARGUMENTS IN THE EMPIRICAL TRADITION

While positivism dismissed normative political theory, it encouraged a scientific study of political phenomena based upon the methodology of natural sciences. Within this tradition, the nature of political argument underwent a significant change, for now both the subject matter as well as the methodology on which it could justify its arguments were different from those in the normative theory.

As regards the subject matter of the arguments, political arguments could only be about empirical political behaviour and logical analysis of political concepts. With regard to the study of politics, the arguments required that the propositions be defined in terms of some empirical sense content. This, in turn, required that arguments be

based on the behavioral approach to the study of political attitudes as well as an individualistic reductionist approach to social and political phenomena. The latter, implied some kind of methodological individualism so that the concepts relating to social wholes such as the state, the community, the polity could be rendered into some set of statements that refer only to the empirically detectable behaviour of individuals. In effect, political arguments were sanitised of metaphysical suppositions and rendered wholly value-neutral, which could be tested and verified as these arguments were about empirical phenomena.

Political arguments, in this tradition, rejected a priori reasoning about human beings and society, and were based on factual and statistical enquires. It was grounded in the theory of knowledge that took experience as the only valid basis of knowledge. Within such a framework, the purpose of political arguments was to explain the observable phenomena and the validity of the arguments would be judged on the criteria of internal consistency, consistency with respect to the other arguments that seek to explain related phenomena and the capacity to generate empirical predictions that can be tested against observation. The truth claim of the arguments could be vindicated, if it either met the verification principle or Popper's falsification principle. Behaviouralists among the positivists followed the falsification principle. If the argument could not be falsified, then it was merely tautological; that is true by definition only, and hence meaningless. Arguments to be valid must be capable of being falsified, only then can they be said to be based on the scientific method.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: i)   Use the space given below for your answer.

      ii)   See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1)   How is the nature of political argument in recent normative theories different from that in the classical tradition?

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DECLINE OF POSITIVISM AND INTERPRETIVE THEORY AS AN ALTERNATIVE

If all meaningful statements are, on the principle of verifiability, either tautologies or empirically verifiable, what of the formulation of the verification principle itself? Positivism had no satisfactory answer to this and it appeared that the very criterion for judging between sense and non-sense in statements began to appear non-sensical itself. As positivism lost at this basic epistemological level, a great deal of power, a much more permissive approach to meaning and sense emerged.

Interpretive theory, or **Hermeneutics**, emerged in political inquiry as an alternative to positivist political science. Interpretive theorists point out several problems with the positivist method. They criticise the empiricist approach for assuming a disjuncture between political life and language of that political life. In other words, they criticise empiricism for its assumption that there is a political reality that exists and that in principle can be discovered independently of the language of that polity and for, downplaying internal connection between social/political life on the one hand, and the language that is embedded in it, on the other. Interpretive theorists maintain that our political practices are expressed and constituted by the language that is lodged in them (i.e. in political practices), and that the language lodged in them gets its sense from the form of political practices in which it grows. Charles Taylor says that our political practices cannot be identified in abstraction from the language we use to describe them, invoke them or carry them out. The vocabulary of the social dimension of the situation is grounded in the shape of the social practices in this dimension; that is to say that, vocabulary would not make sense if the range of practices did not exist. And yet, this range of practices would not exist without the prevalence of this or some related vocabulary. The language is, thus, constitutive of reality, is essential to its being the kind of reality it is.

When language is constitutive of reality, then the explanation of political life must go beyond empirically observable behaviour and subjective attitudes. Explanation must go deeper to uncover the meanings and practices of language and political life and form the social matrix against which subjective intentions are formed. These more basic inter–subjective and common meanings and practices require a deep hermeneutics that goes beyond the evidence (data) required of empirical inquiry. Hence, empirical social science is insufficient for explaining the most fundamental aspects of political and social life. Explanation in terms of subjective attitudes and empirical indicators of behaviour are too thin to identify and account for the most profound meaning and sense of political life.

To make manifest the meaning of social/political practices informed by language, we require interpretation, because they are often inchoate, tacit and imperfectly articulated. But then any such interpretation in contestable and because, to support a particular interpretation is to endorse one set of political alternatives, while undermining others. Interpretive theory, therefore, cannot be value-neutral. Gadamer in his *Truth and Method,* suggests that one appropriate model to understand the meaning of social/ political practices is the model of interpreting a text: a model in which we are not interested in search for causes or framing of laws, but understanding a whole in terms of its parts , and its parts, in terms of the contributions they make to the meaning of the whole. Interpretive theory has cast a very strong influence in recent years on the normative theories of communitarians, feminists, and post-modernists.

NORMATIVE TURN IN POLITICAL THEORY

The 1970's saw a normative turn in political theory at the hands of Rawls, Nozick, Walzer, Dworkin, Grewith and others. Perhaps, one of the most basic reasons for the change of fortune has been the decline of positivism as a potent force in philosophy. This decline in a large measure was due to the infirmity of the verification principle itself, which we noted above. Along with this, a conducive climate for revival of normative political theory was created by the deep moral crisis that the western civilisation was facing. A view had, therefore, gained ground that a society needs some kind of a moral foundation, a set of beliefs which either do or might hold it together, the idea here being that practical reason is rootless and arbitrary, if it is not based on a set of agreed values which are taken as authoritative for that society.

But if values are subjective, a matter of preference, as positivists will maintain, then how do we agree on values? Normative political theory, on the other hand, maintains

that this agreement is possible, if some general set of principles could be found which could then provide a basis for accommodation between subjective standpoints and / or adjucation between different values. The crucial question then is, how do we get that set of general principles? There are two answers or ways for this.

NATURE OF ARGUMENTS IN FOUNDATIONALIST AND POST-FOUNDATIONALIST THEORIES

The first answer is that we work out a set of values or standards of morality which is universal, transcultural and inter–subjectively valid. These standards of morality can be called the foundations, which are uncontaminated by specific cultures, circumstances and particular histories. Meta-narratives involving such entities as *Noumenal Self* (Kant), *Absolute Spirit* (Hegel), *Proletariat* (Marx), *Ideas Or Forms* (Plato) can provide one such foundation for judgement and justification on a rational basis. Other such universalistic foundational set of moral principles could be (i) utilitarianism, (ii) Kantian deontology and (iii) some conceptions of human nature and human rights. Apart from utilitarianism, most of these foundational theories are based on a priori , abstract reasoning. In more recent times, the attempt to produce universal rational morality has proceeded either by emphasising procedural devices, such as Rawls' *veil of ignorance*, or by trading on the idea of *minimum ethical commitment* , as in Rawls' idea of primary goods which any person is thought to want , or as in Grewith's idea of *minimum condition of agency*. Political arguments of the foundationalists are, thus, based on logos that give a general, but essentialised account of the nature of human beings, society and self, and whose criteria of rationality and objectivity are derived from such logos, which are construed to be universally applicable and valid.

The second answer is provided by the post–foundationalists, such as communitarians. There are several post-foundationalist theories, but we take here only the communitarians for explication of the nature of political argument involved. They argue that we do not require a universalistic, philosophical moral foundation, and that the set of principles required for adjucation between competing values is implicit in a particular community. The implicit has to be made explicit and clear. Political goods are not determined by abstract reasoning, nor can they be freely chosen by free atomised moral agents. These arise out of, and are implicit in the ways of life of particular communities. Communitarian arguments got support from the interpretive linguistic philosophy, for instance from the later writings of Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigation* and *The Blue Book*, which views the search for some external rational foundation for practical reasoning as misconceived, because even if they could be found, they would, infact, be inert in relation to practical dilemma. We do not need a theoretical foundation for a way of life. Practical reason is not about *sophia* (wisdom), justified claims of objective knowledge, but rather about *phronsesis* (judgement); the capacity of practical deliberative judgement in a particular situation. Since the nature of political argument is dependent upon the methodology within which it is made, let us briefly look at Rawls' methodology of *reflective equilibrium* for political theorising as an instance to explicate political argument in post-foundationalist political theory. A clarification is in order. Rawls has generally been labeled as a foundationalist for some of his assumptions as Michael Sandel's critique of Rawls' theory of justice brings this out , but by and large, his (Rawls') methodology of reflective equilibrium is accepted as post-foundationalist in nature.

The method of reflective equilibrium demands that we evaluate a given moral or political view by testing it against our 'considered judgements at all levels of generality'. That is, we consider the general coherence of the abstract principles comprising the theory in terms of its internal relations and general surface plausibility (given the arguments supporting them); we, then, examine the particular judgements that such

principles imply about specific cases in the world; and we consider the entire package for its' overall acceptability, considering its abstract plausibility, internal coherence, and 'intuitive adequacy' in particular cases.

Reflective equilibrium is a coherent account of the validity of normative claims. It is different from *foundationalism* in that it does not demand that we proceed from indubitable first principles and derive conclusions via a deductive argument from them alone. This means that normative claims are always subject to review in the light of new understandings, either of the moral principles themselves or aspects of the world to which these principles are meant to apply. Interpretation, thus, has a role to play in political theorising and that indicates that political judgements are seldom a hard and fast affair, but rather always open to reconsideration in the light of new insights or information.

Political arguments in post-foundational theories, thus, do not abandon general thinking or arguing about social truth. But the argument is always from a socially situated point of view, based on the belief that our social interest and social values shape our ideas and that our social understanding is also a part of the shaping of social life. There is a multi-leveled argumentation involved that moves between analytic reasoning, empirical data, normative clarification and interpretation. Political arguments are generally complex and draw from across disciplinary boundaries, particularly Wittgenstein's language game. The objectivity and rationality that political arguments invoke for justification are contextual, as there is no contextual free standpoint from which social practices can be judged. Thus, the criteria for truth, right and wrong in a political argument are all internal to the language game and the context.

Check Your Progress 3

Note: i)   Use the space given below for your answer.

      ii)   See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1)   Examine Hermerneutics as an alternative to the emprical-bahavioural tradition

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2)   What are the differences between the nature of arguments in foundational and post-foundational theories?

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CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

About what we argue and how we argue have a bearing on why and how we do conceptual analysis. Concepts are crucial in two senses for scholarly endeavour: as means and as ends. As means, concepts are necessary for understanding; they are conditions for the possibility of knowledge. In this sense, science is inter–subjectively controlled understanding made possible through concepts. Concepts are also crucial for explanation and, therefore, how concepts are formed also becomes important. Hence, concepts are not only a means for understanding, but also a matter of understanding as an end.

There are three versions of conceptual analysis. The first version has the purpose to find as unambiguous a core meaning as possible; one which allows the best possible scientific statements, hypothesis formation and reproducible empirical analysis. The second version looks at how concepts are embedded in particular social theories; here, concept formation runs parallel to theory formation; more generally–theories understood as a framework for analysis. The first version looks at the conceptual history, which can lead to a better understanding of history , including the present.

The discussion on these versions can be subsumed under two approaches to conceptual analysis, the positivist approach and the interpretive approach.

Positivist Approach

As noted earlier, philosophers who followed the influential movement called logical positivism saw only two meaningful types of inquiry: empirical investigations into matters of fact, and conceptual discussions of the meanings and uses of terms. Since philosophy was not an empirical, fact-finding discipline, it was assigned the role of conceptual analysis.

The purpose of conceptual analysis was similar to what philosophers of science did with regard to the logical analysis of scientific concepts; namely, to clarify their meaning and help them give a wholly empirical, non-metaphysical and operational meaning.

In this sense, political philosophy was an adjunct of political science, clarifying the concepts used and arguments to attempt to evacuate them of anything other than descriptive and empirical meaning, so that the terms of political discourse could be used in ways that were neutral between ideological and moral perspectives. The hope was that in the same way as scientific theories could be advanced and scientific phenomena described and identified irrespective of the moral and other commitment of scientists, so too political science could go forward in a value-free manner, once the basic concepts of that science had been clarified and given a reductive empirical definition, and that political argument could proceed with clear concepts and agreed definitions. The quest was important, for unless it could succeed, it could not hope to have a science of politics and unless there was a science of politics, one could not, hope to bring reason to political and moral debates. The goal was to reconstruct the language of political inquiry to make it a suitable medium for a science of politics.

However, political theorists outside the influence of positivism, find no merit in conceptual analysis whose purpose it is to create morally neutral concepts that will fill the same kind of descriptive operational role in political science as scientific concepts play in natural sciences. Apart from the merit of the case, they also think it to be undesirable.

Interpretive Approach

The purpose of conceptual analysis is not to reveal the necessary and sufficient condition (definition) of the concept or lay bare its internal structure, but to creatively

produce new ways of understanding them. Concepts are not freestanding entities and have to be understood in the larger context in which they are situated, the way a literary text is interpreted. Concepts become meaningful by the way they are used and this makes conceptual analysis a complicated, never-ending and contestable affair.

Connolly has argued that political concepts such as freedom, power, are 'essentially' contestable. They are contestable because the criteria of the concept and the point of its application are matters of contest. Criteria, here, refer to the conditions that should be met before an event or act can be said to fall within the ambit of the given concept. The point of application refers to the purpose of the concept and along with the purpose, are commitments attached to it. That concepts are 'essentially' contestable means that the 'universal' criteria of reason, do not suffice to settle these contests definitively.

The methodological postulates and norms of the positivist mainstream social science such as the distinctions between operational and non-operational vocabulary, analytic and synthetic statements, descriptive and normative concepts, empirical and conceptual argument are of doubtful validity. Connolly points out that recent works in linguistic philosophy have shown that these norms of research are in need of revision. Interpreting these norms in new light, which leads to, for instance, abandoning analytic-synthetic distinctions and fact-value dichotomy, Connolly maintains, helps us to understand more clearly why the central concepts of politics are so often a subject of controversy.

Moreover, he points out that neutral, descriptive and operationally definable concepts limit the understanding of politics. It not only flattens out the embodied meaning, but also obstructs efforts to explore alternative, radical perspectives on politics. The effort to have neutral operational concepts is born of a wish to escape politics. It emerges either as a desire to rationalise public life, placing a set of ambiguities and contestable orientation under the control of a settled system of understandings and priorities, or as a quest to moralise public life thoroughly, bringing all citizens under the control of a consensus which makes politics marginal and unimportant. To adopt without revision the concepts prevailing in the polity is, thus, to accept terms of discourse loaded in favor of established practices.

In the light of the above, the significance of the concept of contestedness is that it renders political discourse more self-reflective by bringing out contestable moral and political perspectives lodged in the language of politics and thus, opens the way for political change.

Check Your Progress 4

Note: i)   Use the space given below for your answer.

ii)   See the end of the unit for tips for your answer.

1)   What do you understand by conceptual analysis? Bring out the difference(s) between the positivist and the interpretive accounts of conceptual analysis

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LET US SUM UP

Since we have different traditions of political theory each marked by distinctive substantial and methodological concerns, the nature of political arguments differs across the traditions. As political arguments deal with justification or validation of truth claims, the theory of knowledge of different traditions and the methodology of relevant epistemology frames the nature of political arguments. Political arguments and conceptual analysis are dialectically related. Concepts are the terms or the vocabulary with which political discourse is conducted. Political arguments arise in and are carried forward through concepts. Normative political theories were about the right and the good and so were the political arguments. Political arguments assumed the form of moral reasoning with a clear purpose of settling moral issues or claims of moral and political truth on a rational basis. Political arguments in this tradition proceeded from certain self-evident truths, axioms, or assumptions about the nature of truth or knowledge, toward conclusions about political truths or claim to truths. The positivists critiqued normative theory. If the propositions contained in the normative political writings are not susceptible to empirical verification or falsification, then they are not meaningful. While positivism dismissed normative political theory, it encouraged a scientific study of political phenomena based upon the methodology of natural sciences. As regards the subject matter of the arguments, political arguments could only be about empirical political behaviour and logical analysis of political concepts. This, in turn, required that arguments be based on behavioral approach to the study of political attitudes as well as an individualistic reductionist approach to social and political phenomena. Interpretive theory, or Hermeneutics, emerged in political inquiry as an alternative to positivist political science. It criticised the empiricist approach for assuming a disjuncture between political life and the language of that political life. Explanation must go deeper to uncover the meanings and practices of language and political life that form the social matrix against which subjective intentions are formed. Hence , empirical social science is insufficient for explaining the most fundamental aspects of political and social life. Explanations in terms of subjective attitudes and empirical indicators of behaviour are too thin to identify and account for the most profound meaning and sense of political life.

Due to the influence of hermeneutics and the moral crisis experienced by western civilisation, political theory took a normative turn. However, the nature of political arguments differed within the normative theorisation on account of the differences with regard to the methodology and the epistemology between the foundationalists and the post- foundationalists. Lastly, we looked at conceptual analysis following two approaches. For positivists, conceptual analysis meant to produce neutral operational concepts. Interpretive theorists disapprove of such attempts. They highlight the 'essentially' contestable nature of political concepts and argue further that neutral concepts favor established practices and impede critical thinking on politics. The concept of contested-ness renders political discourse more self- reflective by bringing out contestable moral and political perspectives lodged in the language of politics.