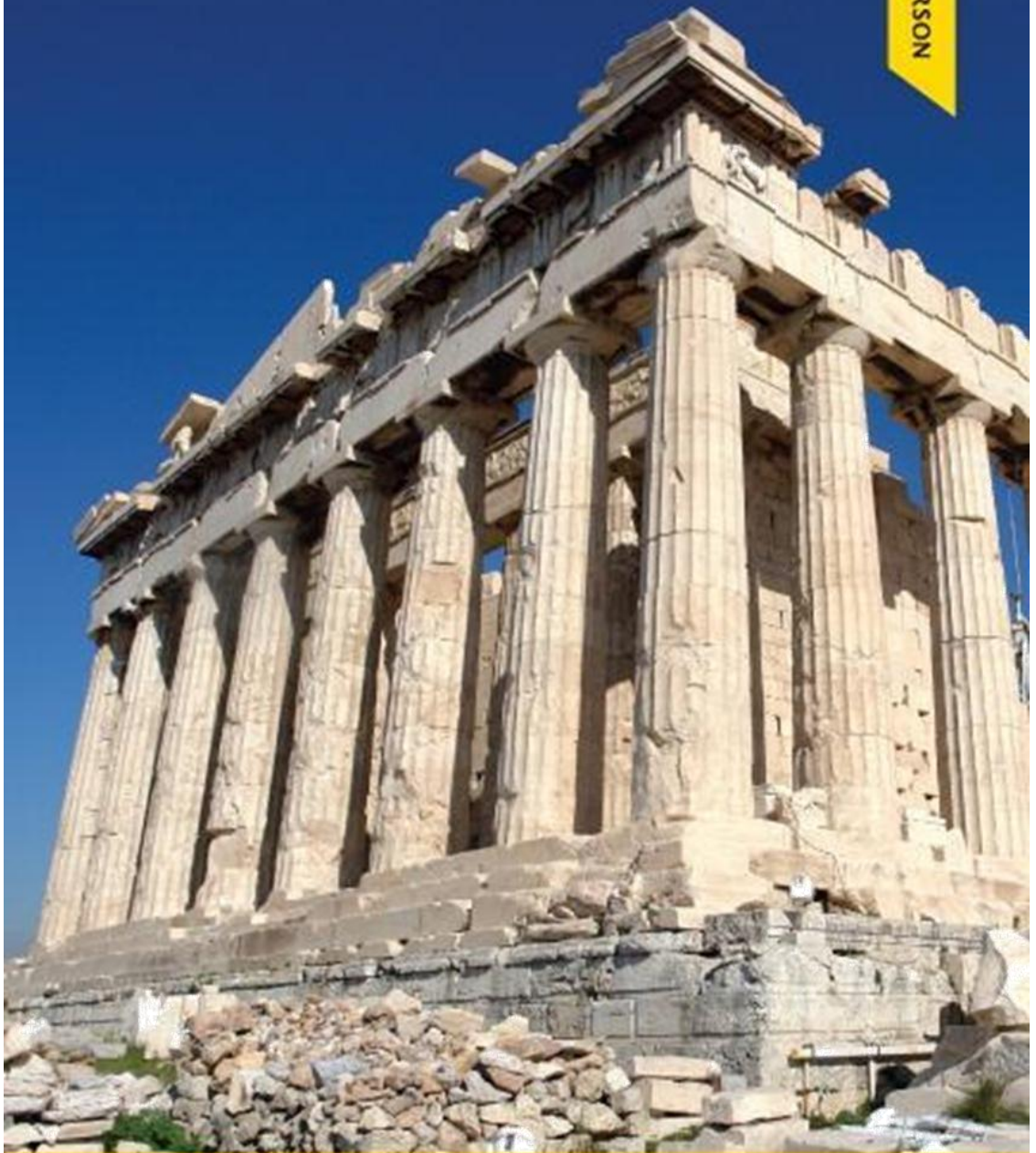


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On the History of Political Philosophy
Great Political Thinkers from Thucydides to Locke

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W. JULIAN **KORAB-KARPOWICZ**

On the History of Political Philosophy

*Great Political Thinkers from
Thucydides to Locke*

W. JULIAN **KORAB-KARPOWICZ**

Anglo-American University

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To my students for their inspiration.



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P R E F A C E

It can be argued that political philosophy begins with the question “What is justice?” raised by Socrates in Plato’s *Republic*. The debate about justice that takes place in the dialogue leads to two opposing positions: the position represented by Socrates, according to which justice is a universal and timeless moral value that provides the foundation for order in any human society, and the position represented by Thrasymachus, according to which justice is purely conventional and relative to human laws that vary according to times and customs: “nothing else than the interest of the stronger.” This debate, initiated by Plato, continues throughout the history of political thought. Already in the *Republic*, it inspires additional questions: Do moral values hold in politics? What is human nature? What are the origins and the end of the state? Can a war be just? What are the limits of governmental power? How much liberty should citizens enjoy? Who should rule? What is the best form of government? Answers to these questions, posed in a single work written more than twenty-four centuries ago, have served in one way or another as the basis upon which the main themes of political and international relations theory have developed. This book provides a fresh, historical introduction to Western political philosophy from its beginning in ancient Greece to modern times. It is designed for students of philosophy, politics and international relations, and other fields, individuals taking courses in the history of political thought, and for general readers who have an interest in the subject. It is written simply and candidly, but without sacrificing intellectual depth. This book demonstrates the continuing significance of centuries old political and philosophical debates and problems. Recurring themes include discussions concerning human nature, different views of justice, the origin of government and law, the rise and development of various forms of government, idealism and realism in international relations, the distinction between just and unjust war, and the nature of legitimate sovereignty. It explores tensions between ancient and modern ideas and presents the history of political thought as a great debate about politics and ethics in which political thinkers of various eras expound on their views in turn.

Although my book focuses primarily on individual political thinkers, it is written so that each chapter develops a theme arising from a previous one. It is three-dimensional, with the first dimension being chronology. The second dimension is found in recurring themes, such as human nature, different views of justice, the origin of society and law, the rise and development of various forms of government, the role of idealism and realism in international relations, and the sources of public authority and the nature of legitimate sovereignty. The third dimension consists of topics, such as freedom, equality, power, authority, legitimacy, justice, sovereignty, happiness, natural law, and human rights.

Throughout this book, I have used parenthetical notes to keep bibliographical references as simple as possible. The works cited list at the end of the book contains the bibliographic information for the primary and secondary works referred to in the main body of the text. The primary works were written by the great political thinkers who are discussed in the various chapters, and are usually referred to by the title of the work in question, and then by numbers that indicate book, chapter, section, or line. The secondary works are usually referred to by author and page number.

To facilitate the reader's entry into the field of political philosophy, I have provided learning aids. Study questions at the end of each chapter can be used as topics for discussions or essays. Suggested readings are a guide to additional works on the subject of a given chapter. A glossary provides definitions of some of the main ideas discussed at much greater length in the text.

Three chapters of this book are revised and expanded versions of previously published articles. Chapter 1 is a revision of the article "How International Relations Theorists Can Benefit by Reading Thucydides," which was printed in *The Monist*, Vol. 89, Number 2 (April 2006). Chapter 2 is a revision of "Plato's Political Philosophy," which was written for *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Chapter 8 is a revision of "In Defense of International Order: Grotius's Critique of Machiavellism," which appeared in *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 60, Number 1 (September 2006). I am grateful to the editors and publishers for permission to include these revised texts.

I would like to thank my family and friends for their support of the effort that went into the writing and publishing of this book. My special thanks are offered to Diane Ewart Grabowski, Deborah Peterson, Michael Shields, and Robin Turner for reading and checking the manuscript. I would also like to thank Professors C.D.V. Reeve, James V. Shall, and Ulrich Steinworth for their helpful comments on individual chapters. Throughout the writing process, I was stimulated by class discussions with my students. I am grateful to them for being my source of inspiration.

It is my belief and hope that this book will enable readers to gain an essential knowledge of the history of political thought.

W. Julian Korab-Karpowicz



INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY?

Perhaps the greatest contribution of ancient Greece to Western civilization is the discovery of autonomous reason. The early Greek philosophers asked questions about the universe, like other thinkers before them, but were the first to propose general, rational answers that were no longer based on religious considerations. The problem that confronted the Greeks, of finding what was really going on in the external world, which they considered rationally discernable and knowable, was extended to their political communities. It took the form of distinguishing between the often-confusing ways in which things *were* actually done and the way in which they *should be* done. The Greek thinkers engaged with essentially ethical, normative questions about politics. In this way, political philosophy was born.

Politics is a complex social phenomenon that includes the activities of governments, political parties and leading figures within them, lobbies and interest groups, and the general public, as well as other political actors. Whereas the study of politics can be confined, like much of today's political science, to empirical research, political philosophers have never limited themselves to observation and measurement. To be sure, they have never disregarded the knowledge of how things are, which can be regarded as the *descriptive* aspect of political philosophy. Their central concern, however, has been with the "ought." They have been explicitly prescriptive or *normative*, asking what is most desirable for society and most just. Ultimately, political philosophers have looked for the best social and political order.

From its very beginning, political philosophy has been essentially a normative theory that would identify sources of evil in a political community and prescribe a solution in the form of an ordering vision of what the community ought to become. Plato can serve us here as a paradigmatic example. The conflict and factional strife that he describes in the *Republic* were not inventions of his philosophical fancy, but the real stuff of Athenian politics. They were a result of establishing a democracy in Athens that increased political participation, but at the same time encouraged rival ambitions, eroded the city's traditions, destroyed its unity, and turned politics into an "incessant movement of shifting currents" (*Seventh Letter* 325e). This turbulent flux of political life, under the influence of which the best of characters could not remain uncorrupted, was for Plato a contradiction of any good political order, which could be based only on the rule of wisdom over mere opinion and of virtue over vice.

For Plato, political philosophy was a practical enterprise of the most serious kind. Its task was to restore order in both societies and human souls. For Aristotle, its task was to organize political communities according to reason and justice. This stress on practice, characteristic of classical political thought, would certainly still find modern adherents. For example, according to Fred



Dallmayr, “to the extent that it seeks to render political life intelligible, political theory has to remain attentive to the concrete sufferings and predicaments of people” (2). In much of today’s political philosophy, often referred to as political theory, ideas are not formulated in vain. They are designed to offer us normative guidance on where to proceed and how to have an impact on day-to-day politics and policy making.

The main political theories today comprise a diversity of forms of liberalism, communitarianism, feminism, neo-Thomism, and post-Marxism. Their particular ideas rest on beliefs concerning human nature that have an extra-political, metaphysical character. Having established these foundational beliefs, current political theories attempt to show how political institutions and processes can be derived from them, thus making political life a more rational, just, or desirable form of existence.

Nevertheless, the modern era is not only marked by these new normative theories of politics but also by the decline of political philosophy as normative political theory into ideology. While the former is ultimately motivated by the desire to know reality (and this is related to its impartiality, reflective open-ness, and critical distance), the latter represents a limited, often dogmatic, partisan worldview that is intended to persuade and manipulate political actors. The chief motive behind ideologies is not really to search for truth, but to achieve definite goals. In them, political action overcomes rational investigation. Hence, in a sense, they represent a departure from rationality, one of the key elements of Western civilization.

The prevalence of ideologies in modernity has led some twentieth-century philosophical schools to dismiss the practice-oriented normative theory altogether. In logical positivism, for example, normative ethical and political propositions were deprived of the status of knowledge and were considered to express nothing but the emotional or psychological states of individuals. Under the influence of analytic thought, the main task of political philosophy has become conceptual analysis. In this view, political philosophy has little impact on politics. It is no longer the heroic enterprise of the great political thinkers, but instead is reduced to a “disciplinary enterprise.” Its practice consists mainly in the training of oneself and others in the habit of clarifying concepts and examining arguments. The former involves trying to define or characterize political concepts such as justice or state; the latter involves evaluating the way people support their claims.

Surely even the best political ideas could not work if they were not clearly expressed and convincingly presented. Philosophers generally subject every-day convictions and foundational beliefs to careful logical scrutiny, exposing inconsistencies and misconceptions. Already, classical Greek thinkers, particularly Plato, distinguished knowledge of things from a mere opinion of them. To claim the status of knowledge, an opinion must be properly justified. There is thus a place for an analytic linguistic therapy in political philosophy—for clarifying concepts and examining arguments. Political philosophy cannot, however, be reduced to it.



Rather than being a mere “linguistic therapy,” political philosophy is a “political therapy.” Perceiving urgent problems around us, the great political thinkers have always aspired to move from where we are to where we might be. The study of their classic texts has become an established part of the discipline of politics. However, to really benefit from these writings, one should not study them merely for antiquarian interest, as if they were museum pieces. The texts might have emerged as a result of particular historical circumstances in which their authors found themselves, yet they transcend their own times and continue to provide us with questions and answers concerning our own political problems.

The great political thinkers that are introduced in this book regarded political philosophy as normative theory. In the classical tradition of moral and political thought, which was developed by Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and other philosophers of antiquity and continued by Christian thinkers, this normative aspect of theorizing linked politics intrinsically with ethics. It was characteristic of the classics that they emphasized the importance of virtue for political life. The first notable critic of this tradition was Machiavelli, who separated morality and politics, and based his normative theory on considerations of power. As an admirer of the Roman republic, though, he was still to some extent under the influence of classical ideas. It was only Thomas Hobbes, the father of modern political philosophy, who at last completely parted company with them. However, despite of the challenge of modernity, the classical tradition of linking politics to ethics has survived to our times. It has equipped us with perennial ideas that at many turning points in the history of the West have proven to be an inexhaustible source of inspiration and renewal.

The classical tradition reminds us of virtues and their importance for politics. This book begins with Thucydides, often regarded as the father of realism in international relations and ends with Hobbes and Locke, the modern political philosophers, to whom we owe so much, but who have contributed to the weakening of the influence of this tradition.