Chapter Three Short Answer (Answers Below)

1. Explain some of the common barriers to the successful adoption of democracy.

2. Using the concepts from Chapters 1 and 2, explain the role of the Church in the medieval age.

3. Explain the differences between Platonic and Aristotelian thought.

4. Explain the difference between markets and a market economy, and explain why the latter was incompatible with feudal society.

5. Contrast the ideas of freedom in Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau.

Answers

1. Democracy, as it evolved in Europe and “the West,” was a product of hundreds of years of slow transformation and the connected development of civil society and the political process. Democracy was not just limited to changes in the institutions of government, but reflected ongoing changes in society as well. Attempts to create democracy in the modern period have encountered problems when the institutional changes in government are not matched by changes in civil society. Many locations where democracy is currently being established, such as Iraq, are still dominated by “pre-modern” social relations (where the dominant social relationships revolve around family, clan, or tribe). It remains an open question if the existence of democracy in government can prompt the development of its supporting relationships in civil society.
2. In the medieval period, the Church was the dominant mediator between legitimacy and power. The Church recognized the power of impersonal leaders (chiefs) as legitimate, but in return, expected to be able to exploit the power of those it legitimated to secure its own position in society. The emergence of monarchy as a divinely-ordained system reflected a mature version of this relationship. Efforts by Church philosophers to define the legitimate use of power also reflect this relationship.
3. Plato focuses on the inherent reality behind things. Everything has a form, and justice is to live according to that form. Just as the soul has different parts with inherent functions (reason, spirit, and appetite) so should societies be divided into groups personifying those functions (guardians, warriors, artisans). A just society is one in which each acts according to their pre-determined role, and only some are able (and thus fit) to lead. Aristotle agrees with the idea of an underlying purpose, but for him it is a potential end, a telos. In contrast to Plato, Aristotle sees all humans as having a similar telos, to strive towards eudaemonia (well-being) through the use of reason and knowledge, and the development of experience. Unlike Plato, who sees the ideal society as a product of humans assuming their pre-determined roles, Aristotle sees it as one in which humans can achieve their potential.
4. Markets are places of exchange. Market society is one in which economic activity (both production and consumption) occurs for the purpose of, and through, exchange in markets. Feudal society, with its connection between agricultural production and the support of political authority, was incompatible with a system where production occurred through exchange. Agricultural production in feudalism was interdependent with political authority. Peasants, tied to the land, produced crops for their own consumption, some of which were appropriated to support local authorities, who held title to the land worked by peasants. In a system where both what you produce and what you consume are tied to market exchange, there was no room for the claims of traditional political authorities. The concentration of power in the hands of monarchs can also be seen as a relevant factor. As monarchs, rather than local authorities, became the guarantor of local security, the material basis of a local lord’s claim to legitimate authority (they protected agricultural producers) was undermined.
5. For Hobbes, liberty comes from the absence of legal restraint by the sovereign. The realm of liberty is that which is left unregulated by the absolute power of the sovereign. While no check exists on the power of the sovereign, not all sovereigns will seek to regulate all things; those things left unregulated constitute the realm of liberty. For Locke, freedom is the absence of arbitrary authority. Sovereign power, especially the power to legislate, must be divided, and subject to popular will. The exercise of authority does not in itself contradict liberty, to the extent that that exercise of power is consistent with the popular will. For Rousseau, freedom is independence. He connects freedom to equality. Inequality expresses itself as unequal distribution of dependence; some are more needy than others. We cannot be equally free unless we are equally independent. Even when we accept political authority, it is our voluntary participation in the general will which ensures our liberty.