

HISTORY
of
POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY
from Plato to Burke

BY

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TO THE MEMORY OF THE GREAT THINKERS
HEREIN DISCUSSED, AND TO THE INSPIRING
TEACHER WHO BY HIS OWN SPELL FIRST
MADE ME FEEL THEIRS, HUMBLY, IN GRATI-
TUDE, AND WITH APOLOGIES FOR MY OWN
FAILINGS IN COMPREHENSION AND SCHOL-
ARSHIP.

Preface

ANYONE who proffers a new textbook on an old subject, without benefit of the excuse that the subject matter has changed or been considerably added to since earlier works appeared, is manifestly required to justify his course.

The determination to write this book arose out of criticisms and complaints of American undergraduates, made over a period of five years in a course on The History of Political Ideas presented by me in Columbia College. These were confirmed and clarified during the past academic year, when the book was taking shape. They came in the main from intelligent and interested students, who gave their reasons for finding existing texts, which I recommended, inadequate and who occasionally suggested how the inadequacies might be remedied.

The American undergraduate, frequently taking a diverse program of courses, desires the haven of a textbook. Unlike his English *confrère*, he does not specialize from an early age, and even in his college years does not select and work in a major subject until his Junior year—and not always and everywhere then. Hence he needs an introduction that is clear, sufficiently full in content, and lacking in that use of learned or literary allusion that frequently marks English writing. He does not want to be flattered as already of the *cognoscenti*: at best he hopes ultimately to enter their august circle. His textbook is only his first step along that difficult path.

Believing, therefore, that a gap existed, I have endeavored to fill it as completely and fairly as possible. It is the task of the textbook writer to present problems and raise questions, to promote a sceptical attitude and encourage the inquiring mind. Eclecticism, though often condemned today as a cowardly avoidance, seems most calculated to do this. Granted that no one can reach that mirage of scholars, complete objectivity, one must present the philosophy of other men as fairly, and even as favor-

ably, as possible. Beyond that, it seems desirable to suggest both the value and the difficulties of all viewpoints.

Yet in so doing one's own philosophy of life necessarily enters. My convictions, so far as I am conscious of them, include the following: I insist, above all, that philosophy is philosophy and not pure science; that the social studies are part thereof, and hence that they are normative, concerned with the problems of ends and values. I reject, that is to say, the pragmatic approach.

While aware of the significance both of the economic bases of different societies and of the economic position of persons within them who may philosophize, I do not accept the view that economic conditions are, generally, all-important, or that thinkers develop their ideas purely in terms of class or personal experience. Nor does it seem to me that philosophies are simply rationalizations. Biological and psychological factors may limit intellectual insight, and pure reason is beyond human attainment; but it is probably dangerous to interpret the ideas of great philosophers simply as consequences of what happened to particular human organisms.

As to arrangement, I have usually opened my treatment of each figure with some biographical material, in order that students may become aware that those whose ideas they study were flesh-and-blood creatures who shared normal human experiences. Many of the political philosophers had quite exciting lives, and it is peculiarly unfortunate for students to assume that they were dull persons, forever burning the midnight oil, surrounded by ponderous tomes—or worse, to conceive of them simply as names, pegs on which ideas are hung. With a view to making them human I have also introduced a dozen portraits of certain of the most distinguished among them, remembering well how curious I was as a student to know what these profound thinkers looked like.

I have then tried to indicate briefly both the political and the social economic background against which the different figures lived and to make clear the issues with which they were concerned. For the Greek and medieval periods I have also

given introductory chapters, since the institutions and ways of looking at things in those days are not always familiar to the student.

The core of each chapter, however, consists of exposition of the tenets of those discussed, and in the case of major thinkers of the arguments they used. I have also suggested the significance of the problems debated and the value and relevance, in terms of current affairs, of the arguments used. I have tried, too, to make clear the similarities of the arguments of various philosophers—but without undue stress on “influences.” Nevertheless, it has seemed worth while to show how the views of some thinkers have lived and worked.

For encouragement in this work and for critical assistance I owe thanks to many teachers and colleagues. The first obligation in time, as well as in extent, is to Professor H. J. Laski, from whom I received my early training in political philosophy, and who has since advised and befriended me. Professor R. M. MacIver aided me greatly with general suggestions and advice, as well as by reading chapters on Bodin and Hobbes. The undertaking of this work is due to Professor Schuyler C. Wallace, who in its course has proved a constant friend and patient guide. He also read my chapter on Colonial America.

To the following colleagues and friends I owe thanks for the reading of particular chapters: Dr. Neil C. Van Deusen (Plato); Mr. William F. McDonald (Aristotle, St. Thomas Aquinas); Dr. Moses Hadas (Roman Thought); Professor Irving W. Raymond (Introduction to Medieval Thought, Hierarchical Theory); the late Professor Parker T. Moon (Hierarchical Theory, Conciliar Movement, Jesuits and Dominicans); Professor Charles W. Cole (Bodin, Monarchomachs and Politiques, Burke); Professor Philip C. Jessup (Grotius); Dr. Shepard B. Clough and Mrs. Rosa Clough (Machiavelli); Professor Thomas P. Peardon (Machiavelli); Professor Robert Schuyler (Seventeenth Century English Thought, Burke); Professor Roland Pennock (Montesquieu, Rousseau); and Dr. Jacques M. Barzun (Voltaire).

I am indebted, further, to my old student Mr. Raymond Horowitz for reading the whole manuscript and suggesting

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