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Introduction

'Live unknown', said the Epicureans, enjoining abstinence from politics. The Stoics, by contrast, believed that the wise man should go into public life if the circumstances were right, but held notoriously utopian and in the end depoliticized conceptions of the good community. Neither school debated the merits of oligarchy and democracy or tried to work out detailed prescriptions for the best constitution. These intellectual postures have sometimes been seen as appropriate and indeed inevitable responses to the decline of the *polis* in the age of the Hellenistic kingdoms: no *polis*, no political philosophy.

There is of course a grain of truth in this conventional picture of political thought – or its absence – in the Hellenistic period. But the present volume tells a more nuanced and complex story. One reason is that it reflects theorizing undertaken from a Roman perspective. Rome was the greatest of the Mediterranean cities of the time, and Rome was not a monarchy but an independent republic governed according to a distinctive constitutional structure which invited analysis along broadly Aristotelian lines. The principal surviving analyses, albeit fragmentarily preserved, come from the pens of Polybius, writing in the mid-second century BC, and Cicero, a hundred years later. Chapters 1 and 2 discuss the way in which these two authors draw on a wide range of Greek intellectual models to devise accounts of constitutional development (ch. 1) and of the moral and intellectual requirements the statesman – conceived as the magistrate of a republic – must satisfy (ch. 2), which are then applied to the case of Rome. Polybius and Cicero are seen here as thinkers working creatively and without any consciousness of anachronism within the framework of political theory established by a succession of writers from Herodotus and Thucydides to Plato and Aristotle.

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It is unlikely that either Polybius or Cicero actually read Aristotle's *Politics* itself. Their knowledge of its ideas was mediated mostly through Peripatetic authors from the beginning of our period, notably Theophrastus and Dicaearchus, prolific writers of political philosophy. Nothing of their output in this field survives, however, and the most substantial extant specimens of Hellenistic Aristotelianism relevant to our concerns reflect the work of thinkers alive at the end of the period: Antiochus (in Cicero's *De finibus* book v) and Arius Didymus (in the anthology of Stobaeus). Chapter 3 shows how their attempts to accommodate key concepts of Stoic moral theory entail a dilution of the strong Aristotelian conception of the *polis* and its treatment of political activity as inherent in the moral ideal. Classical political theory is here perceived as beating a half-conscious retreat, although it is the retreat of a partial before a universal ethic, not in any obvious way a reflex of the triumph of more remote and absolute over more local and participatory forms of government. Indeed, Arius appears to find in the *household* evidence of a more complete embodiment of the human social impulse than Aristotle allows in the *Politics*, and chapter 4 surveys the extensive treatment in Hellenistic sources of *oikonomia*, management of the household, and the closely related activity of *chrematismos*, making money. Once again, the moral dimensions of the theme, rather than its social and political context, are what preoccupy the writers who deal with it, even if some of the dilemmas they explore indicate an anxiety about the professional status of philosophy in the Hellenistic age.

The antinomian *Republic* of Diogenes the Cynic – and works inspired by it such as Zeno of Citium's book of the same name – was evidently conceived as in some sense a riposte to Plato's *Republic*. Chapter 5 argues that the conception of the *polis* advocated by Diogenes constitutes not so much a theory as a deconstruction of theory. In speaking of the city in the *kosmos* the Cynics intend at once an ideal realization of human social potential, and a metaphor for the individual freedom and self-sufficiency within our present grasp if we will reject convention and follow nature. As the years went by, many Cynics softened their stance in practice if not in 'theory', and in accepting positions at court or themselves engaging in public life accommodated to existing political realities. There is certainly a sense in which 'hard' Cynicism is *anti*-political. Its subversive cast, however, is not anything especially characteristic of the Hellenistic

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period, which in any case Diogenes antedates, but something already familiar in different forms in Aristophanes and in as classical a work of political philosophy as Plato's *Republic* itself.

Part I of the volume thus exhibits a range of ideas which belong fairly and squarely within political philosophy as it was already conceived in the time of Plato and Aristotle, even if the genres employed by the writers in question are developed and in some cases transformed. Yet the essays in Part I already give indications enough that the Cynics and Stoics introduce ethical considerations which threaten the intellectual bases of classical *politike*. The idea of a cosmic city, the concept of natural law, and the interpretation of justice as a principle requiring us to treat the interests of all humans impartially constitute a theoretical matrix which robs the *polis* as traditionally conceived of its moral authority. Where Plato and Aristotle had construed justice in essentially constitutional terms as a principle of distribution of duties or rights among citizens, Stoicism takes it to be a moral imperative governing our conduct as men towards other men as men, regardless of whether they are in a conventional sense fellow-citizens. Philosophical interest has here shifted from the *polis* as locus of good and happiness to the foundations of society more broadly considered. The same is true of Epicureanism, which reverts to older sophistic preoccupations in making justice not a matter of proper allocations within the *polis* once established, but the contract that establishes law and society in the first place.

Part II of the volume turns therefore from political to moral theory. Epicurean and Stoic views of law and justice are the subject of chapters 6 and 7. Chapters 8 and 9 take up other moral ideas which play a key role in the Stoicizing reflections on politics and the cement of society found in Cicero and Seneca. They suggest that although values such as true glory or reciprocal generosity are not concepts centrally deployed in classical political philosophy, they are the ideas which provide these writers with the intellectual tools they need to engage searchingly and constructively with the politics and social practices of their time. Whether the job of political philosophy is primarily critical or ideological, Cicero and Seneca forge in their reception of Hellenistic thought a moral weaponry which enables them to perform it more effectively than would reliance on the explicit models of political theory supplied by Plato and Aristotle. Hence the conclusion of chapter 8: 'The *De officiis*, not the *De re publica*, is Cicero's Republic.'

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PART I

Political philosophy: development and transformation

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CHAPTER I

Polybius' applied political theory

David E. Hahm

Polybius' *History* book VI contains the most complete text of Hellenistic Greek political theory that has survived from antiquity and the only extended example of applied political theory.[1] Polybius, an Achaean statesman turned historian, developed a political theory not to justify a political position, advocate an ideal constitution, or speculate on the nature of law, justice, political authority, or the relation of man to the state, but for the practical purpose of explaining and predicting historical events.

Polybius explicitly tells us that the sixth book of his *History* was intended to serve two functions: (1) to explain Rome's rise to power, specifically, 'how and by what type of constitution nearly the whole of the inhabited world, in less than 53 years, was overpowered and brought under one rule, that of the Romans' (I.1.5; III.1.4, 2.6; VI.2.2–3; cf. VIII.2.3; XXXIX.8.7); and (2) to enable astute readers to make intelligent, informed political decisions in a world dominated by Rome (VI.2.8–10), and, in the particular case of political leaders, to govern in such a way as to upgrade and perfect the constitutions of their several states (III.118.10–12).[2] Polybius' attention was therefore directed toward the nature, effectiveness, and destiny of the Roman constitution (VI.11–57).[3] He deliberately postponed his discussion of this subject to book VI, following his account of the Roman

[1] The standard edition of the text is now Weil and Nicolet (1977). On the fragmentary state of the text and reconstruction of the lost portions (including book VI) from a collection of medieval excerpts see Walbank (1957–79) I 635–6; (1972) 130–1; and Weil and Nicolet (1977) 9–13, 28–35, 57–64.

[2] This function is part of the general function of the study of history, which is 'the study of causes and the choice of what is best in each case' (VI.2.8). On Polybius' utilitarianism in writing history see Walbank (1957–79) I 6–9; (1972) 27–9, 40; Petzold (1969) 3–12; Meissner (1986); and above all Roveri (1964). On the role of prognostication see also Brink and Walbank (1954) 109–10; and Petzold (1977) esp. 273–6, 280–4.

[3] For an analysis of the overall structure of the argument with its focus on the Roman constitution see Eisen (1966) 24–97.

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defeat at Cannae (216 BC), because he believed the Roman constitution was then at its peak (*akmē*, cf. VI.11.1–2) and that the crisis afforded a test that revealed the nature and perfection of the Roman constitution. Polybius found indisputable evidence for this in the fact that Rome came back from total defeat to conquer the world (III.118.8–9; VI.2.4–10; VI.58). It was Polybius' principal goal in book VI to enable his readers to understand this recovery and rise to world domination and to learn how to promote it or to cope with it (depending on one's political affiliation).

To achieve this essentially practical goal Polybius believed that he had to lead his readers to a thorough understanding of the way in which the constitution of a state in general affects the functioning and welfare of the community and the life and behaviour of its citizens. He also had to expound the causes of evolution and change in constitutions and show, specifically, which courses of action tend to improve a constitution and the welfare of the community and which tend to undermine its cohesiveness, strength, and stability. In short, his goal demanded a complete theory of constitutional structures and dynamics. This he presented as a preface to his discussion of the Roman constitution, cast in the form of a general analysis of constitutional types and changes (VI.3–10).

Polybius makes no pretence that his theory is completely original.[4] He openly acknowledges that Plato and other philosophers 'discussed the subject at length and in precise detail' (VI.5.1). The only dissatisfaction he registers is that they have made the subject so complicated and tedious that it is out of the reach of ordinary students of history, who are looking for general patterns that they may use to predict the future (VI.2.8–10, 3.1–4). He characterizes his particular contribution as a condensation and focused application of a theory derived from his predecessors.[5] Modern analyses confirm

[4] Of the large bibliography on Polybius' sources the most useful are Ryffel (1949) 186–228; Brink and Walbank (1954); Cole (1964) and (1967) esp. 80–130, cf. 131–47, 160–6; Walbank (1972) 135–42; and Trompf (1979) esp. 6–15, 18–32, 38–42. For further bibliography see the discussions of the state of the question by Ziegler (1952) 1498–1500 and Musti (1965) 392–5, (1972) 1121–2, as well the references in Cole and Ryffel.

[5] He says he will present only as much as is relevant 'for pragmatic [i.e. practical, political] history and for a generalized conception' (πρὸς τὴν πραγματικὴν ἱστορίαν καὶ τὴν κοινὴν ἐπίνοιαν, VI.5.1–2). On Polybius' conception of pragmatic history and its implications for historiographical method see Petzold (1969) 5–8, cf. 8–20; Pédech (1964) 21–32, cf. 33–53; and Walbank (1972) 56–8, cf. 66–96. κοινὴ ἐπίνοια seems to me to have more point if κοινή is construed in the sense of 'generalized' or 'universal' in its content (*LSJ s.v.* κοινός, V), rather than (as it is usually taken) in the sense of 'commonplace' or 'universally held' (LSJ *s.v.* κοινός, III). This meaning is not recognized for Polybius by Mauersberger (1956–75) 3.1409;

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his assessment.[6] No single source for Polybius' theory has yet been identified. On the contrary, his theory appears to have been drawn from three established Greek traditions: (1) the classification and comparison of the value of various constitutions, traceable back at least to Herodotus and continuing in Plato, Aristotle, and later Peripatetics; (2) the theory of constitutional change, discussed by Plato, Aristotle, and later Peripatetics; and (3) the origin of human society, speculatively reconstructed by many philosophers, including Protagoras, Democritus, Plato, Aristotle, Epicurus, as well as later Peripatetics and Epicureans.[7] Polybius' theory appears to combine elements from each of these traditions and perhaps from several sources within each of them. What is original is his attempt to apply the resulting synthesis as a model to explain history and prognosticate political developments.

The particular theory that Polybius presents, whatever its source or sources, is justly renowned as the prototypical example of the theory of historical recurrence.[8] Polybius describes the origin of society and traces the sequential development of seven constitutional forms, specifically, a primordial monarchy, followed by the six constitutional types regularly cited in the philosophical literature: kingship, tyranny, aristocracy, oligarchy, democracy, and ochlocracy or mob-rule (VI.4.7–10, 5.4–9.9). On Polybius' version of the theory, however, the last constitution, mob-rule, reverts to the first, monarchy, creating what Polybius calls a 'cycle (*anakuklōsis*) of constitutions, nature's pattern of administration (*phuseōs oikonomia*), according to which the constitutional structure develops and changes and returns again to its original state' (VI.9.10).

Polybius' vaunted application of this model to explain and predict historical events has long been recognized as problematic in that it is hard to see how he thought an idealized cycle could explain

but it gives a better sense, not only to this expression, but also to the phrase κοινὴ ἔννοια in II.62.2 and XV.36.4 (cf. also X.27.8, where either sense will fit). See Obbink (1992) on the subject of common conceptions (κοιναὶ ἔννοιαι) and the confusion between general, basic conceptions and universally held conceptions.

6 It is generally assumed that Polybius' immediate source was a now lost Hellenistic work; but some, e.g. von Fritz (1954) 67–68; Cole (1964); Pédech (1964) 317–30; and Trompf (1979) 41–2, believe that Polybius himself was responsible for giving the theory its particular shape. Their hypothesis is rebutted by Walbank (1955) 152.

7 The parallels between Polybius and his predecessors are laid out most clearly by Ryffel (1949) 186–99; Cole (1964); Walbank (1972) 138–42, (1980) 50–1; Trompf (1979) 6–45; and particularly with reference to Democritus and the Sophists by Cole (1967) 80–130.

8 See Trompf (1979) 1–59.

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and predict actual historical events. On the face of it, a theory of recurrence may seem to have advantages for explanation and prediction.[9] If constitutions, in fact, follow a set, cyclical pattern, historical changes can be explained as manifestations of the natural order defined by the pattern. Prediction of the future also becomes easy; one simply determines where a constitution is in the cycle and reads off its future *ad infinitum*. The only problem lies in finding a reason to believe that constitutional changes do indeed follow a set, cyclical pattern. This is no easy matter.

Though Polybius clearly believed his theory described the actual constitutional changes undergone by many Greek cities (VI.3.1–2), he does not cite specific examples to validate his belief and his own history furnishes examples that conflict with it.[10] For Hellenistic Greek cities, if they changed constitutions, usually alternated between two basic forms, monarchy and democracy (or mob-rule).[11] Though Polybius' theory supplies a basis for change from democracy to monarchy (VI.9.5–9), it appears to preclude any change from monarchy to democracy without a number of intervening stages, specifically, aristocracy and oligarchy. This discrepancy between theory and practice has led more than one modern reader to conclude that Polybius' zeal for a simple, concise theory blinded him to its incompatibility with the historical evidence, and resulted in an oversimplified theory that he had to ignore when he came to do history.[12]

Lack of empirical verifiability is, of course, fatal to a theory designed to explain history and facilitate prediction; but the problems with Polybius' theory extend even further, to its theoretical

[9] On the role of recurrence theories in historical prediction see Trompf (1979) 60–1.

[10] Cf. Ryffel (1949) 184 and n. 345. Trompf (1979) 107–8 collects examples of both the changes that conform to Polybius' theory and those that do not. Even in the sixth book, in which the theory was formally presented, Polybius cites the history of Athens and Thebes as conflicting with his theory in that their constitutions developed anomalously (μήτε ... κατὰ λόγον, VI.43.2).

[11] Polybius reports at least two changes from monarchy to democracy: the Achaean League, which went from kingship to tyranny to democracy (II.41.4–5; cf. Ryffel (1949) 184, n. 345; Welwei (1966) 282–9), and Macedonia after the defeat of Perseus, which went to a government that Polybius characterized as democratic (XXXI.2.12; see Walbank (1957–79) III.467). Cole (1964) 454–5 sees this pattern and its application to the Achaean constitution as evidence of a source that advocated a different theory of constitutional change.

[12] E.g. von Fritz (1954) 89–91, 95; Brink and Walbank (1954) 119; Walbank (1980) 55; Momigliano (1966) 11–12 = (1969) 27–8. Petzold (1977) esp. 278–9, 285–6, 288–9, agrees that Polybius' theory is inapplicable to history, but on different grounds, viz. because it is an artificial construct designed only to explain the rationale behind the Roman constitution.

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consistency and coherence. On the conventional interpretation Polybius assumed a succession of seven clearly defined constitutional structures, programmed by nature to follow each other in a predetermined sequence. In outlining the theory (VI.4.7–10) Polybius suggests that this natural order is in some sense analogous to the life-cycle of a living organism. Monarchy is said to be 'formed (or conceived) naturally' (*phusikōs sunistanai*) and kingship to 'be born' (*gennatai*) from it (VI.4.7). Aristocracy and democracy are likewise claimed to 'develop naturally' (*phuetai*, VI.4.8) or 'be born' (*gennatai*, VI.4.9). From repeated references we can conclude that Polybius worked out an elaborate analogy between constitutional change and the life-cycle of a living creature, which he used not only in his description of individual constitutional changes, but to promote his theory as a device for predicting future constitutional changes, including changes in the Roman constitution (VI.4.11–13).

Polybius' description raises serious questions about the nature of his theory. He appears to have identified two different patterns of constitutional change, which some critics have thought to be incompatible: (1) a three-station biological cycle of growth, acme, and decline, and (2) a seven-station fixed sequence of constitutions. Charging Polybius with inconsistencies or attempting to reconcile the two schemes has become a minor industry, as has solving the puzzle of how Polybius thought the natural cycle of simple constitutional changes could either give rise to the Roman mixed constitution or facilitate prediction of its destiny.[13] These apparent theoretical deficiencies have led most modern readers to suspect either that Polybius failed to realize what was required of a theory that would have the capacity to explain history and ground specific predictions, or else that in his zeal to integrate diverse traditions he was content to sacrifice consistency and coherence.[14]

[13] E.g. Ryffel (1949) 186–228; Mioni (1949) 49–78; Brink and Walbank (1954) esp. 108–22; von Fritz (1954) 89–95; Erbse (1957) 269–77; Cole (1964); Eisen (1966) 24–97; Pédech (1966) 308–17; Graeber (1968) 75–92; Aalders (1968) 85–106, (1975) 105–12; Walbank (1972) 133–46, (1980) esp. 50–3, 58; Petzold (1977) 267–73; Trompf (1979) 22–5, 33–7, 44–9, 84; Eisenberger (1982). For earlier bibliography see Ziegler's (1952) 1496–98 discussion of the state of the question.

[14] A notable exception is Petzold (1977), who construes the cycle merely as an explanatory model, not as a description of an actual historical process. Petzold provides a penetrating analysis of the historiographical context of Polybius' political theory, though he does not exploit this context as fully as he might have to reinterpret Polybius' theory of simple constitutional change. It should perhaps be noted here that the attempts to explain the perceived inconsistencies by (incomplete) revision on the part of Polybius have generally been abandoned since Brink and Walbank's (1954) defence of unitary composition. For the

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Polybius' critics are certainly right that a theory such as I have described cannot but fail to fulfil the tasks that Polybius set it. I seriously doubt, however, that this is the way in which Polybius supposed his theory to work.[15] An overlooked clue to his own understanding is the fact that he presented two versions of the cycle of constitutional change: (1) a brief outline (VI.4.7–10), and (2) a longer survey (VI.5.4–9.9), each followed by general observations on the role of the theory in grounding prediction (VI.4.11–13; 9.10–14). The conventional interpretation conflates the two presentations, generally taking the first as a succinct statement or the essential pattern, and the second as a more detailed description to enable readers to follow the process more easily and to recognize precisely where in the sequence a particular state happens to be. Such conflation obscures Polybius' principal effort to clarify the operational aspects of his theory.

In his transition from the brief outline to the second, longer account Polybius makes two telling points: (1) The outline of the sequence of constitutional changes just given (VI.4.7–10) is inadequate for prediction; one needs a 'very clear knowledge' that comes from a close examination of the 'beginnings, origins, and changes of each type' (VI.4.11–12); and (2) the philosophers who have given a more exacting (*akribesteron*) account, such as is necessary for prediction, have done so in such a lengthy and unfocused way that it is not useful for practical history or for obtaining a clear general conception of the process (VI.5.1–2). In response, Polybius promises to give his own summary, which will contain all that a historian needs for explanation and prediction, but in concise, focused form (VI.5.2). Accordingly, when Polybius here says, '*we shall attempt* (*peirasometha*) to cover the subject in summary form' to meet the practical needs of historians and statesmen, the tense of the verb

state of the question see Musti (1965) 388–92, (1972) 1117–21. The older attempts to discover evidence of earlier and later versions are surveyed by Walbank (1943), which is still useful despite the fact that its conclusions have been rendered obsolete by Brink and Walbank (1954).

[15] The interpretations of Polybius' theory are many and varied. I cannot discuss all of them here or even acknowledge the extent of my agreement or disagreement. I would, however, like to recognize the following for especially useful discussions or insights, even though I do not always agree with them: Brink and Walbank (1954); Cole (1964) and (1967) 80–97, cf. 107–30; Eisen (1966) 24–97; Eisenberger (1982); Erbse (1957); von Fritz (1954) esp. 40–95; Mioni (1949) 24–97; Petzold (1977); Pöschl (1936) 47–72; Roveri (1964) 163–99; Ryffel (1949) 180–232; Trompf (1979) 4–59; Walbank (1957–79) I 635–59, (1972) 130–56, (1980); and Welwei (1966).

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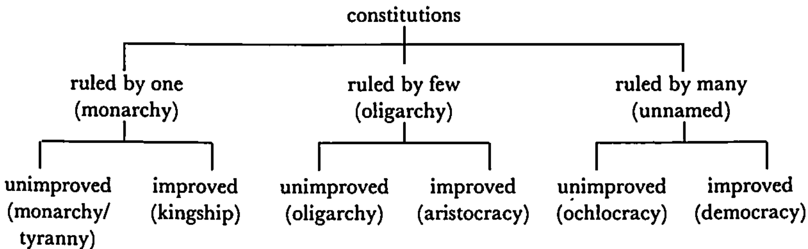
(future) and the sense of the paragraph converge to indicate that the subsequent longer account is the theoretical basis for Polybius' claims to explain history and make predictions.[16] If we wish to understand what gives it its peculiar qualification to serve this purpose, we have first to consider the function of the allegedly inadequate, briefer account and see how its abbreviated formulation serves its own particular function.

The specific function of the brief outline is suggested by its immediate context. Polybius' account of the simple constitutions of Greek states is formally divided into two parts, each presented as an improvement on his predecessors. The first (VI.3.5–4.6) is a classification of constitutions, a subject that Polybius considers inadequately treated by 'those who wish to give systematic instruction'.[17] His complaint is that the handbooks differentiated only three constitutions: kingship, aristocracy, and democracy. He himself contends that these are neither the only constitutions, nor the best. The best constitution, in his view, is the mixed constitution, to which he will turn later (VI.10); but the other deficiency, which he takes up immediately, is that they have failed to register three, patently obvious, additional constitutions. These bear a resemblance in formal structure to the acknowledged three, but differ enormously in the nature or quality of the rulers' administration, hence qualifying as distinct species, namely, monarchy, oligarchy, and ochlocracy or mob-rule (VI.3.9–12). Polybius' implied classification thus consists of a two-stage division, the first, a generic division on the basis of the number of rulers (one, few, many), and the second, a subdivision of each generic type on the basis of the nature of the ruler's administration:



[16] Some, including Ryffel (1949) 184 and Walbank (1957–79) I 650, mistake this as a reference back to the brief outline; but see Eisen (1966) 51–2; and Weil and Nicolet (1977) 73 and n. 2.

[17] On Polybius' classification and its historical precedents see Ryffel (1949) 186–7 and n. 347; and Walbank (1957–79) I 637–42.

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