

# ANCIENT GREEK POLITICAL THOUGHT IN PRACTICE

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## CHAPTER I

# *Meaning in context: how to write a history of Greek political thought*

What experience and history teach is this – that people and governments never have learned anything from history, or acted on the principles deduced from it.

(Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Philosophy of History*  
[*Philosophie der Geschichte*], 1822–1831)

[M]an

Equal, unclassed, tribeless, and nationless,  
Exempt from awe, worship, degree, the king  
Over himself.

(Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound*, 1820)

It is not hard to find quotations from major politicians to justify the importance of any study of the history of political thought. ‘The principles of freedom and the topics of government . . . will always be interesting to mankind so long as they shall be connected in Civil Society’ was how George Washington put it (*ap. Rahe 1992: 581; see Thomas Jefferson ap. Rahe 1992: 709*). Modern students are just a little more disenchanted, perhaps, or disabused, yet even the severest critics, whether they realise it or not, are performing an agenda prescribed over 2,400 years ago by Socrates, as reported by his best-known and most brilliant student Plato: ‘The unexamined life is not worth living for a human being’ (*Apology 38A*).

There is, however, a major difficulty or set of major difficulties in writing a ‘history’ – in any continuous or seamless sense – of political thought. Suppose, for example, that we choose (as recommended by John Pocock in 1962) to try to write a history of political discourse, including or even privileging rhetoric in its particular discursive contexts, as opposed to a history of more abstracted political thinking. It would still be questionable whether we really can reconstruct all the mentalities, paradigms, traditions, ideologies and languages of discourse available to any given society in any given context (*Rahe 1992: 12*). Alternatively, suppose that we were to adopt – as I think we should – a strictly contextualised approach that

reads texts in their original dialogue with each other as well as with our own contemporary modes of discourse (Skinner 1969): this mode of ‘Skinnerism’ too has its critics (Rahe 1992: 916 n. 7), both for its choice of particular texts (set well below the level of the loftiest) and for the use it makes of them. Some critics are, of course, never satisfied.

#### EVIDENCE

Touching any history of political thinking or thought – as opposed to more or less high theory – in ancient Greece, we historians are hard up against certain unbudgeable or uncircumventable obstacles. There was no prose ‘literature’ anywhere in Greece before the second half of the sixth century, and none that survives earlier than the second half of the fifth. On the other hand, there is a very considerable compensation for that echoing silence. If we may paraphrase a famous quotation from Shelley and turn it on its head, early Greek poets from Homer (*c.* 700) to Pindar (518–446) were the ‘acknowledged legislators of the word’. They were not just arbiters of elegance and taste but articulators, often enough controversially so, of ideologies and moral values. That was especially true of the Athenian Solon (*fl. c.* 600), who combined poetry and politics in the most practical way imaginable (chapter 4). A very special class of poets is constituted by the writers of Athenian tragedy, an officially recognised competitive vehicle of both religious reflection and mundane entertainment at Athens from at least 500 BCE. Theirs could be an explicitly didactic genre, though necessarily an indirect, analogical medium for commenting on current political affairs or ideas, since with very rare exceptions tragedy’s plots were taken ultimately from the ‘mythical’ past of gods and heroes. (The one great exception is the *Persians* of Aeschylus: see narrative III.)

Formal written prose had been invented and published from *c.* 550 on (Anaximenes, Anaximander of Miletus), but it hits us with a thump only a century later, in the third quarter of the fifth century. Placed side by side, the magnum opus of Herodotus’s *Histories* and the short, sharp shock of the so-called Old Oligarch’s vitriolic pamphlet on the contemporary democratic *Politeia* of the Athenians (appendix II) together illustrate the extreme range of literary expression available both then and to us today. Contemporary Sophists (as defined in chapter 6) wrote and published small-circulation tracts, as well as teaching individually and giving epideictic (show-off display) performances before large audiences. Their writings are mostly lost, however, and it is usually hard to know what to make of the isolated ‘fragments’ attributed by later, often hostile commentators to the likes of

Protagoras and Democritus (contemporaries, and both, intriguingly, from Abdera in northern Greece). Nevertheless, the Old Oligarch, Herodotus, and – above all – Herodotus’s great successor Thucydides are all clearly Sophist-influenced if not necessarily Sophist-inspired.

Some would say that Greek political theory properly so-called was invented by Plato. I would beg to disagree (for the reasons advanced in [chapter 6](#)). Still, allowance has to be made for his towering genius, complemented by that of his greatest pupil, Aristotle ([chapter 8](#)). Thereafter, the extant tradition is again spotty and lacunose, until we reach Cicero and Plutarch ([chapter 10](#)), in, respectively, the last century BCE and the first/second CE. Polybius (c. 200–120), however, in emulation of Thucydides, practised a theoretically self-conscious and politically specific sort of historiography, often enough in sharply critical reaction against predecessors whom he despised. One of those, the third-century Athenian Phylarchus, has a special relevance to the practical utopianism of mid/late-third-century BCE Sparta ([chapter 9](#)).

On top of the more or less literary sources in poetry and narrative prose, we have a number of inscribed prose documents that betray political ideology. At Athens, indeed, there was a recognised connection between published official documentation on stone or bronze and the practice (and theory) of democracy: to take a local as opposed to ‘national’ example, the honorific inscriptions of the fourth century BCE set up in the Athenian demes (constituent wards of the *polis* of Athens) celebrated and sought to encourage further *philotimia* (ambitious civic do-gooding) and other such qualities of the admirable man and citizen.

Besides the various kinds of written evidence, there is also the mute evidence of archaeology. For example, the ideological programmes of great public monuments such as the Parthenon speak louder than, if not always as distinctly as, the words of a written text (Castriota 1992; Buitron-Oliver, 1993; Hedrick and Ober, 1993). Major public statuary too can make a political point: the statues of the ‘Tyrannicides’ at Athens leap to the mind – or would if they had survived (the bronze originals of c. 500 BCE were removed to Susa by Persian Great King Xerxes in 480 and replaced in 477; we have access only to Roman marble copies of the latter). So too does the combined figure by Praxiteles’ father Cephisodotus showing the goddess Wealth holding the infant goddess Peace a century and a quarter later. Humbler political messages could also be inscribed, literally or figuratively, on painted pottery (Neer 2002) or sculpted on funerary or votive reliefs. Town planning too has its political implications. The very layout of a whole town (on the egalitarian ‘gridiron’ plan ascribed to the

fifth-century BCE Milesian theoretician Hippodamus, author of the earliest known political treatise: see [chapter 9](#)), or the inegalitarian design of a private house, or the inclusivity or exclusivity of a city's graveyard – all these urban plans are making explicit or implicit political statements, of a more or less consciously ideological character. I shall attempt to exploit appropriately all these different kinds of evidence.

#### PROBLEMATICS

Of special concern throughout will be the following three problematics. First, the relationship of theory and practice – or *theôria* and *praxis*. Greek *theôria* had at its root the notion of sight, but it branched out to include both what we would call cultural sightseeing (Solon of Athens, Herodotus) and religious pilgrimage (for example, participation in official delegations to the Olympic Games). *Praxis* is the agent noun of a verb *prattein*, which also gave rise to the abstract phrase *ta pragmata*, literally 'doings' and hence 'transactions' or 'business', but also specifically political business, the business of government. To be politically active was 'to have a share in *ta pragmata*' ([chapter 2](#)), and that was considered in Greek antiquity to be a wholly good thing. On the other hand, *neôtera pragmata*, 'too new transactions', were thought unambiguously bad.

Hegel (epigraph) was surely too sceptical or cynical about the impact of political thinking on practice: does not the revolutionary political success of the 'philosophies' of communism and Nazism count, decisively if also sadly, against him? A career such as that of Martin Heidegger, though, whose philosophically motivated political engagement with Nazism ironically blinded him to the real nature of events, does neatly illustrate how complex the relationship between human thought and political reality can be (Rahe 1992: 795 n. 22; see Macintyre 1983). One particular, foundational aspect of that problem will be addressed in [chapter 5](#), dealing with the origins of democracy and democratic thinking: how far may that usefully be classified as a political 'revolution', and, if so, was it in any sense caused by political thought, theory or philosophy?

The second main problematic is the relevance of class (however defined) and/or status to explaining political behaviour. This has its direct correlates in ancient Greek thinking and vocabulary. In ancient Greek culture, from highest to lowest, the habit of binary polarisation – seeing everything in terms of either black or white, with no shades of grey between, or reducing complex social phenomena to two mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive constituents – was deeply engrained (Cartledge 2002). In

socio-political analysis Aristotle was the greatest theoretician of ancient Greek citizen politics; we note that ultimately – in the last analysis – he found most fruitful a binary polar classification of citizens as either rich or poor (though he was well aware that there were both moderately rich and moderately poor citizens). He based this governing taxonomic dichotomy on real life – that is, on the ownership and exploitation of property, including especially land and slaves. Quantitatively translated, that dichotomy could be expressed in another way as the distinction and opposition of the (elite) few and the many or the mass.

A further refinement suggests that the archetypal or underlying model organising classical Greek thought and mentality regarding politics was the polar opposition of slavery and freedom. Nonetheless, within the citizen body, however differently defined from city to city, the relevant polarity was more typically expressed qualitatively, as by Aristotle, as rich against poor. The leading Roman political theorist Cicero (in his *De Officiis*, or *On Duties*) went far further and argued that it was actually the main business of government, as well as the main cause of the origins of states, to protect private property. Many ancient Greeks, sometimes the majority, disagreed violently, however: this was indeed a principal cause of what the Greeks rather puzzlingly at first sight called *stasis* (literally a ‘standing’, so a standing-apart and a standing-against, or civil faction, at the limit civil war).

The third major problematic to be addressed here is the history or histories of ancient Greek democracy: of special concern will be its invention (in the late sixth century BCE at Athens, according to the story told by me in [chapter 5](#)), development and expansion, and extinction, in antiquity, prior to its relatively very recent (nineteenth-century CE) resuscitation and even apotheosis. If there was ever a ‘Greek revolution’ in politics, it was the invention of democracy (and democratic political theory) and its extension, thanks largely to Athens’ role as imperial capital and ‘city hall of Wisdom’ (Plato’s phrase in the *Protagoras*, 337e), such that in Aristotle’s day democracy was one of the two most prevalent constitutional forms in the Hellenic world. Not long after Aristotle’s death, however, democracy had been snuffed out first in its birthplace, then throughout the Greek world, with the rare and isolated lingering exception, such as Rhodes.

Of all the many political systems devised by men since the coming of the state (in the sense of some form of organised political community), democracy has always had the fiercest critics and opponents. Aristotle and Plato were themselves not the least of them, but their mentor in this as in many other ways was Socrates (469–399). It is a conventional view that



Socrates paid too high a price and suffered a gross injustice when he was condemned to death by his own democratic Athens. At any rate, no history of political thought in the ancient Greek world can afford to bypass the trial of Socrates in 399 BCE: as a paradigm of free thought – or political subversion – on public trial, it continues to have the deepest resonance for Western liberal political thought and practice (see [chapter 7](#)). Nevertheless, the major problem of getting at the ‘democratic beliefs of ordinary men’ (Brunt 1993: 389) must always remain.

For Cicero and his contemporary Romans, democracy was no more than an unpleasant memory, and, indeed, until as recently as two centuries ago ‘democracy’ remained a dirty word in refined political society, despite or because of the American and French Revolutions. One of the founding fathers of the United States, Alexander Hamilton (a product of a long and intense engagement with Greek and the classics), wrote: ‘No friend to rational liberty can read without pain and disgust the history of the commonwealths of Greece . . . a constant scene of the alternate tyranny of one part of the people over the other, or of a few usurping demagogues over the whole’ (1781; see Rahe 1992: 585, 953 n. 115). Today, in the sharpest possible contrast, we are all democrats (if not necessarily party-card-carrying Democrats). We may well ask: how come? One – too simple but poignantly accurate – answer is that the term ‘democracy’ has become etiolated to the point of meaninglessness, in contrast to its original, full-blooded sense or senses of ‘people power’.

#### EQUALITY

To conclude this opening methodological chapter, I take as a test case the problem of equality in ancient Greek theory and practice. (It could equally have been freedom: see below.) What Raymond Aron (1972: 87–8) nicely calls ‘the democratic gospel of equality’ has never been more insistently or globally preached than it is today. Equality of what, however, and for whom? Can humans ever be, really, equal, or is the best that can be achieved to treat equally those deemed to be relevantly equal?

All of us, presumably – whether we are ancient historians, political philosophers or just plain citizens – are mainly interested in explaining, or understanding, the ways in which political concepts are negotiated through discourse and implemented in institutional or other forms of practice. Both in ancient and in modern democratic discourse, equality seems to be one of the two most fundamental of these concepts (the other being freedom). Because language is constituted in political action, however, and political

action in turn conditions or determines language, there is a dialectic – or more often a tension – between political theory (or ideology) and political praxis. This is especially likely to be so in an antagonistic, zero-sum political culture such as that (or, rather, those) of classical Greece. It follows that we should expect the meanings of a core concept such as equality to be especially unstable, and to become extraordinarily hotly contested in situations of civil strife or outright civil war. Thucydides' famous account of the civil war on Corcyra (see further below) neither confounds nor disappoints that expectation.

One useful way of approaching this infinitely delicate topic is constructive comparison, both within ancient Greece and between ancient Greece and other political communities. For some scholars, the aim of comparison is to discover the universal. For disciples of the 'Cambridge School' of 'conceptual history', on the contrary, among whom I should count myself, comparison ought rather to emphasise particularity and above all difference (cf., as applied to a different topic, Cartledge 1985). In the present case, at all events, it is hoped that comparison will serve, first, to make us 'clearer about features of our own social and political environment, features whose very familiarity may make it harder for us to bring them into view' (Miller 1990: 427); and, second, to help us specify the peculiarities of ancient Greek constructions of equality by contrasting the set of meanings then potentially available to political actors with the range available today.

In the first place, then, we must ask what kinds of equality were at stake in reference to ancient Greek politics, and within what value system. Negatively, we are not dealing here with the – or a – liberal sense of the equality of individual rights against the State. Even if the Greeks did recognise a notion of individual autonomy, they did not have the fortune to know the separately instituted 'State' in any post-Hobbesian sense, and they did not construe the individual in a modern, oppositional way (see further [chapter 2](#)). Ancient Greek claims to equality can therefore only be said to have, at most, implied an appeal to rights in our sense. Nor is the equality of all humankind in the sight of God at issue, nor, finally, is there any question here of sexual or gender equality.

Positively, there were basically two kinds of meanings of equality in question in classical Greece. First, and most broadly, there was political (or civic) equality. That meant equality of status and respect within the conceptual framework of the Greeks' normative socio-political system of polarised hierarchy. Insofar as the Greek citizen was by definition male not female, free not slave, native insider not stranger or outsider, and adult not a child, he was equal to all other citizens, and deserving

therefore of equal respect, privilege, consideration and treatment. Aristotle advanced a peculiarly strong – that is, peculiarly exclusive and exclusionist – version of this equalitarian notion of citizenship (Cartledge 2002). By implication, Greeks, especially those Greeks who considered themselves democrats, operated with some idea of equality of opportunity. All relevant citizen contestants in the (too often literally) life-and-death race of public, political action ideally should start from behind the same line and run across a more or less level playing field. As Aristotle for one was well aware, however, inequalities of birth (aristocrat against commoner, *agathos* against *kakos*) and, especially, of wealth (rich against poor, *plousios* against *penês*) frequently frustrated the translation of formal equality of citizen status into universal equality of outcome.

Second, there was equality of generalised *eudaimonia*, or ‘well-being’, ‘well-faring’. Strict economic equality ‘was not a serious issue and belonged in the sphere of comic surrealism or abstract theoretical schemes’ (Raaffaub 1996: 155), but the good life, in a sense that was not narrowly materialistic nor mathematically calculated, was theoretically a possible and viable individual option or social goal. Ancient Greece was no exception to the rule, cross-culturally valid, that equality is urged as an idea or ideal against some perceived inequality, particularly in moments of revolutionary upheaval. In 427, for instance, the democratic partisans of Corcyra were loud in their demand for what they styled *isonomia politikê* (Thucydides 3.82.8). Thucydides regarded this as merely a sloganising cloak for the selfish ambitions of a power-mad clique, however, and certainly a phrase amounting to something like ‘constitutional government with the equal sharing of power by all people’ was vague to the point of vapidness – for what in practice was to count as an ‘equal’ sharing of power, and who were the ‘people’ entitled to share it? *Isonomia* indeed might be appropriated just as easily by Greek oligarchs (Thucydides 3.62.3) as by Greek democrats, and Aristotle was not the only oligarch to propound a theory (or ideology) of ‘geometric’ equality according to which some citizens were literally ‘more equal’ than others (Harvey 1965). Even democrats, who more honestly espoused the opposite ‘arithmetical’ conception (every citizen must count strictly for one, and no one for more than one), were prepared to concede that, in practice, equality was not everything (Cartledge and Edge 2009).

The Greeks had a notably rich and flexible appraisive vocabulary of equality. Besides *isotês* and *to ison* (‘the exactly, mathematically equal thing’), they deployed a wide range of compound nouns prefixed by *iso-*. *Iso-nomia* stood for the most general and unspecific principle of political equality; *iso-kratia* and *is-egoria* connoted, respectively, its oligarchic and democratic

constructions. *Iso-timia*, not certainly attested before the third century BCE, captured the social notion of equality of consideration or respect, parity of esteem; and, finally, *iso-moiria* did the same for the economic idea of the equal distribution of some communal goods.

This verbal flexibility in itself improves markedly on our own restricted and ambiguous vocabulary. The Greeks went further still, however. They recognised that equality by itself was not in all circumstances fair or just. So *isotês* was complemented pragmatically by *homoiotês*, especially in prepositional phrases meaning ‘on an equal and fair basis’, acknowledging that the operative criterion governing equality’s implementation is not sameness or identity but similitude or likeness. For Aristotle, a *polis* had to consist of similars (*homoioi*); indeed, according to one of his definitions, the *polis* is ‘a kind of association of similars’ (*Politics* 1328a35–6). A properly Aristotelian golden mean is struck in his formulation that ‘the *polis* aims at being composed, as much as possible, of similars and equals’ (*homoioi kai isoî*, 1295b25–6).

One of the strongest theoretical charges pressed against ancient democracy by its diehard opponents was that it treated unequals equally, a procedure that was manifestly absurd and unjust. At any rate, in democratic Athens from about 460 BCE onwards, all Athenians were indeed considered to be officially equal on principle *qua* citizens. That strong principle of citizen equality was grounded in the claim that the essence of democracy was freedom, so that all Athenian citizens were *ex hypothesi* free – both by birth and by political empowerment, since they were ‘kings over themselves’ (to borrow Shelley’s oxymoronic phrase) and masters of each other’s collective destiny. On the grounds that they were all equally free in this civic sense, they were all equal. In hard material fact, though, Athenian citizens never were, nor were they always treated as if they were, all exactly equal, identical and the same, in all relevant respects. For example, the Athenians resorted pragmatically to the use of election to fill the highest public offices, which favoured the privileged elite few, the seriously rich, rather than employing dogmatically the peculiarly ‘democratic’ mode of sortition (use of the lottery).

Athens was only one of about 1,000 (at any one time) separate, usually radically self-differentiated Greek communities (Hansen 2006). Most of them in Aristotle’s day could be classified straightforwardly as governed by variants of either democratic or oligarchic regimes. The classification of classical Sparta proved problematic, however, as indeed it still does for modern students of the ancient Greek world. The Spartans identified themselves as citizens under several titles, the most relevant of which to the

present discussion is *homoioi*, meaning ‘similar’ or ‘peers’, not (as it is too often translated) ‘equals’. Despite their universal and communally enforced educational system, and their membership of communal dining messes (both, we learn from Aristotle, considered by outsiders to be ‘democratic’ features), Spartans did not recognise or seek to implement *isotês* in any sense other than the ideal enjoyment of an exactly equal lifestyle (*isodiattoi*: Thucydides 1.6.5) – a peculiar local variant of the *eudaimonia* sense of equality (above). Towards all outsiders, Greek and non-Greek, Sparta turned a homogeneous and exclusive face, but, internally, Spartan citizens were self-differentiated according to multiple hierarchies of birth, wealth, age and ‘manly virtue’ (*andragathia*). In political decision-making, too, the Spartan method of open voting by shouting in the formally sovereign Assembly (Thucydides 1.87) implicitly denied the egalitarian one man, one vote principle.

Probably the major cause of these sharp differences between democratic Athens and (on the whole) oligarchic Sparta was the Spartans’ servile underclass of helots (‘captives’), native Greeks enslaved upon and tied to the territory their free ancestors had once owned, who were politically motivated and far more numerous than their masters (Cartledge 2003). There was no place for genuine equality in the state of ‘order’ (*kosmos*) that Sparta ideally represented itself to embody. Spartans could not afford to practise genuine egalitarianism, only the pseudo-egalitarian ‘geometric’ variety favoured by Athenian oligarchs. This key difference between the *politeiai* – ‘ways of life’ as well as ‘constitutions’, as we shall see – of Sparta and Athens is a suitable point with which to end this opening chapter.

CHAPTER 2

*The Greek invention of the polis, of politics  
and of the political*

[*P*]olis andra didaskei ('a polis teaches a man' [to be a citizen]).  
(Simonides, quoted by Plutarch, *Mor.* 784b [*Should Old Men Govern* 1] = eleg. 15, David Campbell 1991: 517)

**Politics**, n. A strife of interests masquerading as a contest of principles. The conduct of public affairs for private advantage.  
(Ambrose Bierce, *A Devil's Dictionary*, 1911)

THE PRIMACY OF POLITICS?

In my own relatively short lifetime at least two so-called 'Ends' have been widely canvassed – the End of Politics (in the 1950s) and the End of History (in the late 1980s) – not to mention several 'post's (postmodernism, -structuralism, etc.). Is politics really ending, though – or is it rather evolving, possibly out of all recognition? Does the fact (if it is a fact) that hierarchy, certainty, bureaucracy, homogeneity, class affiliation, centralisation and the State are giving way, to some degree, in developed Western polities to market egalitarianism (so-called), uncertainty, diversity, heterogeneity, multiple identity, decentralisation and globalised confusion mean or imply a terminus of politics? Or, rather, does it mean the opposite – that is, more individualism, more democracy (however defined precisely), in the service of a genuinely consensual and free-willed politics? Advances in an undoubtedly democratic sense can most obviously be detected in the politics of, say, Germany, Japan and Italy, especially as compared to their dictatorships or authoritarian regimes of the 1930s. On the other hand, the attempt, however possibly well intentioned, to blitz Iraq into 'democracy' by extra-political means in 2003 has been an unequivocal setback for the 'progress' of democracy on the global scale.

At the other extreme of reception, the capacity of 'politics' to embrace every important issue of collective social life has been questioned by many,

and not only by conservative proponents of elitist theories of democracy. There is a suspicion, on this view, that politics, both as theory and as practice, is a contingent, peculiar and perhaps quite eccentric way of dealing with human predicaments. What the comparative political or social historian can at least try to do (see Golden 1992), however, is compile and evaluate an inventory of major or basic differences. This, it is hoped, will help us to understand a little better both the politics of ancient Greece and our own (modern Western) political institutions, constitutions and culture, and also to grapple intelligently with the politics (in yet another, metaphorical sense) of trying to bring the two into a fruitfully significant relationship.

There has been a debate within ancient history over the ‘primacy of politics’ (Rahe) – over whether or not the political aspect of Greek culture and civilisation is the fundamental, dominant and directional one. According to one modern but Greek-inspired definition of politics and ‘the political’ (Meier), as the public sphere or space of collective debate and decision-taking, it surely was. For the Greeks, the civic space of the political was located centrally and actively (note the directional accusative case) *es meson*, both literally and metaphorically at the heart of the community, which was itself construed as a strong political community of actively participating citizens. The civic *agora* or ‘place of gathering’ and the *akropolis* or ‘high city’ were the twin, symbiotic nodes of ancient Greek political networking.

This has to be qualified in several ways, however, for two main reasons. First, in light of the intrusion of economic, class interests, which may have a political application or expression but yet go deeper than that. Second, because politics does not only take place or is not only about the public sphere: the private sphere can also be a political space, as, for example, when public laws governing legal marriage impact on the ownership and transmission of property and so on the economic basis of society.

It is unquestionably right, however, to emphasise the primacy of politics in an intellectual sense: just as Greek politics presupposed the existence of the peculiar state form known as the *polis*, so the invention of political theory (abstract, theoretical reflection) presupposed practical politics, and, arguably, specifically democratic politics (chapter 6). The *polis* was never the universal Greek state form – many Greeks lived within a political framework known as the *ethnos* (chapter 8); and both before and, especially, after the conquests of Alexander the Great the *polis* was to be variously transcended,

transgressed and superseded. All the same, the *polis* was the core Greek political institution and the source of Greece's most original contribution to Western political theory: its invention.

POLIS: CITY OR STATE?

'So a *polis* was part city, part state' (Hansen 2006: 58). That is to say, it was both a physical, geographical entity – if not necessarily all that urban, by modern standards – and a metaphysical abstraction. It is important to be clear at the outset, however, what sort of a state it was – or, rather, was not. To quote again Mogens Hansen (2006: 149 n. 3; emphasis in original), the nonpareil director of the incomparable Copenhagen Polis Project over a remarkably fruitful decade, 'A much narrower concept of state is commonly found in jurisprudence and political science: the state is not only a government empowered to enforce a legal system within a territory over a population; it is also an *abstraction*, i.e. a continuous public power over both ruler and ruled, and a community must have a *sovereign* government and must be in possession of *full external sovereignty* in order to be a state.' There was no such narrower-sense state – or State – in ancient Greece. The *polis* was, rather, a stateless (not acephalous) community of politically empowered and actively participating citizens (Berent 2004), a citizen state (although admittedly both these English words are latinate, not hellenic, in their etymology . . .).

Therefore, there were no legally entrenched 'rights' (even of the citizen, let alone of man in the abstract), as opposed to the reciprocal powers and duties of citizens as they ruled and were ruled in turn; and especially there were no rights of 'the individual' to be entrenched against a mighty, impersonal and potentially intrusive State. Actually, even 'government' may be a misleading phrase, if it conjures up a notion of an elected government with a specific mandate to rule. Greek citizen bodies selected officials in various ways, but these officials were not 'magistrates' in the strong Roman sense, let alone members of a party with shared ideology and platforms. Rather, Greek citizen bodies ruled themselves turn and turn about, and did so through the vehicle of *nomos*, an ambiguous term that could mean both positive law – i.e. the enactments of duly appointed and empowered organs of government – and custom, including both habitual modes of doing things and self-consciously chosen and valued mores and traditional practices. Politics in an ancient Greek *polis* was thus both institutional



(what we call constitutional) and cultural (a question of civic norms, both public and private, subject to constant negotiation).

#### TERMINOLOGICAL EXACTITUDES

Our political terminology is mostly Greek in its etymology: ‘monarchy’, ‘aristocracy’, ‘oligarchy’, ‘democracy’, to begin with just the most obvious examples, besides ‘politics’ itself and its derivatives. Only ‘republic’, ‘citizen’ and ‘state’ have an alternative, Latin derivation – and a strictly limited application, at best, to ancient Greece. This is not a purely formal, linguistic observation. Politics in one of its many guises is an argument, and arguments about words and their meanings are precisely political arguments, whether we are talking of such academic exercises as *Begriffsgeschichte* (the history of concepts) or the negotiation of terms such as ‘democracy’ or ‘good citizen’ in everyday political practice.

Ideologically, mythically and symbolically, too, it is the Greeks who function as ‘our’ ancestors in this field, and it is they who are credited by sober critics with having discovered or invented politics in the strong sense – that is, communal decision-making in the public sphere on the basis of substantive discussion about issues of principle as well as purely operational matters (Finley 1983; Farrar 1988; Meier 1990). Whether it was in fact the Greeks – rather than the Phoenicians of the Levant, say, or the Etruscans of central Italy – who should be so credited has been questioned. What is unquestionable is that the Greeks’ politics was not ours, theoretically or practically. This is not only or primarily because they operated within a radically different institutional framework, but chiefly because, for both practical and theoretical reasons, they enriched or supplemented politics with – as we would see it – ethics. Their ethics, moreover, comprised radical stipulations, including appeals to notions of nature that are not ours.

For Aristotle, for example, *ta politika* did not mean ‘politics’ in any universally applicable sense, but specifically matters concerning the *polis*; and the *polis* as he construed it was a natural organism within which alone could generic man attain his intrinsic natural end of living the good life. That life was defined as one of political but above all of moral and philosophical activity, an ideal combination of *praxis* and *theôria*. Aristotle’s construction of politics includes a measure of teleology that was peculiar to his system of thought, but it remains recognisably and distinctively ancient Greek, in that it comports a great deal more than merely a theory of government.

Normally and normatively, the politics studied by modern Western political theory and ‘science’ is an utterly different animal. Today politics tends to be reduced to a question of power, or, more precisely, force, exercised on a national scale, and modern political science is a technical, notionally value-free analysis of the workings of the state in the narrow sense. Greek political thought, by contrast, ‘spen[t] most time trying to make citizens good’ (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1099b13). This difference of scope and aim is underlined in the introduction to Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* (Part I of the bipartite project completed by the *Politics*): ‘A young man is not a fit person to attend lectures on political theory, because he is not versed in the practical business of life from which politics draws its premisses and subject matter’ (1095a).

‘Politics’ today seems to be an artificial and formal affair, not a natural activity, and a lower-order phenomenon to be judged in terms of more fundamental ideas and values. The ancient Greeks’ view could not have been more different, indeed opposite (even if their practice did not always live up to their ideas). Scholars differ considerably, though, over how precisely to characterise ‘the political’ in ancient Greece. One school of thought, exemplified variously by Hannah Arendt (1958) and Sheldon Wolin (2004), seeks to extrude from it every hint or taint of sordid materialism. The political, on this almost Platonically formalist view, was precisely the non-utilitarian. Others, more realistically and accurately, deny any absolute separation of politics and economics. The Thessalians were explicitly praised by Aristotle (*Politics* 1331a30–31b3) for instituting a formal, physical separation between their commercial agora and what they called the ‘free’ – meaning political – agora, but their practice was (regrettably, in his view) exceptional among Greeks.

Another salient distinction between their thought and ours is that, whereas modern political theory uses the imagery of machinery or building construction, ancient political theory spoke in organic terms of shareholding (*methexis*) and rule (*arkhê*) rather than sovereignty or power (*bia, kratos, anankê*). A further issue is the place of religion. The Greek city was a city of gods as well as – indeed, before it was – a city of humankind; everything for an ancient Greek, as the early intellectual Thales is said to have remarked, was ‘full of gods’. Greek religion, moreover, like Roman, was a system ideologically committed to the public, not the private, sphere. The relationship of men and gods was never purely and solely unidirectional, however. Protagoras’s famous dictum, that man was the measure of all things that are *that* they are (or are not), embraced a sophisticated

philosophical restatement of the generally accepted fact that the gods owed their status and prestige to mankind almost as much as men and the city owed their (continued) existence and prosperity to the gods. It was the human city that laid down the limits to be observed in the due recognition of the gods, most obviously through the medium of public sacrifice and communal banqueting, but also through enforcement of its laws on impiety (see especially [chapter 7](#)). In the Greek civic context, therefore, to prescribe an ideal utopia in the form of a perfect theocracy, as Plato did in the *Laws*, was a profoundly unconventional move.

#### REPUBLICAN POLITICS ANCIENT AND MODERN

Republicanism almost by definition believes in the public good, but that means very different things in different republican systems. United States republicanism, for instance, according to which universal rights are attached to a particular regime and republican government is accorded a universal basis, differs crucially from, say, the Italian version, though less so from the French. On the other hand, the seemingly paradoxical claim that '[m]ost governments try to suppress politics' (Crick 1992: 168) is applicable to all modern varieties of republican states, as it is also to difficult-to-classify hybrids such as the constitutional monarchy of the United Kingdom. For modern governments are part and parcel of the State (capital 'S'), an entity of which the ancient Greek world was happily, even blissfully, innocent and ignorant, and that difference is a key element of the explanation of the differences between the politics (including political culture no less than formal political institutions) of the *polis* and that of modern State-centred polities.

Positively, two differences obtrude. Political action in Greece was direct, unmediated, participatory. On the other hand, the category of those entitled to participate was by modern standards very restricted. Neither difference was purely the function of unavoidable material or technological factors; they were the outcome, rather, of deliberate political choice. Hence the emphasis in ancient Greek political theory on self-control, and on the desirability as well as necessity of self-help – as opposed to State intervention – in everyday Greek political practice. Provided that they could control themselves, the citizens can and are entitled to rule others – their own wives and children and other disfranchised residents, no less than outsiders in a physical sense. Failure to control oneself would lead to transgression of the communally defined limits of appropriate behaviour. When accompanied by violence, such transgression was both informally

castigated and formally punished as *hubris* – the ultimate civic crime (Fisher 1992).

Thus the famous texts inscribed on the Temple of Apollo at Delphi – ‘Know yourself’ and ‘Nothing to excess’ – were political precepts in the strongest sense, inscribed at the symbolic centre of Hellenism. They were the community’s metaphors for necessarily decentralised and personal self-policing. More literal self-policing in the form of self-help was a function of the total or partial absence of institutionalised public organs of law enforcement (Nippel 1995). Athens, for example, not only lacked an office of Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP), but possessed only the most rudimentary of law enforcement agencies to see to the practical execution of any judgement handed down in the People’s Court. This institutional weakness was complemented, and to some extent compensated for ideologically, by a stress on the intrinsic value of personal as well as civic autonomy.

Negatively speaking, the statelessness of the *polis* reveals itself by a series of comparable and directly consequential absences, striking by comparison with the modern liberal State community. There was no civil society distinct from a government and its agents; no concept of official public toleration of civil dissent, and so no conscientious objectors to appeal to such a concept (as the trial of Socrates most famously demonstrates: [chapter 7](#)); above all, as noted above, no rights. There are, of course, relative exceptions to the absolute statelessness of the ancient *polis* – there are always exceptions. Its validity as a (Weberian) ideal type, however, is confirmed on the one hand by Sparta, the partial exception in practice, and on the other by Plato’s *Republic* and *Laws*, the total(ising) exceptions in ideal(ising) theory.

Conversely, the peculiarly modern ideals of liberalism, usually represented now under the guise of liberal democracy, and pluralism *are* peculiarly modern because they presuppose or require the existence of the strong, centralising and structurally differentiated State. Liberalism has the older pedigree. It is at least in part, often its most crucial part, the product of an attempt to disengage the State from the enforcement of virtue; as such, its roots can be traced back to humanist struggles with absolutist doctrine and monarchy (Dunn 1993: 29–56). Pluralism holds, roughly, that political freedom depends on a rich mixture of competing, autonomous groups, and on the flourishing of associations relatively independent both of each other and of the State. It was invented early in the last century as a response to claims for the exclusive sovereignty of the increasingly potent State. Competing schools of thought trace different genealogies from antiquity to the

political thought of early modernity, and from there to today, but as usual the confrontation of ancient and more or less modern thinking within the general framework of republicanism has the merit of highlighting and focusing attention on differences (see Nippel 1994a). Two of those are now considered in more detail.

#### PUBLIC AND PRIVATE

Compare and contrast, first, Greece with Rome. The Romans opposed *res publica*, literally ‘the people’s thing’, to *res privata*, but the Greek equivalent of *res publica* was not *to dêmosion*, the public or people’s sphere, or *to koinon* (the commonwealth), but *ta pragmata* (political) affairs or transactions. Would-be revolutionaries in ancient Greece struggled for control of *ta pragmata*, and the Greek equivalent of revolution was *neôtera pragmata*, ‘newer [that is, too new] affairs’. The Greeks’ equivalent of *res privata* was *to idion*, the opposite of which might be either *to koinon* or *to dêmosion*. The private/public distinction, in other words, occupied overlapping but different semantic spaces in Greece and Rome, and in Greece there was no straightforward opposition of the public = the political to the private = the personal or domestic.

To pursue cross-cultural semantics a little further, we may note that in contemporary Anglo-American culture ‘The personal is the political’ can be a counter-cultural, radical, even revolutionary slogan. For the Greeks, however, it would merely have been a banal statement of the obvious. For example, the Athenian volunteer (*ho boulomenos*) prosecutor claimed to be bringing his public lawsuit on behalf of the *koinon*, yet simultaneously claimed to be acting from private and personal motives. To our way of thinking this is a contradiction, but Athenians, lacking the State, lacked also our notions of bureaucratic impersonality and facelessness, and therefore required individual citizens to place their persons on the line in public causes. For them, moreover, there existed no realm of private morality that was on principle not the law’s business. Society, not the individual, was their primary point of collective reference, and individualism did not constitute a rival pole of attraction; indeed, there was no ancient Greek word for ‘individual’ in our (anti-)social sense. Thus the semantic passage from Greek *idiôtês*, a citizen viewed in a private – unofficial or lay – capacity, to English ‘idiot’ starts ultimately from the Greeks’ blurring of the boundary between public and private, and their privileging of public, political, collective space.

## GENDER

In no Greek city were citizen women – that is, the mothers, wives and daughters of citizens – accorded full public political status, and the (hundreds of) societies of classical Greece were both largely sex-segregated and fundamentally gendered. War, for instance, was considered a uniquely masculine prerogative, and the peculiar virtue of pugnacious courage that it demanded was labelled *andreia* (literally ‘manliness’). For mainly economic and cultural reasons, the private domain of the *oikos* (household) could easily be represented as more of a feminine than a masculine space, and the *oikos* understood as being opposed to – rather than simply the basic component of – the *polis*. On the other hand, it would be wrong for us to draw the boundary between the two domains too sharply: for most important political purposes, *oikos* and *polis* are better viewed as inextricably interwoven, as the following illustrations, all involving religion, demonstrate.

The Greek city, as already noted, was a city of gods as well as humans. More accurately, it was a city of goddesses as well as male divinities, and maintaining the right relationships with the divine was thought to require the public collective religious participation of women no less than that of the male citizens; indeed, on occasion it required their exclusive participation in women-only festivals (such as the Thesmophoria).

Second, there was the institution of marriage. In itself this was a purely private arrangement between two *oikoi*, or, rather, their male heads, and the marriage rituals and ceremonies, however publicly visible, were nevertheless legally speaking quite unofficial. On the issue of marriages between citizen households depended the perpetuation and continuity of the citizen body, however. The law therefore stepped in to prescribe and police the boundaries of legitimacy of both offspring and inheritance, positively as well as negatively.

My final illustration is distinctively Athenian. When boys who had been orphaned by the death of their father in battle and raised at public expense came of age, they were paraded in full armour as part of the opening ceremonies of the annual Great or City Dionysia play-festival. Athenian tragic drama was set in mythical time and often in a place other than the city of Athens, but it was enacted in Athenian public political space and time, within the context of a state-sponsored religious festival. One of the central functions of Attic tragedy was to scrutinise critically the community’s most fundamental values, and both the prominence of particular women and

the dominant role played by issues of gender, household and kinship in this quintessentially political form of dramatic contest neatly demonstrate the inseparability of *oikos* and *polis*, at least in democratic Athens (Cartledge 1997b).

#### FREEDOM AND SLAVERY

Freedom, together with equality, constituted the prime political sentiments or slogans of the ancient Greeks, as they are our own. What exactly did political freedom mean for the Greeks, though (see Raafflaub 1985)? Not, remotely, what it means to us. It was, rather, a value of a very different kind, precisely because it was so differently institutionalised, being embedded in societies whose political, social and economic arrangements were irreducibly alien to modern Western ones. A strong hint, at least, of this core value difference comes from a key feature of Aristotle's political philosophising. Slaves, especially those wholly owned human chattels who were accounted as subhuman items of property, were the physically living but socially dead embodiments of the denial of human freedom. Nonetheless, not only did Aristotle advocate a doctrine of natural slavery but he made it central to his entire socio-political project of description, analysis and amelioration. In other words, Aristotle, whose thought we otherwise tend to admire extravagantly, was prepared – or, rather, required by his political-philosophical system – to defend a doctrine of 'natural' slavery (Garnsey 1996; Cartledge 2002: ch. 6).

That in itself is one good reason for arguing that Greek civilisation and culture – as a whole, not just those of particular Greek societies – may properly be regarded as based on, shaped by and determined by slavery. What was it about slaves, though, that made them seem to Aristotle utterly indispensable? It was not their strictly economic function, for, in Aristotle's terms, slaves were necessary not for *poiësis*, economic production, but for *praxis*, living the life of the citizen. To Aristotle, slaves were the basis of the good life in the *polis*, indispensable for enabling free Greek citizens to achieve their full humanity, above all because they provided their masters with the requisite leisure for practising politics and philosophy.

In fact, though, there was more to it even than that: it was not solely a question of slaves' instrumental value. Rather, consideration of a wide range of texts, literary, historical and medical as well as philosophical, indicates that the Greeks' very notion of freedom depended on the antinomy of

slavery: being free for a Greek was precisely *not* being, and not behaving in the allegedly stereotypical manner of, a slave (Cartledge 1993).

#### CONSTITUTIONS

The modern political theorist, preoccupied with the distribution and exercise of power, could not have delayed for so long the discussion of strictly constitutional questions. Greek political theory was not by any means solely about power, however, and *politeia*, the Greek word that we translate as ‘constitution’, both was used (and maybe coined) to denote citizenship and had a wider frame of reference than either our ‘constitution’ or ‘citizenship’. This reflected the fact that the *polis* was imagined as a moral community of active participatory citizens, not as a mere political abstraction. ‘You left me friendless, solitary, without a city (*apolis*), a corpse among the living;’ so the eponymous hero of Sophocles’ *Philoctetes* (line 1018) bewails his isolated fate, in terms instantly familiar to a Greek audience.

*Politeia* thus came to denote both actively participatory citizenship (quite different from the passive possession of the formal privileges of a citizen) and the *polis*’s very life and soul (Bordes 1982). Greek constitutional political theory is first unambiguously visible in Herodotus’s ‘Persian debate’ (chapter 6). Already in Herodotus, indeed, we find the germ of Plato’s fully developed sixfold classification of ‘rule’, whereby each genus has both a ‘good’ specification and its corresponding deviation or corruption (a reminder, if we needed it, that for the Greeks constitutions were moral entities and not merely technocratic devices). Thus rule by one might be the legitimate, hereditary constitutional monarchy of a wise pastor – or the illegitimate despotism of a wicked tyrant; and so forth.

Plato, however, had relatively little interest in practical terrestrial politics, let alone in the comparative sociological taxonomy of political formations. For his star pupil Aristotle, by contrast, the natural scientist with a teleological bent, these were precisely the major preoccupations of his *Politics*, a study based on research into more than 150 separate Greek and non-Greek polities. He was careful, though, to preface the *Politics* with the *Nicomachean Ethics*, less of a moral treatise than the title might lead us to expect, but not altogether dissimilar in general orientation from, say, John Rawls’ influential *A Theory of Justice* (Rawls 1999). In direct and no doubt deliberate opposition to his master, Aristotle liked to begin from and return to what he called the *phainomena* and the *endoxa* – that is, the received and reputable opinions and perceptions entertained by the men of political prudence, the *phronimoi*, whose ability to translate their beliefs into



effective political action depended importantly on the accuracy of their empirically derived knowledge and understanding of ‘affairs’ (*pragmata*). For that method to work, Aristotle had to have been able to convince not only himself but also his readers that his own perceptions and opinions were no less empirically accurate than those of the *phronimoi*.

In his account of actually existing constitutions he was not content, therefore, merely to distinguish Platonically between the ‘good’ versions of rule by some and rule by all, namely aristocracy and polity (a rather confusing application of *politeia* in a specialised constitutional sense), and their respective deviations, oligarchy and democracy. He further distinguished with some pride four subspecies each of both oligarchy and democracy. Similarly, after a partly theoretical discussion of the definitional question ‘Who is a citizen?’, Aristotle conceded somewhat ruefully but with laudable honesty that his preferred definition is more aptly suited to the citizen of a democracy than of an oligarchy. Finally, in place of the idealist *tabula rasa* approach of his mentor, Aristotle preferred to suggest practical ways in which defective arrangements might be brought into closer harmony with his theoretical aims. That explains why the central section of the *Politics* is devoted to the prevention (rather than the cure) of the Greek city’s endemic disease of *stasis*.

#### FACTIONS

Already in the ‘Persian debate’ Herodotus’s ‘Darius’ had warned of the fierce and bloody *staseis* that were apt to erupt in oligarchies, and Herodotus in his own voice had lamented the awfulness of ‘intestine war’, so much worse than war against an external foe (8.3). Thucydides (3.82–3) famously devoted perhaps his most brilliant pages to a single-minded analysis of the phenomenon of *stasis*, which he claimed, with pardonable exaggeration, came during the course of the Atheno-Peloponnesian War to engulf the entire Hellenic world. Aristotle, as we have just seen, took *stasis* seriously enough to make it one of the pivots of his practical political theory of the city. Nor was this merely a preoccupation of historians and philosophers: there is no question but that *stasis* was a widespread, frequent and grave phenomenon in Greece.

Its prevalence can be accounted for positively as well as negatively. Positively, a major source of faction was the contradiction between the notional egalitarianism of the citizen estate, expressed by the term *isonomia* (chapter 1), and the existence of sometimes extreme socio-economic stratification, which expressed itself politically as ‘class struggle on the political

plane' (de Ste. Croix 1983: 278–326). The poor were always with the Greeks, who operated with a very broad definition of poverty: everyone was deemed to be 'poor' except the very rich, at one end of the scale, and the destitute, at the other; political thinkers did, however, occasionally allow for the existence of a few relatively well-off *mesoi*, who fell 'in between' the rich and the poor. The criterion of distinction was leisure: what mattered was whether or not one was sufficiently 'rich' not to have to work at all for one's living. Typically, indeed almost automatically, the relationship of rich and poor citizens was conceived as one of permanent antagonism, which too often took an actively political form.

A further inflaming or exciting factor was the existence of exceptionally charismatic individuals, such as Alcibiades, who considered that they were being denied their due measure of honour and status (*timê*). Politics in the narrow sense of political infighting was construed by the Greeks as a zero-sum game of agonistic competition, and honour, according to Aristotle, was the goal of politics in this sense (de Ste. Croix 1983: 80, 531 n. 30). Athens under the democracy was exceptional in being *stasis*-free for long periods because the *dêmos* did not feel – and, indeed, had no good reason to feel – that it was being deprived by the elite of its fair share of honour. It was the elite rather than the mass which felt its honour to be unduly compromised – hence, in part, the two successful Athenian oligarchic counter-revolutions of 411 and 404 BCE.

From the negative point of view, the Greeks had no formally instituted separation of powers. Whoever ruled – one, some or all – did so legislatively and judicially as well as executively. Sovereignty, insofar as it was an issue or, indeed, a concept, remained blurred, despite modern legalistic attempts to identify a notion of the 'sovereignty' of law (or of the laws) that would supply the motive force for civil obedience. Moreover, since there were no political parties in the modern sense, there could be no concept of a loyal opposition – indeed, no legitimacy of opposition for its own sake. Finally, the already noted absence of State forces of law and order played its contributory role here too.

Various solutions to the problem of *stasis* were proposed. Intellectually the most satisfying was the notion of the *miktê* (sc. *politeia*) or 'mixed constitution', the aim of which was to mediate and mitigate the political class struggle between 'rich' and 'poor' citizens. In its earliest known form, the notion proposed a mixture of persons and powers, a 'pudding' theory. This is alluded to by Thucydides (8.97.2) in the context of his account of the oligarchic counter-revolutions at Athens of 411: he praised the moderately oligarchic 'constitution of the 5,000' for its 'moderate blending in the

interests of both the few [sc. rich] and the many [sc. poor citizens]'. Predictably, however, the fullest exponent of a mixed constitution theory on record was Aristotle, again resorting to the standard dichotomous model of a citizen body divided structurally between the few 'rich' and the mass of the 'poor' (*Pol.* 1308b29–30). Later, in the Hellenistic era, a theoretical system of constitutional checks and balances – a 'seesaw' theory – was first adumbrated by the Greek politician-historian Polybius in his sympathetic analysis of the constitution of Republican Rome, and this was to be developed enthusiastically by Niccolò Machiavelli and Charles Montesquieu among many others (see Nippel 1980).

Not all Greeks, however, were always absolutely against all forms of *stasis*: Solon, the Athenian lawgiver of the early sixth century BCE (chapter 4), was even supposed to have promulgated a law to the effect that every Athenian had to take sides in a time of *stasis* – that is, had to take a stand (one of the several meanings of the term *stasis*). There was a sense, too, in which *stasis* was but the logically extreme form of the division that bound together any Greek citizen body when it made a decision *es meson*; here lay the paradox of *stasis*, as a phenomenon both execrable and yet somehow inevitable, given the framework of the Greek city (Loraux 2002). On the other hand, precisely because of the dangers of a peaceable division turning into an outright civil war, the governing ideal remained *homonoia*: not merely consensus or passive acquiescence in the will or power of the majority, but literally and full-bloodedly 'same-mindedness', absolute and total unanimity.

The contrast between ancient Greek and early-modern European political thinking on faction is as sharp as could be. From Thomas Hobbes to James Madison, faction was construed wholly negatively, in line with the general abhorrence of direct popular participation, as a horrible antique bogey to be exorcised utterly from modern political life. That reactionary tradition was honed and polished with the rise to political prominence in industrialised countries during the nineteenth century of an organised working class. It was not until the conservative virtues of representative democracy had been fully perceived and exploited, and faction institutionalised in the relatively harmless form of political parties, that democracy could be held up once again as a shining ideal. Today, as noted above, we are all notionally democrats of one stripe or another. Nothing could illustrate better the gulf between the political culture of ancient Greece and the modern Western world.