THE CAMBRIDGE HISTORY OF Greek and Roman Political Thought

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Contents

SOCRATES AND PLATO

Maps

I

Greek political thought: the historical context

PAUL CARTLEDGE

1 Terminology

Much of our political terminology is Greek in etymology: aristocracy, democracy, monarchy, oligarchy, plutocracy, tyranny, to take just the most obvious examples, besides politics itself and its derivatives. Most of the remainder – citizen, constitution, dictatorship, people, republic and state – have an alternative ancient derivation, from the Latin. It is the ancient Greeks, though, who more typically function as 'our' ancestors in the political sphere, ideologically, mythologically and symbolically. It is they, above all, who are soberly credited with having 'discovered' or 'invented' not only city-republican forms but also politics in the strong sense: that is, communal decision-making effected in public after substantive discussion by or before voters deemed relevantly equal, and on issues of principle as well as purely technical, operational matters.[1]

Yet whether it was in fact the Greeks – rather than the Phoenicians, say, or Etruscans[2] – who first discovered or invented politics in this sense, it is unarguable that their politics and ours differ sharply from each other, both theoretically and practically. This is partly, but not only nor primarily, because they mainly operated within the framework of the polis, with a radically different conception of the nature of the citizen, and on a very much smaller and more intimately personal scale (the average polis of the Classical period is thought to have numbered no more than 500 to 2,000 adult male citizens; fifth-century Athens' figure of 40,000 or more was hugely exceptional).[3] The chief source of difference, however, is that for both practical and theoretical reasons they enriched or supplemented politics with practical ethics (as we might put it).

For the Greeks, moreover, the 'civic space' of the political was located

[1] Meier 1980 (1990), Finley 1983, Farrar 1988; cf. Ampolo 1981. For Rome see Part II, especially Ch. 20.
[2] Raaflaub 1993; see also Ch. 2 below.
[3] Nixon and Price 1990. Gawantka 1985, an attempt to dismiss the polis as largely a nineteenth-century invention, has not found critical favour. A variety of perspectives: Hansen 1993b.

centrally. Public affairs were placed *es meson* or *en mesōi* ('towards' or 'in the middle'), both literally and metaphorically at the heart of the community, as a prize to be contested. The community in turn was construed concretely as a strongly inclusive political corporation of actively participating and competing citizens.[4] By comparison, or contrast, the 'politics' studied by modern western political theory, to say nothing of modern political science, is an utterly different animal. It is characteristically seen as a merely instrumental affair, to be evaluated in terms of more fundamental ideas and values. Popular usage often reduces it to amoral manipulation of power, or confines it to the force exercised on a national scale by agencies of the state.[5]

2 The 'political'

The point of opening with this comparison and contrast is to emphasize the gulf between ancient Greek and modern (western) politics and political thought. Scholars differ considerably, though, over how precisely to identify 'the political' in ancient Greece, a difference of opinion that is itself political. One school of thought holds to the formalist, almost Platonic view, that it should be defined strictly as the non-utilitarian.[6] Others, more realistically and accurately, deny any absolute separation of politics and economics and see the relationship between them rather in terms of primacy or priority. For the Greeks, to paraphrase and invert Brecht's dictum, politics (including *die Moral*) came first; then and only then came the 'guzzling' (*das Fressen*).[7] Further enlightenment on the particular nature of the political in Greece may be derived from considering the semantics of the public/private distinction.

First, compare, or rather contrast, Greece and Rome. The Romans set the *res publica*, literally 'the People's matter' hence the republic, in opposition to *res privata*. However, the Greek equivalent of *res publica* was not *to dēmosion* (the sphere of the Demos, the People's or public sphere), but *ta pragmata*, literally 'things' or 'deeds' hence (public or common) 'affairs', 'business'. It was for control of *ta pragmata* that revolutionaries in ancient

[4] Vernant 1985: 238–60; cf. Lévêque and Vidal-Naquet 1964 (1983): 13–24, Nenci 1979.

[5] Ancient politico-moral philosophy: Loizou and Lesser 1990, Euben, Wallach and Ober 1994, Gill 1995: esp. ch. 4. Modern political philosophy/science: Waldron 1989, Goodin and Pettit 1993. However, Richter 1980 and Held 1991 are premised on wider and more apt conceptions; see also Dunn 1992, 1993, 1996. Political culture: Pye 1993.

[6] Arendt 1958, Meier 1980/1990.

[7] Rahe 1992, Schmitt-Pantel 1990; cf. Heller 1991. Note also Springborg 1990, a critique of Rahe.

Greece struggled, and the Greek equivalent of 'revolution' was *neōtera pragmata*, literally 'newer affairs'.[8] Moreover, for the antithesis of *to idion* (their equivalent of *res privata*, but susceptible also of a pejorative construal), the Greeks as readily used *to koinon* ('the commonwealth') as *to dēmosion*.[9] In short, the private/public distinction occupied overlapping but markedly different semantic spaces in Greece and Rome. The Romans' construction of the distinction was closer to ours, but in Greece there could be no straightforward opposition of the public = the political to the private = the personal or domestic.[10]

Hence, whereas for us 'The personal is the political' is a counter-cultural, radical, even revolutionary slogan, for the Greeks it would have been just a banal statement of the obvious, for two main reasons. First, lacking the State (in a sense to be specified in the next section), they lacked also our notions of bureaucratic impersonality and facelessness, and therefore required individual citizens to place their persons on the line both officially and unofficially in the cause of the public good. Secondly, society, not the individual, was for them the primary point of political reference, and individualism did not constitute a serious, let alone a normal, alternative pole of attraction. In fact, there was no ancient Greek word for 'individual' in our anti-social, indeed antipolitical, sense.[11]

Gender introduces a further dimension of comparison and contrast.[12] In no Greek city were women of the citizen estate – that is, the mothers, wives and daughters of (adult male) citizens – accorded full public political status equal to that of the citizens themselves, and the societies of Classical Greece were both largely sex-segregated and fundamentally gendered. War, for example, one of the most basic Greek political activities, was considered a uniquely masculine prerogative, and the peculiar virtue of pugnacious courage that it was deemed to require was tellingly labelled *andreia*, 'manliness' (the Greek equivalent of Roman *virtus*).[13] From a mainly economic and cultural point of view, the private domain of the *oikos* (household) might perhaps be represented as more a feminine than a masculine space, and understood as opposed to the polis, rather than simply its basic component. Yet for most important political purposes *oikos*

[8] Vernant, 'The class struggle' (1965) in Vernant 1980: 1–18; Godelier, 'Politics as a relation of production. Dialogue with Edouard Will' in Godelier 1986: 208–24.
[9] These and other Greek/Roman contrasts: Steinmetz 1969, Nicolet 1975, Müller 1987.
[10] Humphreys 1993c, Sourvinou-Inwood 1995.
[11] Strasburger 1954 (1976). The semantic passage from Greek *idiōtēs*, a citizen viewed in an unofficial capacity, to English 'idiot' begins with the Greeks' privileging of the public space: Rubinstein 1998. See further however Goldhill in Ch. 3, pp. 13–16.
[12] Comparatively: Scott 1986, 1991; cf. Okin 1991.
[13] War: Havelock 1972. *Andreia*: Cartledge 1993a: 70–1.

and polis are better viewed as inextricably interwoven and complementary.[14] Two illustrations must suffice.

Firstly, the Greek city's ability to flourish depended crucially on mortals maintaining the right relationships with the divine, and that was thought to require the public religious participation of women, even as high priests, no less than of the male citizens; the religious calendar of all Greek cities included the festival of the Thesmophoria in honour of Demeter, and that was strictly women-only.[15] Secondly, marriage was in itself a purely private arrangement between two *oikoi*, or rather their male heads, and its rituals and ceremonies, however publicly visible, were legally speaking quite unofficial. Yet on the issue of marriages between citizen households depended the propagation and continuity of the citizen estate. So the law stepped in to prescribe and help police the boundaries of legitimacy of both offspring and inheritance. The Periclean citizenship law of 451/0 in democratic Athens, reimposed in 403 and vigorously enforced thereafter, is but the best-known example of this general Greek rule. Among other consequences, it effectively outlawed the interstate marriages that had been a traditional strategy for elite Athenians.[16]

Both the above illustrations of the essential political interconnectedness of polis and *oikos* involve religion. Here is a further major difference between ancient and modern (western) politics. The Greek city was a city of gods as well as a city of humankind; to an ancient Greek, as Thales is said to have remarked, everything was 'full of gods'.[17] Greek religion, moreover, like Roman, was a system ideologically committed to the public, not the private, sphere.[18] Spatially, the civic *agora*, the human 'place of gathering', and the *akropolis*, the 'high city' where the gods typically had their abode, were the twin, symbiotic nodes of ancient Greek political networking. Nicole Loraux's study of Athens' patron goddess Athena and the Athenian acropolis in the context of the Athenian 'civic imaginary' is thus an exemplary demonstration of the necessary imbrication of religion and the political in an ancient Greek polis.[19]

The polis, however, was no theocracy. Worshipping the gods was for the Greeks *nomizein tous theous*, recognizing them duly by thought, word and deed in fulfilment of *nomos* – convention, custom and practice. Yet it was men who chose which gods to worship, and where, when and

[14] Humphreys 1993b; cf. Musti 1985, Swanson 1992. [15] Bruit 1992.
[16] Harrison 1968, Just 1989, Bruit and Schmitt Pantel 1992: 67–72, Oakley and Sinos 1993.
[17] Bruit and Schmitt Pantel 1992.
[18] Fustel de Coulanges 1864, Burkert 1985; cf. Beard 1994: 732. [19] Loraux 1984 (1993).

how, availing themselves of the fantastic variety of options on offer under a system of almost limitless polytheism; and they did so without benefit of clergy, dogma or sacred scripture. In its other main sense, which corroborates the significantly man-made character of Greek religious belief and practice, *nomos* meant law, as exemplified by the positive Athenian law against impiety of which Socrates fell foul for 'not duly recognizing the gods which the city recognizes'.[20]

In all the explicit Greek political thought or theory we possess, and in a good deal of other informal political literature besides, the rule of the *nomoi* or of plain *Nomos* in the abstract was a given within the framework of the polis. After positive laws began to be written down in imperishable or lasting media (stone, bronze) in the seventh century BC, a distinction came to be drawn between the unchangeable and universal 'unwritten' laws – chiefly religious in import, and all the more binding for not being written down – and the laws that were 'written', that is, locally variable and open to alteration. Yet although it was men or rather citizens who made the positive, written laws, they too were in principle considered somehow above and beyond the reach of their quotidian interpreters.[21]

The etymological root of *nomos* would seem to be a verb meaning 'to distribute'. What was on offer for distribution within the civic space of the polis was *timē*, status, prestige or honour, both abstractly in the form of the entitlement and encouragement to participate, and concretely in the form of political offices (*timai*). Differing social backgrounds and experiences, and different innate abilities, meant that in practice *timē* and *timai* were of course distributed among the citizens unequally – almost by definition so under a regime of aristocracy or oligarchy. But even in formally as well as substantively inegalitarian regimes there is perceptible an underlying, almost subconscious assumption of equality in some, not in every, respect. The polis in this sense may fairly be described as an inherently egalitarian political community. By 500 BC this broadly egalitarian ideal had engendered the concept of *isonomia*: an exactly, mathematically equal distribution of *timē* for those deemed relevantly equal (*isoi*), a precise equality of treatment for all citizens under the current positive laws (*nomoi*). The earliest known appearance of the term is in an elite social context, whereas its characteristic appropriation after 500 was democratic.

[20] Socrates' trial in religio-political context: Garland 1992: 136–51, Vlastos 1994.

[21] *Nomos*: Ostwald 1969. A polis's *nomoi* might be ascribed en bloc to the initiative of one superwise 'lawgiver' (*nomothetēs*), appeal to whose supposed intentions could serve as a conservative force: Hölkeskamp 1992b [1995]; cf. Ch. 2 below.

This is a measure of the essentially contested nature of the concept of equality in the polis, a feature by no means peculiar to ancient Greece, but given extra force by the Greeks' agonistic mentality and competitive social and political systems.[22]

Scarcely less fundamental to the Greeks' idea of the political than gender, household, religion and *nomos* was the value of freedom. Freedom and equality, indeed, were the prime political sentiments or slogans of the ancient Greeks, as they are our own.[23] But ancient Greek political freedom was arguably a value of a very different kind, embedded as it was in societies whose political, social and economic arrangements were irreducibly alien to modern western ones.[24] Aristotle, for example, advocated a strong form of political freedom for citizens, but simultaneously made a doctrine of natural slavery central to his entire sociopolitical project of description, analysis and amelioration. Although the doctrine may have been peculiarly Aristotelian in crucial respects, a wide range of texts, literary, historical and medical as well as philosophical, makes it perfectly clear that the Greeks' very notion of freedom depended essentially on the antinomy of slavery. For a Greek, being free meant precisely not being, and not behaving in the allegedly typical manner of, a slave. It was probably the accessibility and availability of oriental 'barbarians', living under what the Greeks could easily construe as despotic, anti-political regimes, that most decisively influenced the particular ethnocentric construction and emphasis they placed on their own essentially politicized liberty.[25]

The peculiarity of Greek liberty may also be grasped comparatively, through following the lead given by Benjamin Constant, a pioneer liberal thinker and activist, in a famous speech ('The Liberty of the Ancients compared with that of the Moderns', 1819). If the Greeks did indeed 'discover' liberty, the liberty they discovered was for Constant a peculiarly ancient form – political and civic, public, subjecting the individual completely to the authority of the community, and anyhow available only for male full citizens. The liberty of the moderns, Constant insisted, was incommensurably different. It was social rather than political, for women as well as men, and involved private rights (including those of free speech, choice of occupation, and property-disposal) more importantly than public duties. In short, it was little more than freedom *from* politics as the Greeks understood it.[26]

[22] Equality, ancient: Cartledge 1996a; cf. Vlastos, below, n. 35. Equality, modern: Beitz 1991. Contest-system: below, n. 39. [23] Raaflaub 1983, 1985, 1990–1, Patterson 1991, Davis 1995.
[24] Garlan 1988; cf. Patterson 1982. [25] Cartledge 1993a: 118–51, 1993b.
[26] Constant 1819 (1988); cf. Thom 1995: 89–118.

3 The polis

The typical ancient polis was a republic, not a monarchy, nor *a fortiori* an extra- or anti-constitutional tyranny or dictatorship. Republicanism almost definitionally aims to promote what it is pleased to call the public good, but that can mean very different things and may be promoted in very different ways.[27] For example, the paradoxical claim that today 'Most governments try to suppress politics. . . .'[28] exemplifies a peculiarly modern phenomenon, equally applicable to all modern varieties of republican states. An ancient Greek republican would have been puzzled or appalled by this seeming contradiction between theory and practice. The short explanation of this disjunction is that modern governments are part and parcel of the State (capital S), whereas the polis may for all important purposes be classified as a more or less fully stateless political community.[29]

The differences between the politics (including political culture no less than formal political institutions) of the polis and that of modern State-based and State-centred polities may be considered in both positive and negative terms. Positively, and substantively, the chief difference is the direct, unmediated, participatory character of political action in Greece. The citizens were the polis; and there was no distinction or opposition between 'Us', the ordinary citizens, and 'Them', the government or official bureaucracy. Indeed, for Aristotle – whose preferred, actively participatory definition of the citizen was (as he confessed) more aptly suited to the citizen of a democracy than of an oligarchy – the essential difference between the polis and pre-polis or non-polis societies was that the polis was a strong community of adult male citizens with defined honours and obligations. Correspondingly, the category of those who were counted as citizens, and thereby entitled so to participate, was restricted narrowly to free adult males of a certain defined parentage. Their wives and other female relatives were, at best, second-class citizens. Resident foreigners, even if Greek, might qualify at most for inferior metic status. The unfree were by definition deprived of all political and almost all social honour.[30]

Negatively, the (relative) statelessness of the polis reveals itself by a series of absences striking by comparison with the condition of the

[27] Nippel 1994; cf. 1988, Rahe 1992. [28] Crick 1992: 168.
[29] 'State', comparatively: Hall 1986, Skinner 1989. Greek polis as 'stateless': esp. Berent 1994; but not 'acephalous': Rhodes 1995. Ehrenberg 1969 did not address the issue.
[30] Aristotle's citizen: *Pol.* 1274b31–1278b5, esp. 1275b19–20; cf. Cartledge 1993a: 107–11; further section 4, below.

modern, especially the modern liberal, state-community. There was in Greece no Hegelian civil society distinct from a government and its agents; and no formally instituted separation of powers: whoever ruled in a Greek polis (whether one, some or all) did so legislatively and judicially as well as executively.[31] Sovereignty, on the other hand, despite modern legalistic attempts to identify a notion of the 'sovereignty' of Law (or the laws) that would supply the motive force for civil obedience, remained blurred, in so far indeed as it was an issue.[32] There were no political parties in the modern sense, and so no concept of a loyal opposition, no legitimacy of opposition for its own sake. There was no properly constituted police force to maintain public order, or at most a very limited one, as in the case of the publicly owned Scythian slave archers at Athens. Self-help was therefore a necessity, not merely desirable.[33] There was no concept of official public toleration of civil dissent and so (as the trial of Socrates most famously illustrates) no conscientious objectors to appeal to such a concept. Finally, there were no individual, natural rights to life and liberty (as in the French eighteenth-century Rights of Man and Citizen), not even as a metaphor, let alone in the sense of legally entrenched prerogatives (as in the United States Bill of Rights).[34] At most, there might exist an implied assumption of or implicit claim to political entitlement, as in the concept of *isonomia* or equality of status and privilege under the citizen-made laws.[35]

None of these differences between republics ancient and modern was purely a function of unavoidable material or technological factors. Rather, that Greek political theory laid such conspicuous stress on the imperative of self-control was a matter largely of ethical choice. Provided that citizens could control themselves, they were enabled and entitled to rule others (their own wives and children and other disfranchised residents, no less than outsiders in a physical sense). Failure of self-control, on the other hand, would lead to transgression of the communally defined limits of appropriate behaviour, a deviation that when accompanied by violence was informally castigated and formally punished as *hubris* – the ultimate civic crime.[36]

It was from the statelessness of the Greek polis, too, that there stemmed in important measure the material prevalence of and theoretical

[31] Rule/participation: Eder 1991. Hansen 1983 offers an alleged but unpersuasive exception.
[32] Ostwald 1986.
[33] Legitimacy: Finley 1982; cf. MacIntyre 1973–4. Policing: Hunter 1994; cf. Nippel 1995. Self-help: Lintott 1982: 15–17, 21–4, 26–8, Finley 1983: 107 and n. 9.
[34] Ostwald 1969: 113 n. 1; cited by Raaflaub 1983: 539 n. 24. See also Schofield 1995–6.
[35] Vlastos 1953, 1964. [36] Fisher 1992; cf. 1990.

preoccupation with the phenomenon known as *stasis:* civil discord, or outright civil war.[37] *Stasis* had several other contributory sources and causes. A major one was the contradiction between the notional egalitarianism of the citizen estate, expressed by the term *isonomia*, and the existence of exceptionally charismatic individuals denied (so they believed) their due portion of status and honour (*timē*).[38] Politics in the sense of political infighting was typically construed by the Greeks as a zero-sum game of agonistic competition with as its goal the maximization of personal honour. Democratic Athens was quite exceptional in successfully suppressing, or channelling in socially fruitful directions, the public struggle among the elite for political honour over an extended period.[39]

A second and yet more major cause of *stasis*, economic stratification, operated at the deeper level of social structure. The poor were always with the Greeks, whose normative definition of poverty was noticeably broad. Everyone was deemed to be 'poor', except the seriously rich at one end of the scale and the destitute at the other. The criterion of distinction between the rich and the rest was leisure: what counted was whether or not one was obliged to work at all for one's living. Characteristically, the relationship of rich to poor citizens was conceived, by thinkers and activists alike, as one of permanent antagonism, prone to assume an actively political form as 'class struggle on the political plane'.[40] Logically, however, *stasis* was but the most extreme expression of the division that potentially threatened any Greek citizen body when it came together to make decisions competitively *es meson*.

Here indeed lay the paradox of *stasis*, a phenomenon both execrable and yet, given the framework of the Greek city, somehow inevitable and even supportable.[41] It was because of this inherent danger of the division of a split vote turning into the division of civil war that the governing political ideal on both main sides of the political divide was always *homonoia*: not merely consensus, or passive acquiescence in the will or power of the minority or majority, but literally 'same-mindedness', absolute unanimity among the publicly active and politically decisive citizenry. Alternatively, and more theoretically, if not wishfully, Greek political thinkers from at least Thucydides (VIII.97.2) onwards proclaimed the

[37] Lintott 1982, Fuks 1984, Gehrke 1985, Berger 1992, Molyneux 1993.
[38] *Isonomia*: above, n. 35. Charismatic individuals: Finley 'Leaders and followers', in Finley 1985: 3–37.
[39] Zero-sum game: Gouldner 1965; cf. Cartledge 1990. Honour as political goal: Arist. *EN* 1095b19–31; cf. Ste. Croix 1981: 80, 531 n.30. Athens as exception: Cartledge, Millett and von Reden 1998.
[40] Ste. Croix 1981: 278–326; cf. 69–80. Also Fuks 1984, Ober 1989.
[41] Loraux 1987, 1991.

merits of a 'mixed' constitution, one that would ideally offer something substantial to all the contending groups and personalities.[42] If, however, *homonoia* and the mixed constitution proved unachievable, the Greek citizen was expected, and might even be legally required, to fight it out literally to the death with his fellow-citizens.[43]

The contradiction between ancient Greek and early modern (and subsequent) western political thinking on the question of faction is revealingly sharp. From Hobbes to Madison, faction was construed wholly negatively, in line with the general early modern abhorrence of direct popular participation in politics, as a horrible antique bogey to be exorcized utterly from modern, 'progressive' political life. During the nineteenth century, with the rise of an organized working class to political prominence in the industrialized countries, that hostile tradition could not but be honed and polished – or rebutted in the name of revolutionary politics of different sorts. Conversely, the peculiarly modern ideals of pluralism and liberalism, usually represented now under the guise of liberal democracy but increasingly challenged by varieties of communitarianism, presuppose or require the existence of the strong, centralizing and structurally differentiated state.[44]

4 Political theory

The modern political theorist would surely find it odd that the discussion of strictly constitutional questions has been so long delayed. But Greek political theory was never in any case solely about constitutional power. The ancient Greek word that we translate constitution, *politeia*, was used to mean citizenship as well; and it had besides a wider, moral frame of reference than either our 'citizenship' or 'constitution'. Conversely, not some abstraction but men – citizen men – were the polis. *Politeia* thus came to denote both actively participatory citizenship, not just the passive possession of the formal 'rights' of a citizen, and the polis's very life and soul (both metaphors were applied in antiquity).[45] Congruently, whereas modern political theory characteristically employs the imagery of machinery or building-construction, ancient political theory typically thought in organic terms, preferring to speak of sharing (*methexis*) and rule (*archē*) rather than sovereignty or power (*bia*, *kratos*, *anankē*).[46]

[42] Von Fritz 1954, Nippel 1980, 1994. Post-ancient idealization: cf. Blythe 1992.
[43] Raaflaub 1992: 41 and n. 99.
[44] Rawls 1992. This is just one of the reasons why Havelock 1957 is misguided: Brunt 1993: 389–94; so too Hansen 1989.
[45] *Politeia*: Bordes 1982.
[46] Meier 1980 (1990); cf., comparatively, Nippel 1993.

All ancient Greek culture was inherently performative and competitive, and Greek intellectuals reflected the competitiveness of politics in both the manner and the matter of their own internal disputes.[47] Although there is still plenty of room for modern controversy over how long it took for political theory proper to replace mere political thinking, the discovery of constitutional political theory was made in Greece at least a century before Aristotle sat as a pupil of Plato's Academy; it is first unambiguously visible in Herodotus' 'Persian Debate' (III.80–2). By then, some Greek or Greeks had had the stunningly simple intuition that all constitutionally ordered polities must be species subsumable in principle under one of just three genera: rule by one, rule by some, or rule by all. This is a beautiful hypothesis distinguished by its combination of scope and economy, but moving qualitatively beyond the level of political debate visible in Homer in terms of both abstraction and sophistication. In Herodotus, too, we find already the germ of a more complex classification of 'rule', whereby each genus has both a 'good' specification and its corresponding corrupt deviation. Thus rule by one might be the legitimate, hereditary constitutional monarchy of a wise pastor – or the illegitimate despotism of a wicked tyrant; and likewise with the other two genera and their species.[48]

Of the two great fourth-century political theorists, however, Plato seems to have had little interest in the comparative sociological taxonomy of political formations. That was a major preoccupation of his pupil Aristotle's *Politics*, a study based on research into more than 150 of the over 1,000 separate and jealously independent Greek polities situated 'like frogs or ants round a pond' (Plato, *Phaedo* 109b) on the Black Sea and along much of the Mediterranean coastline.[49] In Aristotle's day, the third quarter of the fourth century, democracy and oligarchy were the two most widespread forms of constitution among the Greeks.[50] But before about 500 BC there had been no democracy, anywhere (not only not in the Greek world); and conceivably it was the invention of democracy at Athens that gave the necessary context and impetus for the discovery of political theory – as opposed to mere thinking about politics, which can be traced back in extant Greek literature as far as the second book of Homer's *Iliad*.[51]

Political theory of any sort, properly so called, would have been impossible without politics in the strong sense defined at the start of this

[47] Lloyd 1987: ch. 2.
[48] Among many treatments of the Debate, see e.g. Lloyd 1979: 244–5.
[49] Huxley 1979.
[50] *Pol.* 1269a22–3; Aristotle typically claimed to have identified four species of each (oligarchy: 1292a40–1292b; democracy: 1291b31–1292a39).
[51] Finley 1986: 115, Brock 1991; cf. Euben 1986, Raaflaub 1989.

chapter, and there would have been no such politics without the polis. It is generally agreed that this institution, not certainly unique to Greece but certainly given a peculiarly Greek spin, emerged in the course of the eighth century BC. Almost everyone would also accept that there is an unbridgeable divide, politically, between the world of the Bronze Age Mycenaean palace (c.1500–1100 BC) and the world of the historic Greek polis. But there is no such general agreement as to how and why, precisely, the polis emerged when and where it did, although the principal causal variables were probably land-ownership, warfare and religion.[52]

Contemporary sources for this momentous development are mainly archaeological; the literary sources are largely confined to the poetry of Homer and Hesiod. Controversy over the use of Homer for political reconstruction has centred on whether the epics presuppose, imply or at any rate betray the existence of the polis.[53] The significance of Hesiod's testimony is rather that his is the first extended articulation of the idea of the just city.[54] It took rather longer for the Greek polis to become also, ideally, a city of reason.[55] One crucial step was the dispersal of political power downwards, through the tempering of the might of Hesiod's aristocrats by the empowerment of a hoplite 'middle class', who could afford heavy infantry equipment and had the necessary leisure to make profitable use of it in defence both of their polis and of their own new status within it. They were the backbone of the republican Greece that in the Persian Wars triumphantly repulsed the threat of oriental despotism, and the chief weapon with which radical political change and its accompanying revolution in political theory could be effected.[56]

A contemporary of those Wars, the praise-poet Simonides, observed unselfconsciously and accurately that 'the polis teaches a man' – how, that is, to be a citizen.[57] The dominant tradition of ancient Greek political theory, as opposed to mere political thinking or thought, that took its rise round about the same time was dedicated to the proposition that the Simonidean formula was a necessary but not a sufficient condition of political virtue and excellence.[58]

[52] Runciman 1982, Whitley 1991, Funke 1993.
[53] Scully 1990, e.g., is confident that the polis exists in Homer, whereas what seems to me most signally lacking is the concept of citizenship and so of the 'citizen-state' (Runciman 1990).
[54] Snodgrass 1980: ch. 3. [55] Murray 1990a, 1991a.
[56] Cartledge 1977 (1986): esp. 23–4, Hanson 1995.
[57] Simonides *ap.* Plu. *An seni sit gerenda res.* 1 = eleg. 15, ed. D. A. Campbell (*Greek Lyric* III, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, MA 1991).
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