

Preface

IN my Preface to *The Time of Our Lives*, which undertook to expound the ethics of common sense, I announced my intention to write this companion volume on the common sense of politics. The two books dovetail as reciprocally interdependent parts of a single whole—moral philosophy, of which the part that is ethics deals with the problems of the good life, and the part that is politics deals with the problems of the good society. Distinct in substance by virtue of the quite different problems with which they deal, they are alike in method and approach: both offer themselves as philosophical refinements of common-sense wisdom, and both are normative rather than descriptive—both attempt to prescribe ideals that ought to be pursued and the steps that ought to be taken toward their realization.

In *The Time of Our Lives*, I commented on the decline of moral philosophy in the twentieth century and painstakingly answered objections to discourse that is not embarrassed to affirm and defend the truth of moral principles. So far as the problems of ethics are concerned, some positive efforts have been made in this century to propose solutions that have the look of novelty and that claim to establish normative truths concerning what is good and bad, or right and wrong. In my judgment, all of these efforts have failed: their appearance of novelty derives from ignorance of traditional thought, especially that of antiquity and the Middle Ages; and their claims are vitiated by errors that have been overlooked.

When we turn from ethics by politics, we find that the decay of moral philosophy has gone even further. There have been almost no positive efforts, on the part of leading twentieth-century writers, to address themselves to the problems of politics in a normative manner. Normative political philosophy has almost

ceased to exist and has been supplanted, in the literature and teaching of the subject, by historical studies and descriptive discourse. If I were asked to list twentieth-century writings that, on the basis of clearly formulated normative truths, project political ideals which, reflecting conditions, problems, and trends new in this century, look to the future for their realization, I could name only a few: Bertrand Russell's *Roads to Freedom*, Jacques Maritain's *Man and the State*, Yves Simon's *Philosophy of Democratic Government*, and John Strachey's *Challenge of Democracy*.

If one restricts himself, as I have attempted, to purely normative considerations and to the exposition of principles that have the certainty and universality appropriate to political wisdom, much that usually fills the pages of books on politics will be omitted. The reader should be forewarned that he will not find lengthy discussions of historical or contemporary institutions, nor will he find panaceas, jeremiads, activist programs, political polemics, or shibboleths. For such omissions he will be compensated, I hope, by the fact that this book tries to provide him with the standards for judging political institutions, past and present, and for assessing the conflicting appeals made by the major political movements of the day. It should certainly protect him against the inflammatory rhetoric that exhorts or denounces without defined objectives, defensible standards, factual basis, or rational argument.

If the political theory here set forth is rejected, as I think it will be, by both the old right and the new left, that will confirm my judgment of its soundness. To the professed or unwitting anarchist of the new left, its controlling principles will appear to bespeak reactionary conservatism. To the reactionary conservative of the old right, the ideal of the classless establishment that it projects will appear to be revolutionary, and may even evoke such epithets as "anarchistic" or "communistic." That is, perhaps, as it should be, for the doctrine of this book is both conservative and revolutionary—conservative without being reactionary, and revolutionary without being either anarchistic or communistic.

So far as this book does relate directly to the cross currents of opinion and action on the contemporary political scene, the one tendency or trend that it explicitly challenges is the recently re-

vived anti-political philosophy of anarchism, which underlies or pervades the various revolutionary movements that are united, if by nothing else, at least by their opposition to "the Establishment." My aim is not merely to expose the fallacies and utopian illusions of the anarchist doctrine, but to restore faith in politics—faith in the reform and improvement of our institutions as the only way to perfect society and better the conditions of man on earth. That is why I have thought it appropriate to dedicate this book to my old and good friend, Robert M. Hutchins, who, as administrator and educator, as conservative and reformer, has been the staunchest and ablest defender of that faith in both thought and action.

The Common Sense of Politics has been elaborated from the fourth series of Encyclopaedia Britannica Lectures delivered at the University of Chicago, under the same title, in the spring of 1970. I am once more grateful to the University of Chicago for the auspices it has provided, and to Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc. for its initiation and support of this lectureship at the University.

Like the three earlier books that were developed from Encyclopaedia Britannica Lectures at the University of Chicago, this one has also profited greatly from the collaboration of my colleagues at the Institute for Philosophical Research, of which I am Director. I am especially grateful to Charles Van Doren, Otto Bird, George Ducas, John Van Doren, and Arthur L. H. Rubin for their critical comments on the lecture outlines and on the manuscript of this book at various stages in its development, and for the emendations and improvements that they suggested. I also wish to thank other members of the Institute staff for bibliographical research, for the preparation of the index, and for the typing and editing of the manuscript. I cannot leave unspoken my debt of gratitude to my wife for the lively dialogue, generous patience, and sustaining encouragement that have helped me immeasurably in producing this book and its three predecessors.

Mortimer J. Adler

Chicago
November, 1970