CHAPTER II
HETEROGENEITY OF FACTS AND VALUES
EMPIRICAL THEORY OF DAVID EASTON

We have shown in the preceding chapter that the problems arising out of the neglect of political theory is one of the central themes of Easton's political science. He has drawn the attention of the practitioners of the discipline to what he calls the "historicist" and the "hyperfuctuatist" tendencies of American political science. He holds, that these trends led to the decline of political theory in America. He, however, points out that there have been some attempts at formulating a body of political theory to guide research. Such attempts led political scientists to the formulation of a framework that he calls "the theory of political equilibrium." Easton explains that in political science the idea of equilibrium is used in two different senses. (1) General equilibrium and (2) Constitutional equilibrium. The general equilibrium, in turn, conveys two ideas. First, that all elements or variables in a political system are functionally inter-dependent; and second, that they will tend to act and react on each other to a point where a state of stability, if even for a moment obtains.  

2. Ibid., p. 268.
The concept of inter-dependence is closely related to the idea of a political process. As we have seen in the preceding chapter this idea was introduced to American Political Science by A.F. Bently. Once the notion of process with its pluralist causal assumptions crept into the political research it was easy for the idea of equilibrium already familiar in economics and sociology to filter in as well. The idea of equilibrium implies that there is a tendency to maintain the given equilibrium. Easton shows that the argument of Bently's Process of Government implies that the process tends to maintain itself in a system and that the law and the governmental institutions or the formal expression of policy and the high level agencies framing this policy, were all intertwined with underlying groups in a complex reaction system that constantly tended towards a moment of balance or equilibrium.

The influence of the equilibrium concept on the American Political Scientists has been rather, obvious. As Easton says, "a reading of significant empirical literature in the United states since the first world war reveals the astonishing extent to which the equilibrium notion has been adopted."

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5. Ibid., p. 272.
Easton further shows how this concept has been used sometimes to refer to an actual condition that occurs at some moment in time; and how at other times it has been used to describe an equilibrating or balancing tendency. The first meaning leaves the impression that activities which are functionally inter-related act and react until they ultimately reach a condition wherein no actor is willing to change his position in relation to others. Easton bases his analysis of this idea on Catlin's writings who uses the idea to mean a condition of rest. He believes that the essential homogeneity of political relations lies in the fact that each person in society, and each group, seeks to assert his or its will over others through control or power over them. But he argues that to live together is as fundamental as individual assertiveness. He writes, "in the political act ..., the primary object is to procure some personal adjustment of the will of another man to my will ...." Catlin argues that the political process, thus, consists of the means and paths whereby these conflicting wills are brought into some sort of 'Consensus', 'harmony', 'balance', or 'equilibrium'. Catlin does not distinguish between these terms. But Easton points out that if any set of political relations are the product of adjustment of wills at the time, when these relations change the

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6. Ibid., p. 274.

old equilibrium will be destroyed to make way for a new one. In this sense Catlin seems to have contradicted himself. Moreover, Easton rightly says that to prove that an empirical system ever reaches a condition of rest and to discover that the change has stopped the term equilibrium will have to be defined sharply which Catlin could not do.

The term equilibrium has not always been used to mean a state of rest. Easton says, "Conventionally equilibria are classified as stationary or dynamic". Charles E. Merriam used the concept in a dynamic sense. Merriam argues that the social situation constantly involves the maintenance of equilibrium between groups, classes and factions. He writes:

In searching that actually there arises a series of intergroup relations, calling for a balance and ordering of some type, preferable to the distress caused by lack of common arrangements and understandings. There are also, however, the relations of a group of external political groups; and by this road we come into the field of interstate or international arrangements and understandings, seriously complicating the symmetry of the simpler local situations. This becomes all the more intricate when we observe that many of the local inter-state groups have extensions outside the boundaries of the political association (e.g., nationalities, linguistic, groups, religions etc.) and the web is correspondingly more involved as the number of possible interrelations increases. The task of political association is thus a manifold one of reconciling the interests of the internal groups and at the same time of the external groups, and simultaneously of

of the internal projected into the external inter-relationship.\(^\text{10}\) (emphasis added).

In Merriam's view politics, therefore, involves 'reconciling of interests' or it calls for a 'balance'. This balance is, however, not viewed as a static one. He views political action as something which is living and on the move. He says, "It is possible to have a clearer understanding of the basic necessities which government satisfies by examining both the typical complexes which call for political action and the conditioning elements in which it lives and moves"\(^\text{11}\) (emphasis added). Merriam does not explain the idea in details, but he repeatedly refers to what he calls "moving equilibrium"\(^\text{12}\)

Easton rightly argues that in depicting the equilibrium as one that moves Merriam must mean that at certain stages in the process moments of equilibrium do occur.\(^\text{13}\) He, therefore, concludes that these political scientists in fact tried to convert a useful tool of analysis in to a misleading picture of reality.\(^\text{14}\) Easton further shows that when political

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11. Ibid., p. 1.
scientists like Bently used this idea of equilibrating tendency they viewed the process as one steadily striving to achieve a moment of equilibrium which was never attained. This approach seems to enhance the utility of the concept because here the reality is not viewed as an equilibrium. In this sense it becomes a tool for analysis of the political system. Easton points out that even this approach would face the problem of quantification. Some of the most important variables relevant to the study of politics are not quantifiable at least not at the present state of the science. Power, for instance, is a variable which is difficult to measure. Easton makes the point succinctly when he says, "Lacking appropriate indices for the measurement of power much of the usefulness of the point of equilibrium as a theoretical norm disappears." But even if this problem is overcome there still is another major problem. This is the problem of numbers. The relevant variables in the study of a political process are so numerous that such an analysis becomes almost impossible. To quote Easton "The multiplicity of variables, even if they could be satisfactorily quantified, would still place formidable barriers in the way of rewarding equilibrium analysis."

Easton maintains that inspite of these limitations the equilibrium concept has some value at the level of insights.

15. Ibid., p. 238.
16. Ibid., p. 290.
The description of a political process as an equilibrium suggests that this process takes place in a political system. The idea of a system implies that the parts of the process are mutually dependent and therefore any change in one part will influence the rest of the system. The resulting changes will, in turn, react back on the element stimulating the initial change. It insists on plural factor causation. Viewing political life as a system would also imply that the inter-related parts of this system tend to cohere. Such a coherent whole will be distinguishable from other related phenomena. At the level of insight then such a view of the political life enables the political scientist to distinguish political phenomena from the whole mass of social phenomena. This in turn helps the political scientist to simplify the reality. Simplification of reality is, of course, a task of theory.

The idea of moving equilibrium does not rule out the possibilities of change. In fact it views political life as a process that keeps on moving from one point of equilibrium to another. Easton, therefore, argues that such an approach maintains at the fore-front of political inquiry the problem of political change. He holds that it should serve to keep alive the importance of studying political change.17

Easton, then, goes on to analyse the idea of the constitutional equilibrium. Here, he shows that it presented itself

17. Ibid., p. 292.
in many forms. In Mosca's *The Ruling Class* this concept was used to mean that an equilibrium among social classes would permit rule of law. Sometimes this concept is used to include a balance among social groups also. Yet another form is cited by Easton in the point made by the federalists that a social equilibrium is insufficient. The separation of power is, therefore, designed to introduce an equilibrium within the legal structure. The form in which it is manifested in international politics emphasises that peace depends upon an appropriate balance of power. Easton explains that constitutional equilibrium assumes that equilibrium facilitates maintenance of order; but he points out that there is no concrete data to prove or disprove this.

From the above discussion it is clear that in his assessment of both the general and constitutional equilibrium, Easton maintains that, the idea of quantification is ineluctable from the concept of equilibrium. He argues that as quantification of political data is not possible, at least at the present stage of the science, this concept can't be used as a tool of analysis. He, however, sees its utility in keeping alive the importance of studying political change. Easton seems to have missed the main issue involved in the question of application of equilibrium analysis in political science.

18. Ibid., p. 294.
or for that matter in all social sciences. Despite all the ideas of disequilibrium and moving equilibrium this concept always betrays a bias in favour of the maintenance of the status-quo. Even in economics and sociology, from where Easton says the concept has crept into political science, it has a conservative effect.

In economics equilibrium theory was the result of a reaction to the classical economics. The neo-classical economics of this brand tried to explain that it was the utility of a particular commodity which determined its value.\(^{19}\) "These theories focused on the market relations with determination in exchange of relative prices took over as the primary and principal theme and thereby replaced the primacy of production relations."\(^{20}\) In this brand of economic theory equilibrium is defined in terms of the relationship between supply and demand and occurs where the two intersect. A movement from the equilibrium position occurs through alterations in amounts demanded and supplied. Changes in any other variable such as time, the nature of conditions or tastes cause a movement to a new situation, and, therefore, a fresh position of equilibrium. This process can be repeated indefinitely but it all takes place within an unaltered system of

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freemarket economy.\footnote{21} A freemarket is a prerequisite of equilibrium analysis. The question of the transition of the system of freemarket distribution to another economic system is beyond the scope of this framework. To that extent it has a conservative effect.

In sociology too, this framework reflects a similar bias. Sociology seems to have borrowed the concept from physiology and psychology.\footnote{22} In sociology equilibrium means that everybody plays his role. Though some equilibrium theorists hold that consensus on values is a prime feature of the social system not all of them agree to this but in one way or another they all regard the exercise of power as an exchange in which all citizens participate and which makes it possible to think of society as a system held in equilibrium. There may be disturbances which may produce failure of communication with the system; but the system is regarded as persisting through time by virtue of the equilibrium created either by its internal cycles of power and support, or by the interchange between sub-systems as mediated by the currency of power.\footnote{23} In this sense equilibrium does not mean stability. An equilibrium may be stable, unstable or neutral, depending

\begin{itemize}
  \item \footnote{22} See, Cynthia Russett. \textit{Concept of Equilibrium in American Social Thought} (Yale University Press, New York, 1966)
\end{itemize}
upon the relationship between the elements which are defined as constituting equilibrium. But in all its forms this equilibrium position is seen as the stable and therefore the desired one.

Some political scientists have been able to note this conservative effect of equilibrium analysis. Spragen shows that the present tendency of equilibrium analysis is to imply a kind of conservation. He writes "throughout its history ... one feature of the concept of equilibrium has remained quite consistent — namely its perception as an essentially desirable situation. Such diverse figures as Comte, Spencer, Ward, Parato, Bentel, and Gatlin have agreed on this."24 In equilibrium analysis one has to talk about the equilibrium of related variables such as supply and demand, goals, social control, or sentiments and interests, or whatever are regarded as the prime determinants of behaviour. It would make no sense of the concept to do otherwise. Allen argues that in this framework the very choice of the variables carries with it a stability bias. When they are in harmony then they are in equilibrium and there is stability. Disequilibrium is equated with disharmony and conflict. A consequence of the use of equilibrium analysis has been to emphasize that a change away

from any given equilibrium position must have negative or derogatory effects. It is but one step away from claiming that change itself is undesirable. Thus, equilibrium analysis is status quo analysis. Easton overlooks this bias and praises the concept for its utility at the level of insight. He, however expresses his dissatisfaction for its dependence on quantification.

Easton has correctly pointed out the failure of American political science to develop any political theory in the real sense of the term. He, does not say that absence of theory makes empirical generalisation impossible. He only emphasises that to attain a high degree of reliability of knowledge theory is a necessity. Easton, therefore, pleads for a revival of political theory. But the question is what kind of a theory? Easton divides political theory into two broad categories (1) The value theory, (2) Causal theory. According to him value theory discusses political values or the philosophy of politics; causal theory seeks to show the relations among political facts. Easton emphasizes the importance of value theory. In

27. Ibid., pp. 53-54 and 73-79.
an essay mentioned above he wrote that political theory by tradition had chosen as part of its task to try to propose standards within the framework of which practical policy might be adopted. But as we have seen in the preceding chapter he held that towards the end of the nineteenth century, however, interest in the reformulation of values and in conception of a good political order declined. He went on to suggest "... new vision and clarity for research is possible if the political scientist is trained to appraise his values critically." He thinks that this will ensure the relevance and significance of political research for human goals.

In 'The Political System' also be asserted that a neglect of value theory had affected political science in an adverse manner. He argued that political scientists must take a constructive approach toward the question of values. In his famous presidential address to the 65th annual meeting of the American political science association he reviewed the achievements of behaviouralism in political science and held "Today the hazards of neglecting our normative presuppositions are all too apparent." He argued in favour of creative

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29. Ibid., p. 50  
31. Ibid., p. 338.
speculations. In the epilogue 'B' to the second edition of *The Political System*, he claims that he sought to reconstruct the image of science so as to justify the inclusion of creative moral discourse and dispute within the boundaries of the scientific enterprise itself. But a close analysis of his writings shows that in the ultimate analysis his political theory is only Causal theory, which he calls empirical theory.

Easton's preference for empirical theory to value theory is reflected in his treatment of the relation between facts and values. He views the factual aspect of a proposition as one that refers to a part of the reality. Therefore, it can be tested by reference to the facts. In this way its truth could be checked. The moral aspect is viewed as one that expresses the emotional response of an individual to a state of real or presumed facts. It indicates whether and the extent to which an individual desires a particular state of affairs to exist. He says, "Although we can say that the aspect of a proposition referring to a fact can be true or false it is meaningless to characterise, the value aspect of a proposition in this way." Such an approach does not exclude value questions from the scope of scientific research right away. They can be examined as observable facts associated with human activity. What it forbids is value judgements. The scientist

32. Ibid., p. 360
33. Ibid., p. 221.
may take account of values but he cannot decide whether a particular set of values is preferable to others.

An examination of Easton's ideas about the Causal or empirical theory will throw more light on his views on the questions of values and value theories. Easton is aware of the fact that there is no such thing as a pure fact. The interest of the observer always determines the selection of facts about any event. Such a selection is made on the light of a frame of reference that fixes the order and relevance of the facts. "When raised to the level of consciousness this frame of reference is that we call a theory." Such a theory would, of course, be a causal theory. Easton divides causal theory into three types. This division is based on the scope of such theories. These types are:

1. **Singular generalizations**:

   These are statements of observed uniformities between two isolated and easily identified variables. From these, few deductions can be made that go beyond the actual observed uniformity. These are not theories in the strict sense.

2. **Synthetic narrow gauge theory**:

   These are at a higher intermediary level. They consist of sets of inter-related propositions that are designed to

34. Ibid., p. 53.
synthesize the data contained in an unorganized body of singular generalizations. But in this process the theory that is developed goes beyond the actual data included in the original cluster of generalizations.

3. Broad gauge or systematic theory:

This is the conceptual framework within which a whole discipline is cast. 35

This conceptual framework is considered by Easton as the empirical theory that a discipline must develop to produce reliable knowledge. Easton describes it as a sieve which helps to sort out, select and reject observed facts; or a compass which indicates the direction in which research is moving; or a gauge which reports the state of development of a science at a particular time. Such a framework is flexible in nature. He writes, "it is a body of theory which changes in the light of the facts that it collects or that suggest it." 36 Easton explains that each investigator while undertaking an analysis within a given field, uses some theories and assumptions. The conceptual framework consists of these theories and assumptions. A conceptual framework helps the researcher to test the relevance of succeeding research. There is nothing sacrosanct about such a framework. Its utility in understanding phenomena is its supreme test. Greater the variety of signi-

35. Ibid., p. 58.
36. Ibid., p. 57.
significant problems that it can help to unify and give meaning to, better is the framework. Such is the idea that Easton propogates about a mature theory of political science. It is a theory which is based on a few basic, empirically derived premises. It is a theory which facilitates the formulation of intermediate theories based on deductions. His idea of this kind of an empirical theory and its role is based on his understanding of the role of theory in physics and economics. He hopes, "it is conceivable that some day in the social sciences such a framework might reach the stage of maturity associated with theory in physics, for example." Easton argues that such a framework makes it possible for a discipline to formulate deductively a whole body of intermediate theory. This makes the prediction of empirical events possible. Prediction of empirical events is very important for political science of Eastonian brand; because his concept of political science is similar to the prediction-generalization model of science. Easton wants to build a general science of politics. He also wants to predict how a political system will behave in a particular situation. As Thorson puts it, "One cannot even follow his arguments, make sense of his transitions, let alone accept his conclusions, unless one at least understands the prediction-generalization conception of science."

37. See Ibid., pp. 57-58.
38. Ibid., p. 58
His idea of political theory as a conceptual frame-work suits the purpose of such a science.

Easton spells out three reasons for which such a frame-work is essential for an adequate analysis of the Political system; (1) Through such a theory it would be possible to identify the significant political variables and describe their mutual relations, (2) It facilitates comparison of research and maps out areas in which additional or new research is badly needed, (3) It adds to the reliability of the results of both new and old research.\textsuperscript{40} Easton, therefore, considers such a frame-work to be the highest form of empirical theory necessary for political science. The emphasis this laid on such a theory leads him to a situation where he concentrates on the possibilities of developing such a frame-work and devotes most of his work since 1966 towards this end. As a result normative political theory is relegated to the background. Even the explanatory tasks of political theory are forgotten. As Meehan says, "Easton does not think of a political theory in terms of explanations but in terms of the creation of conceptual frame-work."\textsuperscript{41}

As we have noted above, Easton does not only not ignore but emphasises the importance of value theory but in his own

\textsuperscript{40} Easton, \textit{Political System}, op. cit., pp. 61-62.

political science we do not see such a theory. His is an empirical political science. His political theory is also empirical political theory only. In the face of his own neglect of value theory and the role that he gives to empirical theory, his deliberations on the need of value theory becomes a mere lip service. This becomes evident from what he has to say about the state of political theory in Pre-world War II period. "The dominance of historical and ethical theory had at that time virtually crushed out any small shoots of empirical theory that had reached the surface prior to world War II." In another place he says:

> Prior to world war II, theory almost exclusively implied moral philosophy in its various forms or, at the very least the history and analysis of the moral systems of the great political thinkers of the past. Only the barest glimmerings of the modern kind of theory were visible. For most students of politics, the little that did exist was scarcely recognizable as such, very seldom was it clearly identified and labelled"42 (emphasis added).

This modern kind of theory, here refers to empirical theory.

Easton notices that after the world war II political theory has undergone a major revolution. He maintains that the image of political theory built in the philosophical tradition of Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, Mill or Dewey is giving way.

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"The aspect ... which now rises to shatter the old image of the nature and tasks may be described as a descriptive, empirically oriented, behavioural, operational or causal."44

Gaston, thus, emphasises the role of empirical theory. This itself is not objectionable. In fact it is necessary to recognise the importance of such a theory. Easton's arguments for taking such theory seriously must be considered as a contribution to the development of political science. But he not only emphasizes the need for such theories but also views them separately from normative theory and goes on to build such a theory for political science in the form of systems analysis. If we accept Easton's conceptual frame-work we will be building a set of political theories which will be empirical in nature. And if we follow his arguments for the need of value theory then may be, we will be building another set of theories which are normative in nature. This idea of separating value and empirical theories ring bells of positivism in one's mind. Influence of positivism on Easton has already been pointed out. Dante Germino, for instance, brands him as an axiological positivist. Axiological positivists are those, who while agreeing that value judgements are not and may not become scientific, nevertheless insist upon the propriety and indeed inelianceability of value speculations on the part of

the social scientist. Because it is not possible to achieve a completely value-free social science. It is maintained that the investigator should frankly state and develop his value assumptions, carefully labelling them as such.\(^{45}\)

In fairness to Baston it must be noted here that he does not consider a mere formal statement of the value premises of the researcher as sufficient. He says, "... it is deceptive, however, to accept formal assertion of belief in certain moral postulates as a meaningful description of the ethical premises behind theoretical research."\(^{46}\) Easton is aware of the fact that such a formal statement cannot give an accurate picture of the moral views of the theorist. He, therefore, suggests that theorists should take a constructive approach toward moral clarification. This approach requires more than a mere formal statement of the values of the theorist. Easton says,

This task we can call the constructive approach toward moral clarification as contrasted with the largely formal approach implicit in the exhortation to avow, affirm, state, or make explicit our values. A constructive approach requires the synthesis of values with facts to bring out the full meaning of the values.\(^{47}\)

\(^{45}\) Dermino, Beyond Ideology, op. cit., p. 69.


\(^{47}\) Ibid., p. 231.
Easton argues that this approach has always been followed by all the great philosophers of the past. He says that an analysis of the components of any political theory shows how a theorist communicates his values, not through the assertion of a few dogmatic premises, but through the elaborate construction of the consequences of his moral views for the political structure and processes. If a constructive approach can synthesise values and facts and can show the consequences of the moral views of the theorist, it probably is the best we can do to solve the problem of the fact-value dichotomy. But unfortunately this does not happen. Easton has not been able to come out of the clutches of positivism. There is no doubt that he emphasized the importance of values and value theory; but he wants the theorist to save his theory from the impact of his own moral views. Easton writes, ".... the theorist cannot check the impact of his moral views on his theory unless he is thoroughly aware of these views." The implications of this positions are unmistakable. If Easton wants the theorist to save his (theorists) theories from being influenced by his moral views, he is assuming that it is possible and desirable to separate values from facts.

The separation of fact and value is the basic methodological postulate of positivism. Easton's adherence to this

48. loc. cit.,
49. Ibid., p. 232.
position becomes clear from what he says in 1971 in his epilogue 'B' to the second edition of the *Political System*: "I sought to construct the image of science so as to justify the inclusion of creative moral discourse and dispute within the boundaries of the scientific enterprise itself and not only within the university, while continuing to accept the logical heterogeneity of facts and values."^50 (emphasis added).

Easton, then, continues to adhere to the logical heterogeneity of facts and values. This methodological position has led social scientists to what is generally known as value-neutrality. In modern social sciences this idea is associated with the name of Max Weber. ^51 Irving Horowitz shows how the Weberian idea has been further developed by his followers and how the course of events identified social science not only with value neutrality but with scholarly aloofness from moral issues. ^52 This position about values is based on the belief natural science is the model or pattern for social sciences. The natural sciences could apparently be independent of values prevailing in society. Social scientists who hope to build such social sciences believe that this independence

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50. Ibid., p. 380.
51. For a discussion on this point see, Prochuck, op. cit., p. 146.
is attainable in social sciences also. We have already noted that Easton's idea of political theory is based on his understanding of the role of theory in physics. Therefore, he also falls into this trap. His political science like the social sciences of those who adhere to this view does not permit the political scientist to make value judgements. A methodology based on counter posing judgements of facts to value judgements implies that political science is not capable of choosing value alternatives. It believes that science can only say how to achieve goals; but cannot say which goal is preferable. This approach regards political science as a neutral discipline and does not allow political scientists to draw any political, ideological or moral conclusions. It attempts at standing above politics and as a result confines itself to the study of what Christian Bay calls "pseudo-politics". Bay rightly says, "we cannot avoid the realm of normative issues unless we really wish to disclaim all political significance for our work."54

If Easton is advocating the construction of a set of theories which are free from the influence of the moral views of the theorist he seems to believe that it is possible to deal with facts without getting involved in normative issues.

54. Ibid., p. Loc cit.
He seems to be unaware of the fact that facts cannot even be described without a perspective. When a researcher chooses a particular problem for study he makes a value choice. Such a choice cannot be made without some political or moral considerations. Moreover, all political knowledge is made for application. Even if the researcher manages to formulate his conclusions in a manner which appears to be value neutral, these become value-laden in the hands of those who make use of such knowledge. That is why it is not possible to develop an empirical political theory which is free from value biases at least not about really vital social problems.

Social theories are always influenced by the value preferences of the theorists. Hyrdal has shown that the value connotation of our main concepts represents our interest in a matter, gives direction to our thoughts and significance to our inferences. He rightly concludes that there is no way of studying social reality other than from the viewpoint of human ideals. In this sense Eason's hope of developing a set of theories which are empirical in nature and on which the influence of the moral views of the theorist can be checked will remain a mere hope. An approach which requires the political theorist to state his moral position clearly to enable him check the influence of his moral views on his

theory would develop only such theories which will be concerned only with description of the trivialities. It would prevent the theorist from studying the really vital social problems. And a political science built with the help of such theories will not be able to deal with questions like whether a particular social order is just or unjust? or whether a change is or is not necessary? Since the days of Greek Philosophers, the right order of society has traditionally been a central question of political theory. Easton's approach places it out side the scope of political theory. Theory thus becomes a hand maiden of empirical research. An analysis of Easton's major works will show that as a result of this conception of Political theory his political science becomes descriptive in nature. Such a science, of course, makes it possible for the scientist to ignore questions of normative nature.