A HISTORY OF POLITICAL THEORY

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PREFACE

This history of political theory is written in the light of the hypothesis that theories of politics are themselves a part of politics. In other words, they do not refer to an external reality but are produced as a normal part of the social *milieu* in which politics itself has its being. Reflection upon the ends of political action, upon the means of achieving them, upon the possibilities and necessities of political situations, and upon the obligations that political purposes impose is an intrinsic element of the whole political process. Such thought evolves along with the institutions, the agencies of government, the moral and physical stresses to which it refers and which, one likes at least to believe, it in some degree controls.

Thus conceived, the theory of politics no more reaches an end than politics itself, and its history has no concluding chapter. If there is a divine, far-off event toward which human history moves, the author of this book makes no pretense of knowing what it is. Taken as a whole a political theory can hardly be said to be true. It contains among its elements certain judgments of fact, or estimates of probability, which time proves perhaps to be objectively right or wrong. It involves also certain questions of logical compatibility respecting the elements which it tries to combine. Invariably, however, it includes valuations and predilections, personal or collective, which distort the perception of fact, the estimate of probability, and the weighing of compatibilities. The most that criticism can do is to keep these three factors as much as possible distinct: to prevent preferences from claiming the inevitableness of logic or the certainty of fact.

It cannot be supposed that any political philosophy of the present time, more than those of the past, can step out of the relationships in which it stands to the problems, the valuations, the habits, or even the prejudices of its own time. A writer of history, at least, ought to avoid the egoism that makes every generation fancy that it is the heir of all the ages. On the other hand, he

can make no profession of impartiality beyond that fidelity to sources which is the obligation of every serious historian, or beyond that avowal of conscious preferences which should be expected of every honest man. In any other sense the claim of detachment is a superficiality or a pretense.

A reader is entitled, if he is interested, to an avowal of an historian's own philosophical preferences. Those of the author are in general agreement with the results of Hume's criticism of natural law described in the first part of Chapter XXIX. So far as he can see, it is impossible by any logical operation to excogitate the truth of any allegation of fact, and neither logic nor fact implies a value. Consequently he believes that the attempt to fuse these three operations, whether in Hegelian idealism or in its Marxian variant, merely perpetuated an intellectual confusion inherent in the system of natural law. The substitution of the belief that there is a determinate order of evolution or historical progress for the belief in rational self-evidence displaced an unverifiable idea with one still less verifiable. So far as there is any such thing as historical "necessity," it seems to belong to the calculation of probabilities, and in application this calculation is usually impossible and always highly uncertain. As for values, they appear to the author to be always the reaction of human preference to some state of social and physical fact; in the concrete they are too complicated to be generally described even with so loose a word as utility. Nevertheless, the idea of economic causation was probably the most fertile suggestion added to social studies in the nineteenth century.

To write the whole history of Western political theory from the point of view of this sort of social relativism is probably a greater task than a careful scholar ought to have attempted. It implies a range of knowledge which the author is painfully aware that he does not possess. For, on the one hand, political theory has always been a part of philosophy and science, an application to politics of the relevant intellectual and critical apparatus which is at the moment available. And, on the other hand, it is a reflection upon morals, economics, government, religion, and law — whatever there may be in the historical and institutional situation that sets a problem to be solved. It is of the essence of the point of view here adopted that neither factor should be neglected.

The intellectual apparatus is important, at least for political theory, only in so far as it is really applied to some state of the facts, and the institutional realities are important only so far as they evoke and control reflection. Ideally both should be conceived and presented by an historian with equal clearness; political theory in action ought to receive equal treatment with political theory in books. The demand thus made on the historian's scholarship is impossibly heavy.

In dealing with the large mass of literature that makes up the sources for a history of political theory, the author has tried to avoid so far as possible the mere mention of men and books that for lack of space could not be described in their setting. The fact that a man existed or that a book was written is, in itself, no part of the history of political theory as it is here conceived. In many cases it has been necessary frankly to select a specimen to stand for a considerable group, omitting other possible representatives. After a selection has been made the preserving of reasonable proportions between the subjects included presents the greatest difficulties. Especially as one approaches the present time the problem of knowing what to include and what to omit, and of deciding upon the relative importance of the items selected for inclusion, becomes nearly insoluble in view of the space at one's disposal. To be specific, the author is gravely in doubt whether the chapters following that on Hegel do not omit much that ought to have been included, if a proportion consonant with that observed in the earlier chapters were to be maintained. If the author were to offer an excuse, it would be that a friend, Professor Francis W. Coker, has recently done this task better than he in any case could have done it.

The author owes a heavy debt to the many scholars who have dealt, more adequately than he could do, with specific phases or limited parts of the subject.

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THE CITY-STATE

Most modern political ideals — such, for example, as justice, liberty, constitutional government, and respect for the law — or at least the definitions of them, began with the reflection of Greek thinkers upon the institutions of the city-state. But in the long history of political thought the meaning of such terms has been variously modified, and always that meaning has to be understood in the light of the institutions by which the ideals were to be realized and of the society in which those institutions did their work. The Greek city-state was so different from the political communities in which modern men live that it requires no small effort of the imagination to picture its social and political life. The Greek philosophers were thinking of political practices far different from any that have prevailed commonly in the modern world, and the whole climate of opinion in which their work was done was different. Their problems, though not without analogies in the present, were never identical with modern problems, and the ethical apparatus by which political life was evaluated and criticised varied widely from any that now prevails. In order to understand at all accurately what their theories meant, it is necessary first to realize at least roughly what kind of institutions they had in view and what citizenship connoted, as a fact and as an ideal, to the public for whom they wrote. For this purpose the government of Athens is especially important, partly because it is the best known but chiefly because it was an object of special concern to the greatest of the Greek philosophers.

SOCIAL CLASSES

As compared with modern states the ancient city-state was exceedingly small both in area and in population. Thus the whole territory of Attica was only a little more than two-thirds the area of Rhode Island, and in population Athens was comparable with such a city as Denver or Rochester. The numbers are exceedingly

uncertain but a figure somewhat in excess of three hundred thousand would be approximately correct. Such an arrangement of a small territory dominated by a single city was typical of the city-state.

This population was divided into three main classes that were politically and legally distinct. At the bottom of the social scale were the slaves, for slavery was a universal institution in the ancient world. Of all the inhabitants of Athens perhaps a third were slaves. Consequently as an institution slavery was as characteristic of the city-state economy as wage-earning is of the modern. It is true of course that the slave did not count politically in the city-state. In Greek political theory his existence was taken for granted, just as the feudal ranks were taken for granted in the Middle Ages or as the relation of employer and employee is taken for granted now. Sometimes his lot was deplored and sometimes the institution (though not its abuses) was defended. But the comparatively large number of slaves — and still more the exaggeration of their numbers — has given rise to a myth that is seriously misleading. This is the idea that the citizens of the city-state formed a leisure class and that its political philosophy was therefore the philosophy of a class exempt from gainful labor.

This is an almost complete illusion. The leisure class in Athens could hardly have been larger than it is in an American city of equal size, for the Greeks were not opulent and lived upon a very narrow economic margin. If they had more leisure than the moderns, it was because they took it — their economic machine was not so tightly geared — and they paid for it with a lower standard of consumption. The simplicity and plainness of Greek living would be a heavy burden to the modern American. Certainly the overwhelming majority of Athenian citizens must have been tradesmen or artisans or farmers who lived by working at their trades. There was no other way for them to live. Consequently, as with most men in modern communities, their political activities had to take place in such time as they could spare from their private occupations. It is true that Aristotle deplored this fact and thought it would be desirable to have all manual work done by slaves, in order that citizens might have the leisure to devote themselves to politics. Whatever may be thought of the wisdom of this ideal, it is certain that Aristotle was not describing what existed

but was proposing a change for the improvement of politics. Greek political theory sometimes idealized a leisure class, and in aristocratic states the governing class might be a landed gentry, but it is quite false to imagine that in a city like Athens the citizens were typically men whose hands were unsoiled by labor.

The slaves being put aside, the second main group in a Greek city was composed of the resident foreigners, or metics. In a commercial city like Athens the number of such persons might be large and many of them would not be transients. But there was no form of legal naturalization, and residence extending over several generations would still leave a metic outside the citizen-body, unless indeed he were taken in by inadvertence or connivance. The metic like the slave had no part in the political life of the city, though he was a freeman and his exclusion implied no social discrimination against him.

Finally, there was the body of citizens or those who were members of the city and entitled to take part in its political life. This was a privilege attained by birth, for a Greek remained a citizen of the city to which his parents belonged. Moreover, what citizenship entitled a man to was *membership;* that is, some minimum share of political activity or participation in public business. This minimum might be no more than the privilege of attending town-meeting, which itself might be of greater or less importance according to the degree of democracy that prevailed, or it might include eligibility to a narrower or a wider range of offices. Thus Aristotle, obviously thinking of Athenian practice, considered that eligibility to jury-duty is the best criterion of citizenship. Whether a man were eligible to many offices or only a few would again depend upon the degree of democracy that prevailed in his city. But the point to be noted is that, for a Greek, citizenship always meant some such participation, much or little. The idea was therefore much more intimate and much less legal than the modern idea of citizenship. The modern notion of a citizen as a man to whom certain rights are legally guaranteed would have been better understood by the Roman than by the Greek, for the Latin term *ius* does partly imply this possession of private right. The Greek, however, thought of his citizenship not as a possession but as something shared, much like membership in a family. This fact had a profound influence upon Greek political philosophy. It meant

that the problem as they conceived it was not to gain a man his rights but to insure him the place to which he was entitled. Somewhat differently stated, it meant that, in the eyes of Greek thinkers, the political problem was to discover what place each kind or class of men merited in a wholesome society so constituted that all the significant sorts of social work could go on.

POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

The institutions by which this body of citizen-members undertook to transact its political business can be illustrated by taking Athens as the best-known type of the democratic constitution.[1] The whole body of male citizens formed the Assembly or Ecclesia, a town-meeting which every Athenian was entitled to attend after he had reached the age of twenty years. The Assembly met regularly ten times in the year and in extraordinary sessions at the call of the Council. The acts of this town-meeting corresponded, as nearly as anything in the system did, to modern enactments in which the whole public authority of the body-politic is embodied. This is not to say, however, that the formation of policies and the effective discussion of measures took place, or was intended to take place, in this body. Direct democracy conducted by the whole people assembled is rather a political myth than a form of government. Moreover, all forms of Greek government (except extra-legal dictatorship), whether aristocratic or democratic, included some sort of assembly of the people, even though its share in government might actually be small.

The interesting thing about Athenian government is therefore not the Assembly of the whole people but the political means which had been designed to make the magistrates and officials responsible to the citizen-body and answerable to its control. The device by which this was effected was a species of representation, though it differed in important ways from modern ideas of representation.

[1] The constitution of Cleisthenes, whose reforms were adopted in 507 B.C. Minor changes were made from time to time, largely in the direction of increasing the number of magistrates chosen by election and lot and also the number of paid services, both devices of popular government, but the reforms of Cleisthenes established the constitution of Athens as it was during the period of Athens' greatest power and as it remained. There was a brief oligarchic reaction at the close of the Peloponnesian war but the old forms were restored in 403.