

# HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT

BY

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**HISTORY OF  
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## PREFACE

At the present time no satisfactory single-volume history of political theory exists in the English language. Numerous excellent works deal with special topics or with limited periods. Professor Dunning's three volumes are a splendid monument to his scholarship, and must serve as the basis for the work of any later writer. His last volume, however, leaves unexplained the theories of the past half century, during which period important movements have taken place. His work makes no attempt to trace the development of the theory of international relations, and gives practically no attention to the development of political thought in the United States. It also shows little realization of the connection between economic and political theory during the past two centuries. It is rather a survey of political literature than a history of the development of political thought in relation to its historical, institutional, and intellectual background. The present volume aims to meet, to some extent, these deficiencies.

Obviously, the attempt to cover so wide a field in a single volume raises difficult problems of selection and proportion. It also necessitates a condensed treatment of topics that deserve fuller elaboration. For these reasons a rather extensive bibliography is included. The source material, consisting of the writings of the authors referred to in the text, appears in the form of footnotes arranged in general chronological order throughout the book. Secondary material, historical, biographical, and critical, is referred to at the end of each chapter. Contemporary political theory is given relatively less attention than it deserves because a volume on that subject, written by Professor Francis W. Coker, will appear in this series; and because a memorial volume in preparation by former students of Professor Dunning will cover the same field.

The author wishes to express his appreciation of the valuable assistance given by Professor Frederic A. Ogg, the editor of the Century Political Science Series, by Professor Paul H. Douglas of the University of Chicago, by Professor Francis W. Coker of Ohio

State University, by Professor Harry E. Barnes of Smith College, and by his colleague, Mr. W. Y. Elliott of the University of California. Miss Emma Fisk has performed the tedious task of verifying the numerous references.

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**HISTORY OF  
POLITICAL THOUGHT**

TO YROTSIH  
POLITICAL THOUGHT

# HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT

## CHAPTER I

### THE NATURE OF POLITICAL THOUGHT

#### 1. ORIGIN OF POLITICAL THOUGHT

All living creatures except man are largely at the mercy of their surroundings. They live under conditions which are not of their making and which are but little changed by their efforts. No conscious purpose nor definite idea of progress is possible among them. They live in a world of nature and are controlled by its conditions, being unable to conquer it or to change their own destiny by their own deliberate actions.

The relation of man to his environment is essentially different. While, in primitive times man, like the lower creatures, lived at the mercy of nature and developed in accordance with the law of natural evolution, and while man is still in many ways affected by conditions which he is powerless to change, a point was nevertheless reached in human development when man became conscious of his environment and set his reason to work to explain it and to plan modifications and improvements. Natural phenomena were investigated and understood, and conscious direction and purpose gradually replaced the purely physical relation between man and nature.

This was the case not only with the physical environment, composed of those geographic and climatic conditions and their resultant natural resources within which all life exists, but also with the social environment, composed of those ideas, associations, and institutions that make up the non-physical life of man. In the same way that man began to investigate nature, learn her laws, bring her powers under his control, and utilize her resources, so man began to question his intellectual beliefs and his social customs and institutions, to examine their nature, to question their author-

ity, and finally to plan deliberate change and progress. All early social institutions, therefore, arose and for a long time developed unconsciously. Only gradually did man realize their existence and the possibility of directing or improving them by his own purposeful efforts.

Of all social institutions the state has been the most universal and most powerful. Some form of organization and authority has been found wherever human life has existed, and a sanction of some kind has enforced some sort of rules. In the process of human development, it was, therefore, inevitable that man should investigate this institution, should attempt to discover its origin, should question or uphold its authority, and should dispute over the proper scope of its function. As the outcome of this process, political thought arose. Government and law, springing up naturally and growing at first without conscious direction, came later under the scrutiny of man's reason. Man became conscious of the state, and made attempts, crude enough in the beginning, to explain the nature of political phenomena. Increasing powers of observation and of logical analysis built up a constantly widening sphere of political speculation, and the development of the state in its objective phase of organization and activity was, accordingly, accompanied by its subjective phase—the theory of the state—in the minds of men and in the records of tradition and literature.

## 2. POLITICAL THOUGHT AND POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

It is evident that a close relation will exist between the political thought of any given period and the actual political conditions then existing. Most political theories arose either to explain and justify the authority that men obeyed or to criticize it in the hope of accomplishing change. Sometimes, it is true, political philosophers speculated concerning the ideal state, or drew imaginative pictures of political conditions as, in their opinion, they should be. Even this type of political theory, however, will, if closely examined, prove to be based on the political ideals of its time, and will usually be aimed at certain specific evils to which the conditions then prevailing gave rise. Plato's *Republic* has little meaning unless viewed in the light of the conditions that existed during the decline of the Greek city-states. More's *Utopia* depends upon the background of social unrest during the change from agriculture to sheep raising in England. Bellamy's *Looking Backward* pre-

supposes the modern city and modern problems of capital and labor.

Ordinarily, political theories are the direct result of objective political conditions. They reflect the thoughts and interpret the motives that underlie actual political development. At least they represent what men believe to be the nature and spirit of their institutions. They indicate the conditions and the intellectual point of view of their age. (At the same time, political theories also influence political development.) They are not only the outgrowth of actual conditions, but they, in turn, lead men to modify their political institutions. Sometimes theory has preceded, sometimes it has followed, the corresponding institution or activity. Political theories are thus both cause and effect. Changing conditions create new theories; these in turn influence actual political methods. Magna Carta and the Declaration of the Rights of Man were much more than mere statements of principle. (They were, programs of action whose effects are felt to this day.)

(Political theory is connected, not only with the political institutions of its time, but also with thought in other lines) Just as an abstract political or economic man cannot be separated from man in all his interests, so political thought cannot be divorced from science, philosophy, ethics, religion, economic theory, and literature, or even from tradition, dogma, prejudice, and superstition. The nature of political thought depends largely upon the stage of intellectual development. At one period men's intellectual interests place emphasis on one phase; at another, upon a different phase. The primary influence of religious doctrines on the political thought of the Middle Ages, and the connection between economic doctrines and political theory at the present day are at once suggested. Accordingly, the historical survey of political thought must keep in mind, not only the actual development of political institutions, but also the parallel progress of human thought in other fields, in order that the political principles of any given time may be understood and appreciated.

There are, therefore, two phases in the evolution of the state. One is the objective, concrete development of states as manifested in their governments, their administration of law, and their international relations; the other is the subjective development of ideas concerning the state as an abstraction. In political theory as in actual political organization, a continuous growth may be traced. Political principles, like devices of government, are handed down

from age to age, each state by its experience and in the light of its conditions modifying former concepts and devices, and these in turn influencing the states that follow.

It remains to add that political thought is essentially relative in its nature and lays no claim to absolute truth. In the past it grew out of actual conditions and existing modes of thought; at present it represents problems with which we must deal. Concerning these problems political thinking is never unanimous. After the lapse of a considerable period of time, when a proper historical perspective may be secured, past problems stand out clearly, and uncritical people often judge harshly the apparent blindness of earlier generations and the inadequacy or futility of their attempted solutions. So no doubt many of our problems will appear simple to future generations and our groping remedies will seem equally blundering. (But when judged in the light of prevailing conditions and prevailing methods of thought, the difficulties involved are more apparent.)

Intelligent men differ honestly in their opinions concerning the beneficial or injurious effects of certain phases of political life. Even when all agree concerning the nature of the problems, agreement is lacking concerning their causes or the proper methods of solution. (Many such differences of opinion underlie political issues, create political parties and their contests, and form the motive forces of government. Many others are involved in the international policies of states and lead to dispute or to warfare in which both parties to the conflict are honestly convinced of the justice of their cause. There are times when the clash of political issues is mild, when men and states agree fairly well on fundamental questions, and when governmental and international relations run smoothly and effectively. At other times differences of opinion are sharp, parties assume hostile attitudes, revolution is in the air, and international relations are strained or openly hostile.

While some of the fundamental principles of political theory have been stated and restated, hammered out and refined, and have gained in the process a quality of explanatory power that seems universal, no theory of the state can be considered as ultimate truth. It is a fundamental weakness of a certain type of reformer that he believes that his scheme of reorganization would be perfect and permanent. A century hence, under the changed conditions of that time, our present attitude toward political problems may seem as crude and absurd as many of the theories

that arose in the past now seem to us. This does not, however, diminish the necessity that each age should build up for itself a philosophy of the state, based upon its development to the point then reached, upon the actual conditions then existing, and upon the ideals of the future then held.

### 3. PROBLEMS OF POLITICAL THOUGHT.

If an analysis be made of the questions with which political thought has been concerned, it is found that emphasis was placed at various periods upon widely different types of problems. In the medieval period controversy centered in the contest for supremacy between spiritual and temporal authorities; in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the dominant interest was in the contest between monarchic and democratic theories of political organization; at present the extent of state activities has come into prominence and the connection between political and economic interests is especially close.

Besides, political conditions have changed so greatly from age to age that the same problem has had quite different meanings at different periods. Thus in the eighteenth century liberal thinkers favored individualism because they wished to limit the activities of governments controlled by irresponsible monarchs. To-day the same type of thinker is likely to hold a moderate socialistic point of view and to favor the extension of governmental regulation and control. When political power was transferred from king to people, the reason for fearing it disappeared; and government came to be looked upon as a servant whose actions promoted general welfare and should be extended, rather than as a tyrant whose power should be curbed. Moreover, few thinkers have attempted to build up a consistent and comprehensive theory of the state. Men have usually been interested in some particular phase of political existence that seemed important to their time. It is therefore difficult to make a complete and logical outline of the problems that political theory has attempted to solve. Some of the most important, and some that have appeared most frequently, may however be pointed out.

Considerable attention has been given to the origin of the state. In the uncritical past, when historical knowledge was slight, numerous attempts were made to account for the beginnings of political institutions. Among the most widely held theories were the divine theory, which considered the state to be established by