

**POLITICS AND CROWD-
MORALITY; A
STUDY IN THE
PHILOSOPHY OF POLITICS**

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politics and crowd-morality; a study in the philosophy of politics by Arthur Christensen

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ARTHUR CHRISTENSEN

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CROWD-MORALITY

A STUDY IN THE PHILOSOPHY
OF POLITICS

BY

ARTHUR CHRISTENSEN

TRANSLATED FROM THE DANISH

BY

A. CECIL CURTIS

"Politics is like the sphinx in the fable: it destroys all those
who cannot solve its riddles."—RIVAROL.

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THE translation of this work was completed and revised by Mr Curtis before his death in April 1915, but he was unable to finally pass the proofs for press.

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PREFACE

THE whole world nowadays takes an interest in politics. And yet it is but seldom that we come across an understanding of the essence of politics, of its connection with the life of the mind, and of its significance in development. The political interests of most people are absorbed by concern for the fate of this or that bill, and by the question what this or that politician is doing or intends to do. In face of the great political and social problems, men are satisfied with certain universal tendencies, backed by arguments evolved in the party press and at political meetings. Even people whose interests are not so narrowly confined, find it difficult to take a sober view of their surroundings, because we live in the midst of the hubbub of political life, which allows us no leisure to take a broader view of things, beyond the petty quarrels of the day.

But our epoch is not only the epoch of politics, but also that of anti-politics. A wave of disgust with politics has swept over the world. Men see that popular government has not kept its promises of mountains of gold, that the new

rulers have inherited the traditions of abuse of power with the furniture of the government offices. They are beginning to realise that the fault lies not so much with forms of government and constitutional systems as with human nature itself, and are tempted to give the whole thing up in despair. This standpoint is intelligible; but it is naturally unprofitable. The thought of the possibility of improvement is the only stimulus of human activity, and so long as it is not proved incontrovertibly that human society is *not* capable of improvement, the instinct of social self-preservation bids us start from perfectibility as a fundamental hypothesis.

The first great question, then, is: Why has political morality, within the individual states as much as in the relations of states with one another, remained at so low a level? It is only through the understanding of the phenomena pertinent to this question that we can expect to find the paths which may possibly lead to improvement. In my opinion, the reason for the backward state of political morality is to be found in the fact that politics under absolutist, no less than under aristocratic and under popular forms of government, is founded on the crowds, and the ethical development of the crowds must, in consequence of their peculiar psychical conformation, proceed ever so much more slowly than that of individuals.

The effort to raise the standard of political

morality must therefore be a work of culture whose fruits will ripen but slowly. We must be on our guard against two things in particular—dogmas and illusions. It is true that politics can be constructed out of dogmas and illusions; these, however, do not help to the understanding of the relations of political life. Alert criticism and healthy scepticism—these are what are wanted. Mistrust, not trust, is the prime necessity in politics. The realities in which politics deals are everywhere and at all times veiled. There is a diplomacy of home as well as of foreign politics.

It is easy enough to form a mature opinion about actual problems such as equal manhood suffrage, women's suffrage, national defence, the peace movement, etc.; but it is much more difficult to probe these problems to their depths, to weigh the arguments pro and con and to adopt a standpoint accordingly. I have tried, therefore, in this book to give a lead to those who are trying to contract a habit of independent thought in relation to political problems. I am in hopes that my subjective treatment of what might be called the "Philosophy of Politics" will present itself to my readers as the result of objective observations which are free from party colour.

The possibility of discussing a "Philosophy of Politics" ought by now to have been established, since the much-discussed science of sociology has been supplemented by a succession of investigations

into the psychology of crowds. The French are the pioneers in this province. G. le Bon and G. Tarde, in the nineties of the last century, were the first to introduce by their writings the rational investigation of a question which is the very foundation of an understanding of political phenomena, namely, the interaction between individual and crowd. The psychology of crowds, however, has not been by any means exhaustively handled as yet, and my book will, I hope, succeed in presenting some new ideas on the subject.

The first chapter of the book was published in *Ugens Tilskuer* (11th November 1910). Two essays in *Gads danske Magasin* (October 1908 and July 1910) may be considered studies for the section of the book dealing with "Home Politics." The first chapter, as well as the passage dealing with the formation of political parties, touches closely at several points on an article by F. Hagerup in *Samtiden* for January 1910, an article which did not come to my notice till I had completed the present work.

ARTHUR CHRISTENSEN.

CHARLOTTENLUND.

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