



IDEAS IN CONTEXT

# The Greek Tradition ■ IN Republican Thought



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ERIC NELSON

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## THE GREEK TRADITION IN REPUBLICAN THOUGHT

*The Greek Tradition in Republican Thought* rewrites the standard history of republican political theory in Europe and America. It argues that an important republican tradition, derived from the central texts of Greek moral and political philosophy, emerged in sixteenth-century England and contributed significantly to the ideological framework of both the English Civil Wars and the American Founding. This tradition attached little importance to freedom as “non-dependence” and saw no intrinsic value in political participation. Its central preoccupations were not honor and glory, but happiness (*eudaimonia*) and justice – and it defined the latter, in Plato’s terms, as the rule of the best men. This set of commitments yielded a startling readiness to advocate the corrective redistribution of wealth and even the outright abolition of private property. Dr Nelson offers significant reinterpretations of such central actors in the republican drama as Thomas More, James Harrington, Montesquieu, and Thomas Jefferson, as well as a radical reappraisal of ancient Roman historiography.

*The Greek Tradition in Republican Thought* is a powerful and imaginative piece of intellectual excavation, and will be of great interest to scholars and students of the history of ideas, political theory, early modern history, and American studies.

ERIC NELSON has been a Research Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge and is currently a Junior Fellow in the Society of Fellows, Harvard University. This is his first book.



## IDEAS IN CONTEXT

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# THE GREEK TRADITION IN REPUBLICAN THOUGHT

ERIC NELSON



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*To my parents*



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2002), the Fourth Annual Conference of the International Society for Intellectual History in Sydney, Australia (July 2002), and the Cambridge Graduate Seminar in Political Thought and Intellectual History (October 2000). A substantial portion of the argument was also incorporated into a series of lectures on "The Greek Tradition in Republican Thought," delivered to undergraduates in the University of Cambridge during Michaelmas Term, 2002. I am grateful to all of these audiences for many helpful comments.

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## *Note on conventions*

*Bibliography.* The bibliography lists only those primary and secondary sources on which I have relied in preparing this study. I have not attempted to provide a full, systematic accounting of the massive literature available on each of the subjects I discuss. Anonymous sources are listed by title. Apocryphal classical texts appear under the name of their putative author (e.g. Ps.-Cicero, *Rhetorica ad Herennium*).

*Classical names and titles.* I refer to ancient Greek and Roman authors using the most common English form of their names, even though standard practice is often inconsistent. For example, I speak of Sallust, but also of Valerius Maximus. Greek titles are given in English (e.g. Plato's *Republic*), but all other titles are reproduced in their original languages.

*Dates.* I employ the convention of referring to dates "BCE" (before the common era) and "CE" (of the common era).

*References.* I cite each source fully the first time it is referenced in a given chapter. Thereafter, I provide only the name of the author and an abridged title (e.g. Erasmus, *Adagia*, p. 10). Passages from classical authors are cited according to prevailing practice; for example, I refer to passages from Aristotle's *Politics* using both Bekker's division into pages, columns, and lines, and Schneider's division of the text into chapters and sections (e.g. *Pol.* 1281a22 [III.6]).

*Transcriptions.* When quoting from early-modern vernacular sources, I have tried, wherever possible, to preserve original capitalization, italicization, punctuation, and spelling. However, I normalize the long "s," expand contractions, and change "u" to "v" and "i" to "j" in accordance with contemporary orthography. I use "sic" only in cases where there are clear misprints. I do not, for example, correct Noah Webster's use of the form "hav." When



quoting from early-modern Latin sources I change “u” to “v” and “j” to “i,” expand contractions, and omit diacritical marks. On occasion I change a lower-case initial letter to an upper, or vice versa, in order to accommodate the demands of my own prose.

*Translations.* Wherever possible, I have quoted standard English translations of classical and foreign language sources, and have preferred to reproduce the original texts in the footnotes. On occasion, however, I have modified translations for the sake of accuracy or clarity; where this is done, it is duly noted. Translations of unpublished or untranslated works are my own.



## Introduction

When Cicero observed in *De legibus* that Plato, “the most learned of men and the greatest of all philosophers,” had written a book “on the republic” (*de republica*), he was bearing witness to a quiet revolution.<sup>1</sup> Aristotle had called his master’s dialogue the “Politeia” (Πολιτεία),<sup>2</sup> employing a Greek term which could mean “citizenship,” “constitution,” “government,” or, more generally, “way of life.” Centuries later, Plato’s editor Thrasyllus added the now customary subtitle, “On Justice” (περὶ δικαίου).<sup>3</sup> Cicero himself had called the dialogue “Politeia” earlier in his career, preferring simply to transliterate Plato’s Greek into the Latin alphabet, rather than to search for a Latin analogue.<sup>4</sup> But in this passage from *De legibus* Cicero takes a fateful step; his rendering of “politeia” as “respublica” is not so much translation as authorization. Plato’s dialogue is no longer a mere entertainment for the Roman erudite, a treatise written in Greek by a Greek author about a uniquely Greek political arrangement. It emerges instead as a text about the *respublica*, the constituent unit of Roman political life, and accordingly invites careful scrutiny by theorists interested in discovering the *optimus reipublicae status*, the best state of a republic.<sup>5</sup> With one innocuous gesture, Cicero brands Plato as a republican, ensuring that for the next two millennia important political theorists would derive their view of the “republic” from a Greek philosopher who had never even heard the term.

<sup>1</sup> *De leg.* II.14. Cicero, *De republica, De legibus*, ed. and trans. C. W. Keyes, Loeb Classical Library (Harvard University Press, 1928). “sed, ut vir doctissimus fecit Plato atque idem gravissimus philosophorum omnium, qui princeps de re publica conscripsit idemque separatim de legibus eius, id mihi credo esse faciendum . . .” This passage represents the first extant designation of Plato’s dialogue as the “Republic.”

<sup>2</sup> *Politics* 1261a6 (II.2). Aristotle, *Politics*, ed. and trans. H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library (Harvard University Press, 1932). English translations are taken from this volume.

<sup>3</sup> Literally, “on the just thing.” *Platonis opera*, ed. John Burnet, vol. IV, Oxford Classical Texts (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 327 (*app. crit.*).

<sup>4</sup> See *Ep. Att.* IV.16. Cicero, *Epistulae ad Atticum*, ed. and trans. E. O. Winstedt, vol. I, Loeb Classical Library (Harvard University Press, 1912).

<sup>5</sup> *De leg.* I.15.

Plato's assimilation to the republican tradition will, however, only be regarded as a watershed event if Greek and Roman political theory are seen to offer substantially different perspectives on the nature of the commonwealth. If Plato says much the same thing as Cicero, then his designation as an authority on "republics" should make little practical difference in the history of political thought. While it may seem on the face of it implausible that two men separated from each other by language, culture, and the span of three centuries should emerge with basically identical political theories (even if, as in this case, one has influenced the other), the argument for the fundamental unity of Greek and Roman political thought has recently acquired substantial scholarly support. Straussian scholars have long contended that the central pivot of Western intellectual history is that between the "ancients" and the "moderns," and that, accordingly, the classical authors were in substantial agreement on all essential points.<sup>6</sup> But scholars of "classical republicanism" too have increasingly found themselves committed to a similar conflation of Greece and Rome. After all, if republicanism is "classical" in any meaningful sense, then it must represent a coherent Graeco-Roman inheritance.

The argument that this is the case is chiefly associated with the work of Zera Fink and J. G. A. Pocock. Fink's study *The Classical Republicans*, first published in 1945, described the anti-monarchical authors of the English Civil War and Interregnum as heirs to a tradition of thought, stretching from Aristotle to Cicero, which advocated a "mixed constitution" as the only means of bringing permanence to otherwise transitory political arrangements.<sup>7</sup> Yet Fink's analysis, while path-breaking, neglected to ask whether, within this tradition of thought, there was any unanimity as to the moral and philosophical reasons one might have for preferring a mixed regime. Pocock attempted to address this objection in *The Machiavellian Moment* (1975), his magisterial survey of Florentine and Anglo-American republicanism. While he followed Fink in locating the source of the republican tradition in a defense of mixed constitutions, he explicitly argued that this advocacy of mixed regimes should be regarded as an expression of Aristotelian moral and political philosophy. In his crucial third chapter

<sup>6</sup> A recent statement of this view can be found in Paul A. Rahe, "Situating Machiavelli" in *Renaissance Civic Humanism: Reappraisals and Reflections*, ed. James Hankins (Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 270–308. See also Rahe, *Republics Ancient and Modern: Classical Republicanism and the American Revolution*, vol. 1 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992). Leo Strauss himself set out the best-known formulation of this view in his *Natural Right and History* (University of Chicago Press, 1953), esp. pp. 78, 134–36, 178–82.

<sup>7</sup> Zera S. Fink, *The Classical Republicans: an Essay in the Recovery of a Pattern of Thought in Seventeenth-Century England* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1945). See esp. pp. 1–10.

Pocock defended this thesis by providing a reading of Aristotle's *Politics*: on this account, Aristotle's *polis* fulfills human nature by allowing the exercise of virtue, and is best ordered when each citizen is able to exercise his own particular virtue in its governance.<sup>8</sup> Accordingly, Pocock continues, within Aristotle's sixfold classification of constitutions, "polity" is identified as the best, since, as a "mixture" of the two predominant regimes (i.e. the rule of the few and the rule of the many), it allows all political classes to participate in governance in a fashion commensurate with their natures.

It is at this point that Pocock, like Fink before him, turns to Polybius. A Greek writing for a Roman audience in the second century BCE, Polybius devoted the sixth book of his *Histories* to an analysis of the different possible constitutions and the causes of revolution. He accepts the six-fold classification found in Aristotle, and argues that each pure constitution first degenerates into its corrupt counterpart and then yields another pure constitution in an endless cycle of change and disruption (ἀνακύκλωσις).<sup>9</sup> Although Polybius maintains that revolution is ultimately inevitable, he claims that it can be significantly delayed by the introduction of a mixed regime – one infused with "all the good and distinctive features of the best governments, so that none of the principles should grow unduly and be perverted into its allied evil."<sup>10</sup> In Pocock's analysis, Aristotle's ethical case for the mixed constitution, when wedded to the Polybian proposition that only mixed constitutions protect states from the ravages of continual revolution, yielded the philosophical framework of republican discourse from Cicero to Milton, and from Machiavelli to Harrington.<sup>11</sup>

Although brilliant and daring, this account faces a number of difficulties. An argument in favor of a mixed constitution, for example, need not be Aristotelian; and Pocock's suggestion that *cinquecento* authors such

<sup>8</sup> J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton University Press, 1975), pp. 66–80.

<sup>9</sup> Polybius, *The Histories*, ed. and trans. W. R. Paton, vol. III, Loeb Classical Library (Harvard University Press, 1923), VI.9.

<sup>10</sup> Polybius, *Histories* VI.10.

<sup>11</sup> Jonathan Scott approximates this view when he writes that "English republican moral philosophy has rightly been called classical republicanism in that it owed a particular debt to the moral philosophy of Greek antiquity. Civic activity – the life of the polis – was the only means to achieve man's telos, or end: the life of virtue. . . . It was Aristotle's most important innovation. . . . to speak of the moral necessity of public citizenship, a theme subsequently amplified by Cicero" (p. 318). But, as we shall see, Cicero did not so much amplify this claim as replace it with an entirely different set of claims. Moreover, while the Aristotle of *Politics* I and III might seem to urge civic participation, the Aristotle of *Politics* VII and *Ethics* X can be read quite differently. See Jonathan Scott, *England's Troubles: Seventeenth-Century English Political Instability in European Context* (Cambridge University Press, 2000).

as Machiavelli and Guicciardini were committed to Aristotle's political teleology is difficult to sustain.<sup>12</sup> But perhaps *The Machiavellian Moment's* most serious shortcoming is its assumption that Roman political philosophy was a straightforward off-shoot of the Aristotelian–Polybian synthesis, and that, as a result, early-modern theorists who consulted Aristotle would emerge with an account of political life identical in all important respects to the one they would have found in Cicero or Livy. In other words, Pocock and his followers err in assuming that there is a “republicanism” which is “classical.” The present study, in contrast, assumes that Greek and Roman political theory were substantially different from one another, making it highly unlikely that the induction of Plato and Aristotle into the “republican” canon should have yielded a single, synthetic Graeco-Roman political theory. But what essentially separates Plato from Sallust, Aristotle from Justinian? The hint of an intriguing answer is to be found in an improbable source: Hegel's lectures on the philosophy of world history.

Although admired for their philosophical grandeur, Hegel's lectures have notoriously failed to win the respect of historians. Indeed, it is a commonplace that historiography developed in its recognizably “modern” form, through the writings of Niebuhr and Ranke, largely as a reaction against the kind of historical idealism championed by Hegel (through which, as Nietzsche put it, he arrived at the notion that “the apex and culmination of the world process coincided with his own existence in Berlin”).<sup>13</sup> Much of this censure is justified, but nonetheless Hegel's analysis of the transition

<sup>12</sup> Plato had earlier generated a sixfold typology of constitutions in the *Statesman* (in addition to a somewhat different version in Books VIII and IX of the *Republic*), and praised a mixed constitution in Book III of the *Laws*. In this second text, he went so far as to claim that a mixed constitution was the only “real constitution,” whereas the “pure” ones were only “settlements enslaved to the domination of some component section, each taking its designation from the dominant factor” – and therefore prone to revolution. It is, in fact, this Platonic account of constitutional change, not the Aristotelian one, that Polybius favors. Polybius refers to a “theory of the natural transformations” of states that has been “more elaborately set forth by Plato and certain other philosophers” (παρὰ Πλάτωνα καὶ τισὶν ἑτέροις τῶν φιλοσόφων) (VI.5). For Polybius, the primary model is Plato, not Aristotle. This is because, although Aristotle provides his own sketch of constitutional change in *Politics* 1286b (III.10), in 1316a (V.10) he explicitly rejects Plato's argument that constitutions decay into their degenerate counterparts. He insists, rather, that “all constitutions more often change into the opposite form than into the one near them” (πλεονάκεις γὰρ εἰς τὴν ἐναντίαν μεταβάλλουσι πᾶσαι αἱ πολιτεῖαι ἢ τὴν σύγγενον). As a result, he attacks the view championed by Plato (and later adopted by Polybius), according to which aristocracy changes “to oligarchy, and from this to democracy, and from democracy to tyranny.” Aristotle does, however, offer an account more consistent with Plato's in *Ethics* 1160b (VIII.10). For the divergences between Aristotelian and Polybian ideas about the mixed constitution, see Wilfried Nippel, “Ancient and Modern Republicanism: ‘Mixed Constitution’ and ‘Ephors’” in *The Invention of the Modern Republic*, ed. Biancamaria Fontana (Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 7–10.

<sup>13</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Unfashionable Observations*, trans. R. T. Gray (Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 143.

from the “Greek” to the “Roman World” in *The Philosophy of History* contains a remarkable insight. Hegel sets himself the task of studying “universal history,” the process through which Freedom (*Freiheit*) ultimately realizes itself in the union of universal and particular, the subjective and the objective. This union, for Hegel, occurs finally in the modern state, where each particular individual is conscious both of his subjectivity and the fact that he wills the universal (i.e. the universal is then no longer seen as something “external”). The journey begins in the “Oriental World” (*Die orientalische Welt*), where the subjective (“disposition, Conscience, formal Freedom”) is not yet recognized, and government exists as the arbitrary will of a single man whose persona is assimilated to an all-powerful, external, prescriptive force.<sup>14</sup> In the “Greek World” (*Die griechische Welt*), however, subjectivity begins to make itself felt.

The Greeks are surrounded by a heterogeneous environment which gives them the consciousness of diversity and, as a result, “throws them back upon their inner spirit.”<sup>15</sup> They find their *Geist* awakened by natural stimuli, and they express their subjectivity by acting upon those stimuli (hence Hegel argues that their “Spirit” is not yet truly free, since it requires external stimulation to call it into action).<sup>16</sup> The Greek spirit, then, is “artistic,” in that, like the artist, it expresses its subjectivity in modifying the natural. The Greeks first exert their subjective agency on their bodies, producing what Hegel calls the “subjective work of art,” and then create deities who are “objectively beautiful” (the “objective work of art”). The union of these is the “political work of art” (*Das politische Kunstwerk*), the state conceived of not as an abstract universal as opposed to concrete particulars, but rather as an objectively beautiful whole of which each individual is an organic part: it is “a living, universal Spirit, but which is at the same time the self-conscious Spirit of the individuals composing the community.”<sup>17</sup> The Greeks, for Hegel, were not conscious of an external universal, and, as a result, did not discover particularity (they are “unconscious of particular interests”).<sup>18</sup> It is, in short, in the Greek world “that the advancing Spirit makes *itself* the content of its volition and its knowledge; but in such a way that State, Family, Law, Religion, are at the same time objects aimed at by individuality, while the latter *is* individuality only in virtue of those aims.”<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte*, vol. XII, ed. Karl Heinz Ilting, Karl Brehmer, and Hoo Nam Seelmann; *Vorlesungen: Ausgewählte Nachschriften und Manuskripte* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1996). G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Prometheus Books, 1991), p. III.

<sup>15</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, p. 233.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 250.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 252.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 223.

The transition from the Greek to the “Roman World” (*Die römische Welt*) results from the Greek discovery of reflection and particularity. Indeed, in *The Philosophy of Right*, Hegel interprets Plato’s *Republic* as a response to this advent of individual interest. Plato, he writes, “could only cope with the principle of self-subsistent particularity, which in his day had forced its way into Greek ethical life, by setting up in opposition to it his purely substantial state.”<sup>20</sup> Indeed, Plato “absolutely excluded it [i.e. particularity] from his state, even in its very beginnings in private property and the family, as well as in its more mature form as the subjective will, the choice of a social position, and so forth.” But Plato could not withstand the force of the advancing Spirit, and Greece duly gave way to Rome. In Rome, Hegel argues, the state was at last conceived of as an abstract universal to which individuals owed obedience: “In Rome, then, we find that free universality, that abstract Freedom, which on the one hand sets an abstract state, a political constitution and power, over concrete individuality; on the other side creates a personality in opposition to that universality.”<sup>21</sup> Once the universal is discovered, “personality” (its antithesis) comes along with it, “which gives itself reality in the existence of private property.” *Proprietas* thus becomes the central Roman preoccupation. “The administration of government, and political privileges, receive the character of hallowed private property,”<sup>22</sup> and marriage itself “bore quite the aspect of a mere contract” which made the wife “part of the husband’s property.”<sup>23</sup>

It is a matter of the utmost importance that one of Hegel’s chief examples of the clash between the Greek and Roman spirits is the question of agrarian laws.<sup>24</sup> He writes that in Rome “the plebeians were practically excluded from almost all the landed property, and the object of the Agrarian Laws was to provide lands for them.”<sup>25</sup> These measures “excited during every period very great commotions in Rome,” which Hegel explains in a fascinating passage:

We must here call special attention to the distinction which exists between the Roman, the Greek, and our own circumstances. Our civil society rests on other principles, and in it such measures are not necessary. Spartans and Athenians, who had not arrived at such an abstract idea of the State as was so tenaciously held by the Romans, did not trouble themselves with abstract rights, but simply desired

<sup>20</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right* (*Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*), ed. and trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1942), p. 124.

<sup>21</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, p. 279. <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 295. <sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 286.

<sup>24</sup> Indeed, it is striking that F. R. Christi neglects to discuss the agrarian laws in his analysis of the turn from Greece to Rome in the *Philosophy of History*. See F. R. Christi, “Hegel and Roman Liberalism” in *History of Political Thought* 5 (1984), 281–94.

<sup>25</sup> Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, p. 302.



that the citizens should have the means of subsistence; and they required of the state that it should take care that such should be the case.<sup>26</sup>

For Hegel, in short, the issue of agrarian legislation highlights a basic incommensurability between Greek and Roman values: the Greeks tended to see the *polis* as an organic whole, not an abstract universal against which individual rights could be asserted (and they conceived of principles such as “justice” first and foremost as properties of the whole). The Romans, on the other hand, developed the idea of legal personality, and invested the concept of *proprietas* with immense ideological significance.<sup>27</sup> As a result, on Hegel’s account, opposition to agrarian laws must be regarded as a distinctively Roman phenomenon. In Greece, the charge of “injustice” brought against these laws simply would not arise.

As an attempt at social and economic history, this analysis is not terribly compelling. To state only its most obvious shortcoming, the Greeks were by no means generically incapable of articulating a case against redistributionism; such opposition was widespread throughout the Greek world in the classical period (Lycurgus, after all, had his eye put out by *somebody*).<sup>28</sup> Nor are we likely to be consoled by Hegel’s argument that “if we wish to know what Greece really was, we find the answer in Sophocles and Aristophanes, Thucydides and Plato” because it is in the philosophical counter-culture, rather than the culture itself that “we find the historical expression of what Greek life actually was.”<sup>29</sup> Yet, as a conceptual reflection on the character of the surviving ancient sources, Hegel’s analysis is remarkably astute: the extant Roman historians do indeed bitterly attack the agrarian laws and their sponsors, while the ancient Greek historians of Rome almost uniformly praise them. And, as we shall see, this quarrel over *proprietas* emerges equally strongly from a comparison of the principal Greek and Roman texts of moral and political philosophy.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 303.

<sup>27</sup> Hegel is arguing here against the view of Niebuhr. See Alfred Heuss, *Barthold Georg Niebuhrs wissenschaftliche Anfänge: Untersuchungen und Mitteilungen über die Kopenhagener Manuscripte und zur europäische Tradition der lex agraria (loi agraire)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981).

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, Doyné Dawson, *Cities of the Gods: Communist Utopias in Greek Thought* (Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 99–102; J. W. Jones, *The Law and Legal Theory of the Greeks: an Introduction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), pp. 84–87, 198–200; and Fritz M. Heichelheim, *An Ancient Economic History*, vol. II, trans. Joyce Stevens (Leyden: A. W. Sythoff, 1964), pp. 121–26, 134–53. Heichelheim does, however, argue that, while “levelling” programs in the Greek city-states often met with sharp resistance, the overall culture of the classical Greek *poleis* stressed the subordination of property arrangements to the public good.

<sup>29</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, trans. H. B. Nisbet, with an introduction by Duncan Forbes (Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 146. This passage is from the 1830 version of the lectures.

One of the benefits of taking Hegel's insight seriously is that it sheds a great deal of light on an interpretation of early-modern republicanism that has been gaining momentum in recent years. In 1955, Hans Baron published his controversial study *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*, introducing the English-speaking world to the concept of "civic humanism" (*Bürgerhumanismus*). Although Baron's claim that "civic humanism" burst suddenly on to the scene around the year 1400 as a result of Florentine anxiety about the growing hegemony of the Visconti has been largely discredited, his argument that Italian republicanism rested on a particular interpretation of Roman history has aged more gracefully. Baron noticed that his "civic humanists" uniformly explained the death of Roman virtue as a consequence of the collapse of the Republic. He points out that, while Dante had consigned Brutus and Cassius "into the maws of Lucifer, side by side with Judas Iscariot"<sup>30</sup> in the *Inferno*, the Florentine republicans of the *quattrocento* styled Caesar as a tyrant and drew strength from the recently rediscovered first book of Tacitus' *Historiae*, in which we read that, after Actium, virtue was replaced with fawning subservience.<sup>31</sup> Accordingly, Florentine republicans were committed to arguing that Florence was founded by the Romans when Rome was still a republic. They could then interpret Florentine history as the direct outgrowth of Ciceronian virtue and civic spirit.<sup>32</sup>

Quentin Skinner took Baron's insight as the starting-point for a comprehensive critique of Pocock. The Italian republicans, he argued, did not look to Aristotle for their political principles, but rather to a series of Roman sources which had significantly un-Aristotelian things to say about the principles of political organization. Skinner proceeded to identify a neo-Roman ethical system synthesized out of the *Codex* of Justinian and the works of Cicero, Sallust, Livy, and Tacitus, which provided the framework for the republicanism of the Italian city-states.<sup>33</sup> This neo-Roman account defines

<sup>30</sup> Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance: Civic Humanism and Republican Liberty in an Age of Classicism and Tyranny* (Princeton University Press, 1955), p. 39. See Dante, *Inferno* xxxiv.64–67. "Delli altri due c'hanno il capo di sotto, / quel che pende dal nero ceffo è Bruto / – vedi come si torce! e non fa motto!–; / a l'altro è Cassio che par sì membruto."

<sup>31</sup> *Historiae* I.1. See Tacitus, *The Histories*, ed. C. H. Moore, Loeb Classical Library (Harvard University Press, 1925), p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> Baron, *Early Italian Renaissance*, pp. 49, 103.

<sup>33</sup> See Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. 1 *The Renaissance* (Cambridge University Press, 1978); "Political Philosophy" in *The Cambridge History of Renaissance Philosophy*, ed. Charles B. Schmitt, Quentin Skinner, Eckhard Kessler, and Jill Kraye (Cambridge University Press, 1988); "Machiavelli's *Discorsi* and the Pre-Humanist Origins of Republican Ideas" in *Machiavelli and Republicanism*, ed. Gisela Bock, Quentin Skinner, and Maurizio Viroli (Cambridge University Press, 1990); *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge University Press, 1998); "Classical Liberty and the Coming of the English Civil War" in *Republicanism: a Shared European Heritage*, vol. II, ed. Quentin

liberty as a status of non-domination (to be contrasted with slavery), and exalts it as the source of virtue. It insists that virtue encourages justice (*iustitia*), a quality defined in the Roman *Digest* as the “constant and perpetual aim of giving each person *ius suum*”<sup>34</sup> and interpreted as an imperative to respect private property.<sup>35</sup> For neo-Roman theorists, dedication to justice thus understood allows the cultivation of the common good (*commune bonum*), which produces concord (*concordia*) and peace (*pax*), and enables the state to seek *gloria*.<sup>36</sup> Implicit in all of this is that individuals should reject the contemplative life and embrace the life of civic engagement (*vita activa*), performing their *officia* to their friends and family, promoting the glory of their *civitas* or *patria*, and securing honor for themselves.<sup>37</sup>

Skinner and Martin van Gelderen (Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 9–28; *Visions of Politics*, vol. II *Renaissance Virtues* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), esp. chaps. 2–7, II, 12.

<sup>34</sup> “Iustitia est constans et perpetua voluntas ius suum cuique tribuendi.” *Digest* I.1.10. See also *Institutes* I.1.1. For Ciceronian and Stoic views on property, see Julia Annas, “Cicero on Stoic Moral Philosophy and Private Property” in *Philosophia Togata*, vol. 1: *Essays on Philosophy and Roman Society*, ed. Miriam Griffith and Jonathan Barnes (Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 151–73. For the neo-Roman exaltation of wealth and money-making, see Eugenio Garin, *Italian Humanism [Der italienische Humanismus]: Philosophy and Civic Life in the Renaissance*, trans. Peter Munz (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1965), esp. pp. 43–46. Garin famously placed the *quattrocento* notion that (in Davanzati’s image) “money is to the city what blood is to an individual” at the center of the Renaissance remaking of European culture. See also James Hankins, “Humanism and Modern Political Thought” in *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism*, ed. Jill Kraye (Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 126–27; and Mark Jurdjevic, “Virtue, Commerce, and the Enduring Florentine Moment: Reintegrating Italy into the Atlantic Republican Debate” in *Journal of the History of Ideas* 62 (2001), 721–43. This aspect of neo-Roman ideology also explains Steven Pincus’s observation that many seventeenth-century English republicans were quite comfortable with commercial society. See Steven Pincus, “Neither Machiavellian Moment nor Possessive Individualism: Commercial Society and the Defenders of the English Commonwealth” in *American Historical Review* 103 (1998), 705–36.

<sup>35</sup> Cicero argues in the *De officiis* (I.20) that *iustitia* consists in doing no harm and respecting private property.

<sup>36</sup> Jacob Burckhardt long ago commented on the fundamentally Roman character of the Renaissance preoccupation with glory. In the chapter on “Glory” in his great study of Renaissance culture, he writes: “the Roman authors, who were now zealously studied, are filled and saturated with the concept of fame, and . . . their subject itself – the universal empire of Rome – stood as a permanent ideal before the minds of Italians.” See Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, ed. Peter Murray, trans. S. G. C. Middlemore, with an introduction by Peter Burke (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 104. See also Andrew Fitzmaurice, *Humanism and America: an Intellectual History of English Colonisation*, Ideas in Context (Cambridge University Press, 2003), esp. pp. 1–19, 32–35; Markku Peltonen, *Classical Humanism and Republicanism in English Political Thought: 1570–1640*, Ideas in Context (Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 34ff.; and Skinner, “Political Philosophy,” pp. 413ff.

<sup>37</sup> For a helpful analysis of Roman ideology, see A. A. Long, “Cicero’s Politics in *De Officiis*” in *Justice and Generosity: Studies in Social and Political Philosophy: Proceedings of the Sixth Symposium Hellenisticum*, ed. André Laks and Malcolm Schofield (Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 213–40. Long writes, “What do I mean by Roman ideology? I refer to the system of values expressed by such terms as *virtus*, *dignitas*, *honestas*, *splendor*, *decus* and, above all, *laus* and *gloria*. All of these words signify honour, rank, worth, status. They indicate at the limit what a noble Roman would give his life for. This Roman honour code . . . was a value system demanding both achievement in public life and public recognition of that achievement” (p. 216).

Hegel's chief insight seems to have been that, at the center of the ideological apparatus Skinner describes, is the Roman concept of *proprietas*. A republican ideology without this notion would, he realized, look remarkably different. The present study identifies just such an ideology: a view of republican government, accessible from the principal sources of Greek moral philosophy (and quite distinct from Pocock's participatory brand of Aristotelianism), which provided a viable alternative to neo-Roman ideology throughout the early-modern period. Indeed, now that the ideological underpinnings of the neo-Roman account have been identified, we can see how deeply antagonistic they are to Greek ethics. Although Plato and Aristotle produced widely different accounts of political life, they agreed on several propositions which run directly counter to the neo-Roman view just set out. To begin with, neither Plato nor Aristotle particularly values freedom (ἐλευθερία) as "non-dependence."<sup>38</sup> The freedom they value is the condition of living according to nature, and one of their cardinal assumptions is that most individuals cannot be said to be "free" in this sense unless they depend upon their intellectual and moral superiors (if a man ruled by his passions is left to rule himself, then he is enslaved).<sup>39</sup> Both also take it as axiomatic that the purpose of civic life is not glory – the irrelevant approval of non-experts – but happiness (εὐδαιμονία).<sup>40</sup> In Book v of the *Republic*, Plato states emphatically that "the object on which

<sup>38</sup> The farthest Aristotle goes in praising freedom as "non-dependence" is his claim in *Politics* 1283a15 (iii.7) that while wealthy men [πλούσιοι] and free men [ἐλεύθεροι] "are indispensable for a state's existence" (because, as he explains, a state cannot consist entirely of poor men or of slaves), "justice [δικαιοσύνη] and civic virtue [πολιτική ἀρετή] are indispensable for its good administration [οἰκεῖσθαι κολῶς]" and are, thus, more important (since the state aims at the good life). This tepid endorsement, however, does not approach the Roman and neo-Roman glorification of *libertas*. Aristotle defines "freedom" in this sense as the absence of "slavery" – the condition of being owned by another person, and living as a means rather than an end. But he does not, like the Roman authors, transform this claim into a broader argument against political dependence (i.e. being governed according to somebody else's will). On Aristotle's account, men can be said to be "free" in both monarchies and democracies, so long as they are not actually owned by others; this sort of freedom is therefore totally compatible with political dependence. Indeed, such dependence is often prescribed by nature – we read in *Politics* 1254b5 (1.2) that monarchs rule their subjects in the same way that the intellect rules the appetitive part of the soul. Moreover, Aristotle is clear that even "unfreedom" is to be preferred to living a life that is not according to nature; this conviction accounts in large part for his theory of natural slavery. For an interesting discussion of this issue, see Richard Mulgan, "Liberty in Ancient Greece" in *Conceptions of Liberty in Political Philosophy*, ed. Zbigniew Pelczynski and John Gray (London: The Athlone Press, 1984), pp. 7–26. Skinner also discusses this question in "The Republican Ideal of Political Liberty" in *Machiavelli and Republicanism*, ed. Bock, Skinner, and Virolí, p. 296.

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, Plato, *Republic* 431a (iv), 515c (vii), and *Laws* 860d (ix); see also Aristotle *Ethics* 1110b (iii.1.14), and 1178a (x.7.9).

<sup>40</sup> See Richard Tuck's discussion in *Philosophy and Government: 1572–1651*, Ideas in Context (Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 6–9.

we fixed our eyes in the establishment of our state was . . . the greatest possible happiness [εὐδαιμονία] of the city as a whole,”<sup>41</sup> and in Book IX of the *Laws* he reiterates that the goal of the state is to teach its citizens how to lead a “happy life.”<sup>42</sup> Aristotle agrees, establishing in Book I of the *Nicomachean Ethics* that “happiness . . . is the End at which all actions aim,”<sup>43</sup> and adding in *Politics* VII that it is “the best state [ἄριστην], the one that does well, that is happy [εὐδαίμονα].”<sup>44</sup>

For both Plato and Aristotle, this preference has serious consequences for their evaluation of civic participation. In the *Republic*, Plato argues that, in order to achieve happiness, men must live according to their nature. In order to live this natural life, however, they must be led out of ignorance and brought to the awareness that the sensible world is only a flawed, misleading projection of the true, sublime reality. Plato dramatizes this transition from darkness to light in the Allegory of the Cave from *Republic* VII. After escaping from the world of shadows, the former prisoners turn to “the contemplation of things above” and their souls ascend to the level of intelligible reason, and the idea of the Good.<sup>45</sup> In the *Timaeus*, we learn further that this state of contemplation is actually the human soul’s essential “motion” (κίνησις), and the source of human happiness.<sup>46</sup>

Needless to say, this emphasis on contemplation required Plato to take a very different position on civic participation from the one encountered in the neo-Roman authors. In the case of *Kallipolis*, Plato insists that those who have escaped from the cave and contemplated the world of Forms must become involved in the governance of the city, because a happy city (that is, one governed by the wisdom obtained through contemplation of ultimate reality) must not be ruled “by men who fight one another for shadows and wrangle for office as if that were a great good.”<sup>47</sup> Socrates concedes that this will temporarily undermine the happiness of the illuminated souls, but reminds Glaucon that their goal is the happiness of the whole community – not just that of the guardians. In cities not ruled according to Platonic principles, however, the philosophers should opt instead for contemplation. In Book VI of the *Republic* Plato amplifies this point by having Socrates articulate an eerie prophecy of his own demise: he observes that a philosopher attempting politics in an actual city “would . . . before

<sup>41</sup> *Republic* 420b (iv). English translations from Plato are taken from *The Collected Dialogues, including the Letters*, ed. Edith Hamilton, Huntington Cairns, Bollingen Series 71 (Princeton University Press, 1989).

<sup>42</sup> *Laws* 858d (ix).

<sup>43</sup> *Ethics* 1097a (1.7.8). All translations from Aristotle’s *Ethics* are found in Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. and trans. H. Rackham, rev. edn., Loeb Classical Library (Harvard University Press, 1934).

<sup>44</sup> *Politics* 1323b30 (vii.1). <sup>45</sup> *Republic* 517b (vii). <sup>46</sup> *Timaeus* 90a. <sup>47</sup> *Republic* 520d (vii).

he could in any way benefit his friends or the state, come to an untimely end without doing any good to himself or others.”<sup>48</sup> Socrates concludes, “I say the philosopher remains quiet, minds his own affair,” keeping out of the storm of ignorance that afflicts his countrymen. For Plato, the contemplative life is the truly happy life, and those able to pursue it relinquish that opportunity only under extremely rare circumstances – and never because they confuse public honor with the Good.<sup>49</sup>

Although he emerges with a less despairing analysis than Plato’s, Aristotle’s basic view of these issues is largely consistent with that of his teacher. In Book I of the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle maintains that happiness is achieved when men exercise the virtues particular to their nature. As man’s essential characteristic is his reason, the virtues that lead him to happiness are all to do with reason, and are divided into “intellectual” (διανοητικοί) and “moral” (ἠθικοί) virtues. The moral virtues, we learn, can all be explained as a mean between extremes, and Aristotle argues in Book VI that men rely on “practical wisdom” (φρόνησις), one of the intellectual virtues, to locate the mean in any given situation. The moral virtues are social, and, as a result, Aristotle can make his famous claim in *Politics* I that man is by nature suited for the *polis*. The *polis* allows him to realize his nature.

Thus far, Aristotle’s political theory would seem to be straightforwardly oriented toward civic participation. But the story becomes more complicated when we introduce a second component of intellectual virtue. Aristotle explains that, whereas moral virtue relies on practical wisdom, intellectual virtue also comprehends “theoretical wisdom” (σοφία, with its particular activity θεωρία). In Book X of the *Ethics*, and again in Book VII of the *Politics*, he argues that it is the exercise of this intellectual virtue that is most intrinsic to man’s nature, and that man achieves true happiness (εὐδαιμονία) only when he is left to contemplate the universe and assimilate himself momentarily to the divine. Aristotle makes clear that this life of contemplation (ὁ κατὰ τὸν νοῦν βίος) trumps the civic life (it is, in fact,

<sup>48</sup> *Republic* 496d (vi).

<sup>49</sup> This argument raises an important question: if the contemplative life is the happy life, and the city aims at happiness, how can the city itself lead a contemplative life? The most obvious answer – namely that a happy state is one in which everyone leads a contemplative life – is unavailable to Plato, since he insists that only a select group of citizens is capable of leading this kind of life. Instead, Plato relies on the analogy between man and city: when a man’s soul is in a state of contemplation, it is not the case that every part of his soul contemplates. Rather, the rational element keeps the appetitive and spirited elements under control so that it can pattern the soul on the cosmos. Likewise, a “contemplative” *polis* is one ruled by philosophers (i.e. the rational part of the soul). It continually reorients itself through contemplation of ultimate reality.

the only activity which is a good in itself),<sup>50</sup> thus producing a tension in his overall account. And, although he goes to some lengths in *Politics* VII to explain how a *polis*, like a man, might live a contemplative life,<sup>51</sup> suffice it to say that his view of civic participation remains a deeply anti-Roman one.<sup>52</sup>

But if Greek and neo-Roman ethics diverge on the ends of civic life and the value of civic participation, perhaps their most important point of contention is on the nature of justice. Justice for Plato is not simply giving each person *ius suum* in the Roman sense.<sup>53</sup> As expressed in the *Republic*, Platonic justice (δικαιοσύνη) consists in an arrangement of elements according to nature. The *polis*, like the human soul, is made up of component elements (the rational, the spirited, and the appetitive), and, since it is natural for reason to rule, both the *polis* and the soul achieve justice when their elements are governed by reason. This view of justice as “balance among elements” leads Plato to endorse policies that would straightforwardly violate the Roman principle of justice. He concludes, for example, that because the unrestricted flow of property corrupts citizens and topples the rule of reason, the *polis* must – on grounds of justice – either abolish private property (as in the *Republic*) or sharply restrict its accumulation (as in the *Laws*).<sup>54</sup> Platonic justice is holistic, and is inextricably linked to an overall conception of nature and order.

Aristotle’s theory of justice is more complex, and, conceptually speaking, represents something of a midpoint between the Platonic and Roman notions. In Book V of the *Ethics* Aristotle distinguishes between “universal” and “particular” justice. Universal justice concerns what is lawful, and “is applied to anything that produces and preserves the happiness . . . of the political community.”<sup>55</sup> In this sense, he writes, justice includes all of virtue when oriented toward other human beings. Particular justice, on the other

<sup>50</sup> *Ethics* 1177a (x.7). <sup>51</sup> *Politics* 1325b15–30 (vii.3).

<sup>52</sup> Peltonen describes how Francis Bacon, for example, defended the *vita activa* “against Aristotle,” whom he took to have argued that “the contemplative way of living was the most valuable.” See Peltonen, *Classical Humanism*, p. 141.

<sup>53</sup> In *Republic* I, Plato begins from Simonides’ view that “it is just to give each person those things which are owed to him” (τὸ τὰ ὀφειλόμενα ἑκάστῳ ἀποδιδόναι δίκαιόν ἐστι) (331e) (the translation is my own), but he interprets this imperative in a revolutionary, holistic sense. For Plato, a person’s “due” is his natural place within a rationally balanced, organic whole. As a result, Plato prefers to speak of justice as the natural ordering of elements – not, as in the Roman tradition, the protection of private property and the prevention of bodily harm.

<sup>54</sup> It would be more precise to say that the *Republic* bans private property among the guardians, and forbids extreme wealth and poverty throughout the city (*Republic* 421c [iv]). On this, see Malcolm Schofield, *Saving the City: Philosopher-Kings and Other Classical Paradigms* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 79.

<sup>55</sup> *Ethics* 1129b (v.1).

hand, concerns what is “fair” (τὸ ἵσον), and mandates that each person not take more than his proper share of goods or honor; its opposite is the particular vice of “rapacity” (πλεονεξία). One critic sums up the distinction by noting that “universal justice includes any ethical virtue in so far as it promotes and protects the good of the community, whereas particular justice involves specific sorts of actions affecting the common advantage.”<sup>56</sup> In the subset of particular justice which Aristotle calls “distributive” (ἐν ταῖς διανομοαῖς) (as opposed to “corrective” or “commutative”), the apportioning of property and political office according to desert (κατ’ ἄξιον), we have the forerunner of the Roman standard of giving each person *ius suum*.<sup>57</sup>

But Aristotle makes clear that his theory of justice, like Plato’s, is intimately connected to a claim about nature. For Aristotle, distributive justice in the political sense requires giving each person the role for which his nature suits him. In situations where all citizens have sufficient virtue to participate in governance, and where no single citizen or small group of citizens is supereminently virtuous, justice requires that political authority should be broadly shared (although, even in this case, high political offices should be assigned exclusively to the most excellent men).<sup>58</sup> However, when the virtue of one citizen, or that of a small group of citizens, towers above the rest, justice demands that the city should be governed as a monarchy or an aristocracy.<sup>59</sup> The principle here is that if the *polis* is to achieve its purpose (i.e. to allow human beings to fulfill their natures), then it must be ordered and governed by those most skilled at “living well” – those most expert at seeking and achieving the Good. People of inferior virtue should be ruled by their moral superiors for their own sakes. Accordingly, in Book I of the *Politics* we learn that there are natural slaves, and that it is just to go to war in order to put these unfortunates in their proper, natural place.<sup>60</sup>

Thus, Aristotle’s idea of distributive justice is not the Roman notion that we should simply respect private property and do no bodily harm (as Cicero puts it in *De officiis* 1.20). It is revealing that, although Aristotle rejects the communism of Plato’s guardians in Book II of the *Politics*, he nonetheless maintains in II.6 that levels of property must be kept proportionate in order to prevent the development of an unjust system in which wealthy,

<sup>56</sup> Fred D. Miller, Jr., *Nature, Justice, and Rights in Aristotle’s Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), p. 70.

<sup>57</sup> See also Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1366b7 (1.9). “ἔστι δὲ δικαιοσύνη μὲν ἀρετὴ δι’ ἣν τὰ αὐτῶν ἕκαστοι ἔχουσι, καὶ ὡς ὁ νόμος.” But compare 1373b (1.13). The Greek text is taken from Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, ed. and trans. John Henry Freese, Loeb Classical Library (Harvard University Press, 1926).

<sup>58</sup> *Politics* 1281b–1282a (III.6). <sup>59</sup> *Politics* 1283b–1284a (III.7–8).

<sup>60</sup> For Aristotle’s theory of natural slavery, see Peter Garnsey, *Ideas of Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), esp. pp. 107–27.



but unvirtuous men are left to rule (1270a).<sup>61</sup> This passage introduces a theme which recurs throughout the *Politics*: political authority should rest with those who most contribute to the good life (i.e. the virtuous), rather than the wealthy, and only a temperate distribution of property secures this end.<sup>62</sup>

By way of summary, then, the Greek view does not particularly concern itself with freedom as “non-dependence,” and it assumes that the purpose of civic life is not glory, but happiness (εὐδαιμονία), defined as the fulfillment that human beings achieve through contemplation. Most important for present purposes, it also exhibits a sharply contrasting theory of justice. Justice (δικαιοσύνη), on this Greek view, is not a matter of giving each person *ius suum* in the Roman sense, but is rather an arrangement of elements that accords with nature. In the case of the state, justice is instantiated by the rule of reason in the persons of the most excellent men; it results in a social existence which teaches citizens virtue. This view of justice as a natural balance among elements in turn leads to a completely anti-Roman endorsement of property regulations. If property is allowed to flow freely among citizens, both Plato and Aristotle reason, extremes of wealth and poverty will inevitably develop. The resulting rich and poor will both be corrupted by their condition: the rich will become effeminate, luxurious, and slothful, while the poor will lose their public spirit.<sup>63</sup> These corrupt souls will no longer defer to the rule of the best men, an “unjust” regime will develop, and virtue will be undermined.<sup>64</sup>

This “Greek view,” as I have set it out, is clearly a minimal and composite summary, designed to highlight a certain orientation shared by Plato and Aristotle. In presenting it, I do not intend to minimize the extent to which medieval, Renaissance, and early-modern thinkers posited deep divisions

<sup>61</sup> See Miller’s excellent summary of Aristotle’s views on property, *Nature*, pp. 327–31.

<sup>62</sup> See esp. 1267b5 (II.4), 1281a5 (III.5), and the analysis of agricultural democracy at 1318b7–1319a19 (VI.4). See also *Rhetoric* 1391a (II.16).

<sup>63</sup> See, for example, Plato, *Republic* 421d–422a (IV), *Laws* 729a (V), 742e–743c (V), 744d–745b (V), and Aristotle, *Politics* 1295b4–1296a22 (IV.9). It should be noted, however, that, despite Plato’s comments on the effects of wealth in *Republic* IV, his “oligarchic man” becomes avaricious, rather than opulent (*Republic* 554a–555a [VIII]). The corrupting effects of wealth were, needless to say, also a deep concern of Roman authors. Yet the surviving Roman authors found themselves constrained by their theory of justice, and could not bring themselves to endorse severe property regulations or redistribution programs.

<sup>64</sup> Aristotle argues that a state exhibiting extreme disparities in wealth may have one of two degenerate destinies: either it will become an “unmixed oligarchy” (ὀλιγαρχία ἄκρατος), or the poor might revolt and establish “extreme democracy” (δημος ἑσχατος) (*Politics* 1296a2 [IV.9]). Both resulting situations will soon develop into tyranny. Indeed, in cases where one citizen or a very small number of citizens possesses inordinate wealth, Aristotle goes so far as to recommend ostracism as a preemptive measure (1284b15–43 [III.13]). See also Plato, *Republic* 550c–553a (VIII).