A History of Political Thought
Plato to Marx

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SECOND EDITION

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To
the memory of
Prof. George H. Sabine
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This book now in its second edition was first published in 1999, and since then has seen several reprints. We thought that it is appropriate to revise the book incorporating the topics added in the revised course curriculum. The new edition contains two new chapters on Mary Wollstonecraft and Immanuel Kant and an Appendix on John Rawls, who is credited for reviving the normative classical tradition in political theory in the post-Second World War in the twentieth century. The views of some of recent commentators like Carole Pateman have also been incorporated.

Our students have been greatly helpful in bringing to our notice the portions that need greater clarity and elaboration and we would like to thank them all.

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Political theory is one of the core areas of Political Science. Many argue that the entire edifice of the discipline is based on it as no comprehension of any other area in any meaningful manner is possible without an understanding of political theory. In recent years, along with the traditional emphasis on Western political theory, there has been growing interest in non-European sources of political theory. Confucianism and ancient Indian political tradition with special reference to Kautilya are increasingly getting more recognition. Added to this is a renaissance in political theory in the West as there are more participants in the debate today than at any other time in history. Today nobody talks of the death or decline of political theory though there is a realization, as observed by Walzer, that political theory is some kind of alienated politics since participants in the debate have marginal or perhaps no impact on policy makers or the process of policy making except for the Neo-Conservatives in the United States.

This, however, does not diminish the utility of political theory as an academic discipline, for, it is not confined to dealing with contemporary problems of localized nature, but with a wider canvas since it debates and deliberates the definition of a good social order. As Sabine wrote long ago, political theory develops as part of politics, and just as there is no concluding chapter to politics, so there is no concluding chapter to political theory. With the collapse of totalitarian communism and authoritarianism, both right wing and left wing, the debate regarding good social order is conducted within the paradigms of liberalism and social democracy. The increasing consensus on fundamental issues has made it possible for greater universal recognition of concepts like the rule of law, constitutionalism and civil society.

For comprehending the intricacies of contemporary political theory, the starting point is the Classical tradition. In understanding the hoary tradition of political theory, a dissection and continual reinterpretation of the classics in political theory is an important exercise. Ever since Plato raised the question of “What is justice” in the *Republic*, the debate about the nature and meaning of good and just order continues. The classical tradition that began with Plato ended with Hegel who was the starting point