

classical greece, reason, and the state

françois châtelet

translated by adam e. foster

Classical Greece has served as a constant reference in Occidental culture from the moment of its formation. Sufficiently dated and, in a certain way, strange—polytheism, slavery, pederasty, the weasels¹—it is also sufficiently contemporary—with an abundance of loans and relationships of kinship easily discoverable in the domains of thought and expression—thereby designing a particular type of *alterity*.

This alterity is alterity in time. Alterity in space (whether it's geographical or abstract)—which means the co-presence of the one and the other—can be defined

as *position*: one arises by rejecting, excluding, annihilating (either empirically or ideally) the other, using techniques of sharing and encapsulation with varying degrees of complexity whose practice, according to the ‘frontier’ of the North Americans after the conquest of ‘their’ continent, or the conception of the ‘living space’ defined by Ratzel’s² geopolitics and implemented by Hitler’s Germany, gives them significant designs.³ What works from this perspective, it seems, is a *strategic model*. To be sure, alterity in time returns to *one* present that is measured according to the *other*’s absence. It is absolutely absent because, in this case, there is no reference (there is no common space, and therefore no place to *differ*, but instead there is something like an *extra*). What is needed is a distance. In short, that which no longer exists [*révolu*]. The model at play is that of the *familial genealogy*: the other is some sort of ancestor, so far in the past that he cannot appear, among obvious differences, with features that are no less obvious than those manifest in the identity of the one and the other, the filiation between the one and the other or the anticipation of one by the other. This genealogical relation is understood as the return to a beginning or the mark of a decisive inflection; it is heard under the category of the Good—the occurrence of a reality or an idea that, because of its excellence, lasted, a happy change inscribed strongly in progress, a white stone⁴ layed down by divine Providence or human ingenuity—or the category of the Evil—‘original sin’, irreparable illegitimacy, or ‘the beginning of the end’.

Classical Greece has imposed itself on Occidental thought like an ever-present ancestor of the European reality for at least the past eight hundred years. Without a doubt, it shares this dangerous privilege with ancient Rome [*la Romanité*].⁵ On this point, more precisely and by way of an example, Pierre Vidal-Naquet notes the role of Greco-Roman history as a point of reference during the French Revolution in his remarkable preface to the French translations of the lectures, no less remarkable, given by Moses I. Finley on this theme: *Democracy Ancient and Modern*.⁶ Greek history appears like a mirror in which each present strives to rediscover, dressed like the ancient, its image and to spot, in this configuration, the traces of its actual existence. In this regard, viewing a European history in

comparison to Greek history would be highly revealing: we would see the complex effects of reference and capture at work such as the one that, recently, connected, in French historical research, the profound reworking [*remaniement*]⁷ caused by the deciphering of the Mycenaean “linear B”⁸ in the periodisation of the archaic Greek past and the contemporary speculations issued by Marx’s hypothesis on the existence of an “Asiatic mode of production;”⁹ it also tells of the transformation in the way the articulations between myth and reason are understood, which, after having been opposed to one another, are now complicit with each other, and in relation to the changes that have occurred, because of ethnology, because of the interpretation of mythic thought and the recent philosophical distrust of the tribunal of Reason.¹⁰

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How does Ancient Greece now intervene in the representation that the present day affords it? What type of ‘genealogical’ alterity defines it? The analysis that follows—which is the summary or index of research that must be deepened—sticks to those aspects that are, in essence, political, because it seems that they are, in an ideal context, the most important—for better or for worse. The academic response to these questions—if we can synthesise such a position—is largely indebted to the three grand philosophies of history that mark the previous century; it is either the direct expression of one of them, or a mixture which combines them according to the various proportions, with the modernisations and adaptations imposed by historical discoveries. In any case, the design is simple: Greece is a pre-formation of a present or future modernity, on the grounds that it is place of invention of the essential elements of the present-day reality, whether this modernity serves as an origin or, at the very least, as the chief moment of a becoming that is now being realised, whether its becoming is complete or has only just begun.

In this global perspective, this schematic attributes to the Greeks the work of having been, at the same time and by the same movement, the initiators of the unifying rationality and the producers of the first formation of the State. This recognition of paternity is accompanied—and it must be because there is a linear and progressive history—by the definition of a lack. To speak briefly, this lack, in the Hegelian version of the schema, is the subjective principle—that will bring Christianity—without which Reason remains abstract and fails to constitute itself in Spirit [*Ésprit*],¹¹ without which the State, the defect of moral mediation, is incapable of willing history. In the positivist version, what was lacking in the Greeks is the positive mind [*esprit*],¹² that of the sciences of observation: the defect, which has therefore prevented them from going beyond a metaphysical use of cognitive activity and a speculative conception of scientific research. As for the version of historical materialism, it ascribes to the servile mode of production, characterised by the weakness of productive forces and the non-dialectical status of the relations of production, the pre-eminence of idealist philosophy and the impossibility where the City found itself resolving its contradictions, thus passing from youth to decadence.

The cradle or first act of modernity, the Greek world, from the Homeric archaism to the Aristotelian synthesis by way of Pythagoras, Thales, Hippocrates and Plato, is designed by philosophies of history as a beginning. It is also in this way that it takes very recent texts, ones that are journalistic more than they are philosophical, which would not be worth talking about if they were not the symptom of this totalitarian disease to manufacture, for the sake of the cause, unified fields where anything is put anyhow in correspondence with current affairs [*actualité*]¹³ in vehement and abstract juggleries, where the Master, the Slave, the Law, the State, the Angel, the Rebel rapidly swirl [*tourbillonnent*]¹⁴... This time, the mawkish negation of Hegel and the abstract refutation offered by Marx that sees in Hellenism the beginning of our misfortunes: precisely because it invented ‘the tyranny of the logos’ and the despotic State.¹⁵

However, it turns out that the central question of the State today has been posed

in the original and pertinent way, also recent, of Pierre Clastres.¹⁶ Drawing on ethnological resources, he establishes that ‘savage’ societies, deeply cohesive and organised, have adopted provisions that exclude the establishment of a central power embodied in an individual and exercised externally on the community. The leader—there is always a man so chosen—has the task of *expressing* the *consensus* and of reminding everyone of its foundation: he doesn’t command; everything is done, up to and including the ordinance of war, so that he cannot detach himself from society to impose his will. These are societies *without* the State or anything that looks like it. This status is commonly understood by ethnology and political science as a lack (or as an archaism). In truth, they lack nothing: no discourse, no refined thought, no goods to consume [*consommer*] or devour [*consumer*]¹⁷—the association usually established between primitive economy and destitution being proven erroneous: if they gave up accumulation and progress, if they limited the time dedicated to work, it’s not because of the poverty of their thought and technique, nor their absorption in a naturalistic religiosity nor the spontaneity originating from their logic, it’s according to a ‘political’ choice: the refusal of centralised power monopolised by an individual or by a group.

In this way, Pierre Clastres highlights that, decisively, such a power is not needed by the normal social order; it is not inevitable that the *consensus* will divest itself for the benefit of such an authority. It is thus led to oppose globally as constituting two fundamental choices: with the State/against the State. However, as significant as this opposition is, it presupposes, still, that all centralised authority separates itself from society and becomes a State; a brutal alterity is thus at work. The hypothesis that is proposed here is that it’s appropriate, in this case, to be wary of notions of otherness, exclusion, or filiation. And, as the beginning of proof (to be established more precisely), can we not refer to this historical formation that was the Greek City, specifically under the conditions of Athenian democracy at the time of Pericles—around 460 to 430? *The democratic City is not a State, in the modern sense of the term*—a modernity dating back to the 17th century; the concurrence established between the appearance of this ‘first State’ and the invention of

tyrannical Reason is false—and all the more so because it is a surprising ignorance to reduce Greek rationality to the only model espoused by Plato in *The Republic*. In short, the project of this communication is to reveal the simplistic character inherited from the philosophies of history and their futile negation, according to which the classical Greeks alone would be the initiators—for the Good or for the Bad of humanity depending on the interpretation—of the transcendental Reason of the despotic State. And, suddenly, to suggest that the despotism of the contemporary scholarly State is not the affair of ideology, but of power.

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As for the establishment of the status [*statut*]¹⁸ and the nature of the ‘right philosophy’, the Platonic text is not stingy with arguments or details. It fights, with all the forces of irony, the evil certainties of public opinion; it demonstrates the outrageous processes of ‘tradespeople’ who, with a strong know-how, claim a universal competency; it ferociously refutes the rhetoricians and sophists who pretend to legislate and govern while they are good at taking hold of the courtroom of their well-connected speeches; it denounces political men who pretend to confuse the power of persuasion with the science of command. But it is an adversary with whom, it seems, it does not measure up. Athenian democracy doesn’t just produce ‘tradesman’, professors, artists and demagogues: it also aroused historians.

Now, in this conjecture, the fact of wanting to be a historian—as evident by the ‘introduction’ to Herodotus’ *History* and the celebrated §22 of the first book of Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian War*—means that we take a position on the problem of the use that should be made of rational discourse, or, what we now call the relationship between theory and practice. This omission is surprising. It is as if philosophy would prefer not to approach the ‘solution’ of the historian; or,

more accurately, as if it would prefer to treat it from a bias: either in the becoming of societies on the cosmological field, or by rejecting the historian's analyses by throwing it on those who are concerned with studying. Thucydides is ignored, but Pericles is quoted many times: always in scornful terms and with considerations that belong more to our current electoral campaigns than political analysis.

In truth, this opens a debate of extreme importance. To understand it, one must accept the disturbing idea that political Platonism is a heterodox aspect of Greek political ideology, and the conception of *logos* expounded in the *Republic* was held by its contemporaries to be excessive, even aberrant. The precautions Plato took in his demonstration, those which surrounded Aristotle when he proclaimed himself a 'Platonist', are revelatory of the fact there are other exercises of this new rationality that are much more normal and that, at any rate, are in use: those of physicists and medical doctors, for example; but also—more interestingly in our case—those which underline political practices and the strategic leaders of Athenian democracy grouped around Pericles. In this exercise, Thucydides' narrative forms a complete account, one that defines a program for the greatness of Athens and the pacification of Greece. The *logos* that is then acting therefore doesn't presuppose a world of transcendent Ideas, nor a supreme distance judging omni-temporally without any appeal to the truth of words and morality of conduct. What is at work,¹⁹ is the *noûs*, the understanding that reflects and judges, and is constantly immanent in practice.

When Plato condemns democracy, he ignores this dimension of Athenian politics. He admits it is self-evident that at the origin of the democratic 'temperament', there is—and there can only ever be—the training of interests and passions and false imagination. In the deduction of political regimes seen in the *Republic* book VIII, he introduces a cosmic necessity that inevitable leads democracy—defined as 'power of the common people, or, the mob [*foule*]²⁰ (*oi polloi*)—to demagoguery whose excesses will soon provoke the installation of tyranny. In doing so, he completely cancels the effort made—and is successful in part, if we believe Thucydides—by Cleisthenes, by Ephialtes and by Pericles to change the nature of

democracy, to transform this ‘power of the mob’ into a regime organised around principles where decisions are made (and enforced by designated magistrates) by an Assembly comprised of all citizens, rich and poor, discussing in common and voting after the statements of pros and cons. In a similar *polity*, power is no longer the prerogative²¹ of any fraction of the community: it is ‘in the middle’. In the middle of Society. As is immanent in this one understanding that calculates and works within the debates of the Assembly.²²

This use of the ‘new discourse’— that speaks in prose and ‘prosaically’ of social human existence in its sensible status and the sequence of its limited causality— is different not only from its use by the masters of rhetoric (who, basically, for the first time may be able to define the idea of ‘theoretical practice’ or institute the discourse as the place of conflict and resolution), but also from that which determines the philosophy, that establishes *logos* as the final tribunal. This use seems to have even been politically dominant. So, if it is already an unacceptable simplification to oppose globally the archaism of mythic thought—Dionysian supposition, desirous, consensual, ‘popular’—to rational thought—Apollonian, reflective, authoritarian, elitist—(a mistake that did not reach Nietzsche), it is as unfortunate as hearing the Greek rationality under the slogan of the didactic Platonism of the *Republic*. The Aristotelean critique seen in the *Politics* that refers to the civic tradition and wants to give it a firmer foundation, is significative of its strong design: the Ideas constitute a necessary recourse—the true discourse (‘logic’) says that Being (which is ‘ontological’)— but it is exorbitant to understand Ideas as separate from one another—there is no world other than this world in front of us.

Hellenism is reduced to Platonism, and Platonism restricted to its academic pedagogy; this is the kind of reduction required to make the classical Greeks the inventors—like it or not—of tyrannical Reason and the State’s Reason.

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The same kind of approximative thinking governs the analysis that, cheerfully mixing heteroclitic considerations on the Law, the Mastery, the Speech, the State, sees in the City the first link in the chain of domination. In Hegelian and Freudian texts, Greek history is solicited in the most fanciful way for facilitating variations on the incurable servitude of humanity in the grip of politics. The *Polis*—if we judge, in particular, by the example of the Athenian *polity*, though an examination of the Spartan Constitution would not yield different results, it seems—is not a State, or at least not as we understand them today. And this isn't due to the diversity of modes of production, nor demographic or territorial data, or the principles that would be present here—all elements that, without any doubt, entered historically through the historical constitution of the difference, but don't explain this entrance like the cause-reason explains its effects in the philosophies of history. This is because *difference is in the very form of politics itself*.

This difference is drawn on the background of an extrinsic resemblance: existence, in the two “regimes”, of a central decision-making power applied to a fiercely diversified society regarding the division of labour, including “economic” inequalities and practicing the rules of exchange of the merchant civilisation. However, the analogy stops here: in the Greek City, particularly Athens, power remains immanently with Society, while the modern State, defined as sovereignty, transcends it. Everything even happens as if the Athenians, educated by the tyranny they had to endure and the neighborhood [*voisinage*]²³ of barbarian Empires, had endeavoured to ward off, by multiple provisions, the risk of a separation between a fraction of citizens holding the decision and the community promised to obey. We rely here on five fundamental differences. This analysis supposes—which seems hardly deniable if we stick to the only description and if one puts parentheses the political consequences Hegel draws from it—the relevance of the picture drawn of the modern State in the *Principles of the Philosophy of Law* a century and a half

ago.²⁴ Each of these differences, without a doubt, would merit a thorough study, one that would introduce the nuances, but wouldn't compromise the general view proposed. Because it is a question here, above all else, of discarding simplifications that are common and highly damaging, both theoretically and politically.

1. Hegel shows that the State as it should be known is characterised, amongst others, firstly, as a sovereign principle and second, as the realisation of reason. This double characterisation requires that the place of sovereignty, unique by definition, be occupied, in order to be objective, by an empirical individual holding, both formally and in action, the power of decision without appeal, once it has been recognised as the incarnation of sovereignty. On the other hand, he rallies behind the idea of a monarchy that is hereditary (and also constitutional, cf. below § 3). We have not changed much: the tendency of contemporary States is, evidently, more and more monarchical, whether they are one party states, investing in a supreme leader, or democracies rallying ever more to the diverse varieties of presidential regimes. The planning rationality and the requirements of the nuclear strategy make this unification necessary. We see in § 5 how democratic Athens is forearmed against the risk of *apparatuses* [*appareils*]²⁵ of power. It must be emphasised that, as of now, it has been concerned with multiple ways of keeping the place of the 'sovereign' command free—the quotation marks here noting that the Greeks did not possess a conception of sovereignty like that which is attached to the modern State, which is instead an outcome of the Christian worldview. One of the most significant of these processes is that which governs the designation of the *prytanean epistatês*, the magistrate who sits at the highest level of the Popular Assembly and possesses the seals of the City [*Ville*]:²⁶ he is chosen at random each morning and for that day only, avoiding the risk of having his head turned by this precarious honour that envies the Gods!

2. By the same token, the democratic *politeia* is applied to limiting in time the delegation of power and to proscribe any representative system. The reshaping of civic space operated by the reform of Cleisthenes, which is the origin of the organisation of the *deme* (the 'municipalities') and the division [*découpage*] of the

population into ten tribes, aims to remove any screen between the assembly of citizens, each of them being characterised by their *autarkeia* (the disposition of the self) and the central power, assured by the totality of the citizens, united into a single body this time within the *Ekklēsia* (the Assembly of the people)—the tribunal of Heliaia or the *Boule* (the five-hundred-member council that deals with day to day business during the intervals between meetings of the people's Assembly), for example—they are *parts* of it, not its *representation*; those who sit there aren't delegates, but completely temporary officers. In the eyes of the Athenians, the procedure of the draw, widely used as long as the new civic figure of *ten* is always respected, guaranteeing the presence of each tribe in any college, is the most democratic. This signified, of course, the trust that should be shown to the tutelary gods and hope that 'they will keep the balance'. But this means above all that democracy believes in the judgement of its 'basic organism': the assembly of the *deme* whose task is to inscribe on the register of citizens the young people of its jurisdiction whom it deems fit to wage war for the City and to devote itself to its management. In such an assembly, we know each other well, to live together constantly, a partisan decision is almost impossible. It is there that *consensus* is exerted, which is reflected in the *Ekklēsia*. And whatever mistakes may have been committed by the latter—which Plato is pleased to report, not without reason — we are far from the representative systems that, in contemporary States, suppose that *consensus*, incapable of expressing itself by itself, must pass through the intermediary of a representation that thinks and wants on its behalf—the technique of expression by the Party being even more deceptive than the electoral procedure.

3. When Herodotus, before describing the great clash between the Greeks and the Persians, draws up a comparative table of the forces present, he signals as a decisive element likely to compensate for the numerical inferiority the former which distinguishes the Greek warrior from the barbarian, for one obeys a master of flesh and blood, and the other is free with no master other than the law. Is the law, then, not the transcendence we say does not exist in the City? Here again the

example of Athens allows us to answer that this is not the case. The refusal of a conception of transcendental law is even what strongly marks democratic reform. The *politeia* poses, in part, a certain number of general principles that globally define the status of citizenship: equality before the tribunals, the possibility for any citizen to take legal action against any other, the freedom of the disposition of the self, among others. Aside from its principles, the popular will decides a certain number of provisions regarding the organisation of the City, the Army and the Navy, provisions that can be amended more or less profoundly so long as no attack is made on the principles. So, little by little, such a tribunal, bequeathed by tradition, like the Areopagus, will see its prerogatives become more and more symbolic without ever being eliminated. For the rest—that is to say, the essentially historic—the *Ekklēsia* proceeds by decrees, and its will manifests itself in the designation of the magistrates who are charged with governing the City. The *politeia* is in no way a constitution in the modern sense of the term, whose thoroughness, sacredness, and durability are inherited from canon law.²⁷ The system of laws does not constitute a transcendent network to society; formed by a set of statements coordinated around simple principles, the political order is immanent to Society. Everything happens as if legislation has, as its goal, establishing each meeting of the Assembly of the People as a re-foundation and strengthening of the *consensus*, which is also assured by the multiple civic ceremonies where the citizens, both rich and poor, see themselves performing, both tragically and satirically, in dramas both near and far from the community, that evoke problems posed to it.

4. Two provisions particularly require attention. One of them—the *graphē paranomōn* or ‘trial for illegality’²⁸—aims to avoid that which the *Ekklēsia* takes, by proposal of a citizen, a decree that contradicts the principles which govern the City: every citizen, since then, is entitled to attack before the tribunal whoever successfully had the text approved, who is then condemned to a heavy sentence and the decree is annulled. The other permits whichever member of the civic body to bring any magistrate to justice by removing them from office, regardless of their rank, for bad or fraudulent management. This adventure arrives, as we

know, to Thucydides the historian, who was convicted of military incompetence, had to go into exile; Pericles himself was the victim of this and forced to pay a fine and reimburse, out of his own property, the deficit, for not being able to justify a 'hole' in the budget for which he was responsible. What is remarkable is that these two provisions presuppose that the political—whether it is legislation or government—are the affairs of everyone. Holding a public office or being approved by the Assembly doesn't protect the citizen, like the private person, of justifying their political action. More precisely, the individual who takes on political responsibilities cannot claim there is a split between his private being and his public being. For failing as a strategist, Thucydides loses his property and his status as a citizen: he is condemned to exile. This is a constant rule that we rediscover in modern nations during periods of grave trouble and of revolution. We would be tempted, suddenly, to bring this situation closer to the body of citizens promoted by J.J. Rousseau when he counts on the constantly renewed exercise of the general will²⁹—a kind of continuous creation—to reinforce the cohesion of society, or that which Jean-Paul Sartre gives to the "Fused Group."³⁰

5. Here is, finally, the most important aspect which, itself, is sufficient to establish that the Greek City and the modern State cannot be thought of according to the same categories. Hegel has shown that with the force that characterises the modernity of the State is the existence of a body of functionaries, recruited according to their competence, responsible for the technique of government and 'specialists of the Universal'. The passage of time has not proven him wrong: this dimension has increased exponentially in the contemporary era and it is a banality to note (and to complain of) the technocratic hypertrophy of today's societies [*sociétés actuelles*].³¹ But there is nothing like it in the City. It even seems that the *politeia* be made in such a way that not only the risks of personal power are prevented, but also of the formation of a political class whose profession is the government. The task of our functionaries is assured by the magistrates. In Athens and many other cities, the magistracies are collegial and precarious: the conditions of renewal for the same post are very strict and don't exceed two or

three years;³² the drawing of lots for magistrates who do not require any special knowledge compensates in part for the danger represented by the combinations that can be introduced during electoral processes; democracy reigns “at the base” in campaigns and neighborhoods to merit a good circulation of political information. In short, that which Plato denounces as ‘licentiousness’ and as ‘incompetence’ aims to prevent the despotism of groups who, strong through their knowledge, seize central power and become permanent governments, the apparatuses.

It is in this sense that we must understand the violent polemic opened by Aristotle against the Plato of *The Republic*. The Kallipolis is the prefiguration of the technobureaucratic society. But by the very admission of its inventor, it remains an ideal. This ideal, Aristotle, a strong supporter of the civic tradition, fights with vigour: he considers that it contradicts the end of the city which is the *Eu zein* (the dignified life of man) and the portrait of the citizen drawn in the *Nicomachean Ethics* is the opposite of this man with hierarchical souls and situated hierarchically in the social whole built by Plato. And it must be admitted that political practice of the City finds its expression in the texts of Gorgias, Thucydides, Socrates and Aristotle and not in the Platonic heterodoxy.

In the *polis*, the centralisation of power does not take the form of the State, nor does it accompany an institution of transcendence, or the stratification of government apparatuses occupied permanently by specialised citizens. The social division of work—details: the fact that society is formed by different professions and articulated involving relations of more or less, more or less rich, more or less skilled at his job or in speech and writing, more or less ‘recognised’—this doesn’t translate mechanically by a formal principle of organisation implied in the separation of the State and the society, of one class of governments and a mass of governed, the segregation of the dominant and the dominated. It would be unwise to suppose that the old civic ranking operated by Solon awards the highest magistrative positions to the richest citizens and excludes the poorest lost all its effect after the reform of Cleisthenes. But the democratic *politeia* states its objective

is precisely to conjure global, political consequences in this situation: it fights, through a series of institutional dispositifs, against the movement of separation at the locus of the political order that tends to institute the seriousness of the hierarchical ‘economic’ society and the market civilisation. *Autarkeia*, *isonomia*, and *isegoria*³³ intervene as social practices that must be permitted to remedy the inequalities of wealth—at least during the prosperous period of democracy.

Without a doubt there is a context that makes this usage of politics possible. The determining element is the fact that the Greeks ignored what we now call *capitalism*. If there is an exploitation of the work of slaves and also that of the peasantry and labourers, if there is a commercial profit, it is to assure the property owners and the rich of leisure, and guarantee them an abundant uptake, and at the same time as enjoyment [*jouissance*],³⁴ notoriety. Never was a system of capital formed. The improvement of techniques of ‘production’ is meant less to increase the quantity of goods than it is to save time. Work, which is natural, does not ever leave nature and, as a result, doesn’t create anything—and especially not history. Therefore, it is unthinkable that what is natural in society—and which causes inequalities (of fortune, of talent, of chance)—can be abolished. That which is at the disposition of men, which is *praxis*, has political activity as its most serious form: this has the capacity to change relationships between persons. It is therefore important to choose the *politeia* that has which offers the best chance of realising for each and every citizen a happy life with human dignity. Sparta’s oligarchic constitution, strict and stable, is content to reflect and make effective the inequalities given in the territory of Lacedaemon; the Platonic project of the *Republic* reinforces and formalises the inequality produced by the cosmic order in order to impose a irreproachable morality; the democratic regime of Pericles attempted to invent a political organisation that compensates for natural inequalities without doing violence to nature, with the goal of assuring the maximum cohesion of the City—a pledge of its own *autarkeia*—thanks to the *autarkeia* of every member of the civic body.

The second element of this context is obviously slavery. However, here again we must beware of anachronisms and precisely interrogate the relationship existing between the ‘servile mode of production’ and democratic power and more generally the status of the City.³⁵ Because it is too often that we present the ‘Greek miracle’ as having as its counterpart, for a necessary setback, the scandal of slavery, the monstrous harshness of the latter which explains the success of the former, as if the accumulation provided by servile labour was needed to promote the freedom of the citizens.

This is the reasoning of modern terms. It’s true that, in Athens, slaves ensured the essential subsistence of the population of Attica and also gave the citizens the leisure without which they could not so easily become warriors, magistrates, geometers, poets or navigators. But they don’t participate other than a small part, it seems, in the surplus production thanks to which the functioning of democracy is economically possible: payment of the magistrates, the financing of military equipment and expeditions, sumptuary spending destined to vivify the community, prestige policies aimed at subjugating men and placating the gods... which allows the City to be a sort of ‘public limited company [*société anonyme*]³⁶ whose citizens are stakeholders’, according to the excessive and provocative expression of Gustave Glotz, is the considerable income the Empire brings in, which transformed in the Attico-Delian line and, also, the taxes raised on the transit of goods through the ports of Athens.

There can be no consideration, therefore, of a necessary link between the ‘servile mode of production’ and the political system of the City, a central power immanent in the Society—slavery and transcendental power go well together, as evidenced by a number of historical events. The *polis* as political order—and, especially, Athenian democracy—results in a choice or a collective affirmation that at the same time corresponds to a certain historical given. That there is some given means there is nature—that is to say by good or bad fortune, by chance, from power relations, by causality; as for the affirmation, it comes down to asking, when it comes to Periclean democracy, if there is a political organisation capable

of remedying this ‘disorder’ through a type of power that compensates for the relations of domination by guaranteeing the exercise of the *autarkeia*. It is probably from this perspective that one must understand the Aristotelian theory of slavery, which has so often scandalised the moderns. This theory has nothing to do with any dialectic of the Master and the Slave—this one, as its commonly handled today has nothing common with the works of Hegel either, when we read them ‘in their place’ in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The goal of Aristotle is to establish—against the proponents of the idea that politics is founded on violence—that those, in the City, are absolutely devoid of *autarkeia*—the slaves—do not belong to the political order, but the natural order. Because in his eyes, politics is the practical discipline of the free disposition of the self: in this domain, it is absurd (and shameful) to think that there are men who are permanently subject to and under the law. This is a new argument against tyranny, against ‘excessively’ oligarchical regimes and... against the Platonic *Republic*.

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That which presents the City as the first form of the State is therefore a fable, and a bad natured one at that! If the *polis* gives the example of an ‘abstract’ central power, the function of politics is to prevent the creation of a *Sovereign*, in the sense that modern practical theories give this term. Should we consider the City as a model, then? That would be childish. Societies must invent their politics according to what they are. Ours seem to be riveted to the State and its apparatuses: they seem unable to think of themselves outside of this framework, accepting the thousand-and-one reasons peddled by the powers—the extent of nations and the mass of their population, technology, science, security, progress. Because, of course, the State—like the capitalist *system*, like the socialist *system*—is the only way to solve the problems that would not arise... if there was no State.

The Greek City does not provide a lesson: it simply says that a society can will a 'comfortable' existence without falling into the trap of accumulation, it can be commercial without getting caught up in commodity-fetishism; it says that work comes from nature and not from culture, and that reason, in its simple use, is not a tribunal but the means of action. But it is so fundamentally *other* that it doesn't tell us how to dispel our contemporary din; and its will to abstain from all prophecy makes it mute as to our history and our stories. It is up to us to try and determine what a society that is both *united* and *diverse* could look like today, whose organisation doesn't proceed from either the order of the despot nor the transcendence of the sovereign: a democratic society without the State.³⁷

FRANÇOIS CHÂTELET (25 April 1925 – 26 December 1985) was a French historian of philosophy and political philosopher. He served as one of the original members of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Paris VIII – Vincennes along with Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault, and was one of the founders of the Collège International de Philosophie along with Jacques Derrida, Jean-François Lyotard, and others. His research explores the history of the universal rationality that underpins both western philosophy and the modern state. In doing so, he challenges the dominant, linear narratives that surround our understandings of the western philosophical tradition. His works include *Périclès et son siècle* (Pericles and his Age), *La naissance de l'histoire: la formation de la pensée historique en Grèce* (The Birth of History: The Formation of Historical Thought in Greece), *Logos et praxis: recherches sur la signification théorique du marxisme* (Logos and Praxis: Research on the Theoretical Meaning of Marxism), *Platon* (Plato), *Hegel*, and his eight-volume history of philosophy. Châtelet's work appears here in English translation for the first time.

ADAM E. FOSTER is an instructor at Dalhousie University and the University of King's College in Halifax, NS, teaching across the Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences. His research focuses broadly on hermeneutical engagements with the Continental tradition, with particular emphasis on post-structuralism and post-Nietzschean philosophy, as well as themes of marginalised subjectivity within the context of society, politics, and the law.

NOTES

1. Translator's note: In Ancient Greece, weasels were considered a bad omen, akin to the black cat in contemporary western culture.
2. Translator's note: That is, German political geographer Friedrich Ratzel.
3. Cf. Jean-Pierre Faye, *Langages Totalitaires*, Paris, Hermann, 1972; Maurice Ronai and Michel Korinman, "Les Idéologies du Territoire" ["The Ideologies of Territory"] and "Le Modèle Blanc" ["The Blank Model"] in *Histoire des Idéologies*, [*The History of Ideologies*] Hachette, Paris, 1978.
4. Translator's note: During antiquity, jurors were given a white and black stone through which they would communicate their judgment of innocence or guilt concerning a defendant.
5. Translator's note: The French term, "la Romanité" lacks a proper equivalent in English. Its literal translation, Romanity, is sometimes used to refer to Roman Catholicism. Romanité in French does not carry this connotation. Instead, it refers to the character and nature of ancient Rome.
6. Translator's note: See Pierre Vidal-Naquet, "The Tradition of Greek Democracy," *Thesis Eleven* 60, no. 1 (February 1, 2000): 61–86, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0725513600060000006> for a slightly abridged translation of this text.
7. Translator's note: The French term 'remaniement' could be translated as 'reshuffling'. It refers to a modification in the ordering and organisation of a thing's constituent elements. It is most often used in the context of government and politics; a cabinet shuffle would be the most notable example. I have opted to instead use the word 'reworking' for two reasons. Firstly, Châtelet's metaphor does not translate to English perfectly. As the example of the cabinet shuffle demonstrates, English political discourse does not use the term reshuffling in the way that French political discourse uses the term remaniement. Moreover, what Châtelet describes is absolutely a *reshuffling* rather than a shuffling, or a *reworking* rather than the original working. There is a return inherent to what is described. Secondly, the term reworking better describes the procedures at play in this passage, as the words shuffling and reshuffling lack the immediate political resonance in the English language that is found in the original French text.
8. Translator's note: Linear B is a script of Mycenaean Greek that emerged, at the latest, during the end of the 15th century BCE. It would not be successfully translated until 1952 CE. See John Chadwick, *The Decipherment of Linear B*, 2nd edition (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014).
9. Translator's note: In Marxist thought, the Asiatic mode of production refers to a particular pre-capitalist mode of production associated with a despotic state, and the total ownership of property by the monarch. See Karl Marx, "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978); and Karl Marx, "The Grundrisse," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978).
10. Translator's note: The tribunal of reason is a juridical metaphor used by Immanuel Kant in his first critique. There, he issues "a call to reason ... to set up a tribunal that will make reason secure in its rightful claims and will dismiss all baseless pretensions, not by fiat but in accordance with reason's eternal and immutable laws. This tribunal is none other than the critique of reason itself: the *critique of pure reason*." See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. James W. Ellington, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996), 8; In this view, critique entails competing knowledge claims being brought before the tribunal of reason where they are subjected to scrutiny and judgment according to the principles of rationality that govern human thought with the

authority of a code of law. For a further analysis of the tribunal of reason, see Sofie Møller, “The Tribunal of Reason,” in *Kant’s Tribunal of Reason: Legal Metaphor and Normativity in the Critique of Pure Reason* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020);

Châtelet’s reference to “the recent philosophical distrust of the tribunal of Reason” might suggest that Reason (which Châtelet notably capitalises) be equated with the Occidental philosophical tradition, or—in Brian Massumi’s words—a form of “representational thinking that has dominated Western metaphysics since Plato, but has suffered an at least momentary setback during the last quarter century at the hands of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and poststructuralist theory generally.” See Brian Massumi, *A User’s Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), 4. Though Kant is not named directly as the target of this attack, he undoubtedly is part of this tradition. Kant is alluded to as such when Gilles Deleuze refers to him as an ‘enemy’ in relation to his own critical project (in which he also references the ‘tribunal of Reason’). See Gilles Deleuze, “Letter to a Harsh Critic,” in *Negotiations: 1972-1990*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 6. Interpreting Châtelet’s reference to recent philosophical distrust towards the tribunal as the poststructuralist resistant to State philosophy would be in line with the end result of the critique-as-tribunal: the erasure of epistemological pluralism and the reduction to a single mode of reason. *Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. James W. Ellington, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1996

11. Translator’s note: That is, the Hegelian notion of the ‘*geist*’.

12. Translator’s note: The word ‘*esprit*’ in French is used to refer to the conscious mind as well as to the spirit. Given the nature of positivist philosophy, it is likely that Châtelet is here referring to a certain intellectual mindset that engages in certain epistemological practices.

13. Translator’s note: The French term ‘*actualité*’ has two meanings here. First, it can refer to a media text on current events, akin to the English term ‘news item’. Reference to ‘*l’actualité*’ or ‘the actuality’ specifically (which is how it appears in Châtelet’s text) can refer to either an individual news item or the entirety of what we would call ‘the news’. The term can also refer to the philosophy of actuality, understood as the opposite of virtuality and the realisation of potentiality. As Gilles Deleuze argues, the actualisation of potentiality is a major theme across Châtelet’s work. See Gilles Deleuze, “Pericles and Verdi: The Philosophy of François Châtelet,” trans. Charles T. Wolfe, *The Opera Quarterly* 21, no. 4 (October 1, 2005): 716–17. Both meanings of the term are meant by ‘*actualité*’ in this passage. It follows that Châtelet be referring to current affairs given his previous reference to journalistic works. However, the dynamic of actualising a potential within ancient Greece is also present in Châtelet’s argument, which seeks to activate other actualities within Greece, rather than say that the modernist interpretation of Greece is false.

14. Translator’s note: The French term ‘*tourbillonnement*’ carries a connotation of the word ‘*tourbillon*’, which often is used to refer to a whirlwind but can refer to any rapid and circular movement. Something is lost in translation in using the word ‘swirl’, as would be true for other possible translations like ‘whirl’ and ‘circle’; they lack the connotation of force that is found in this movement. As such, the word rapidly has been added, which is missing from the original French. The reader should therefore imagine the Master, the Slave, the Law, the State, the Angel, the Rebel spinning in a whirlwind alongside popular discourse on current events.

15. It must be emphasised, concerning both Hegelian philosophies of history and Marxist analyses of history, that the texts, in their own development, often contradict the massive meaning their authors attribute to them in the overall demonstration. The pages devoted to the Greek *Sittlichkeit* [that is, the German term for morality] denies the stiffness of the Hegelian theory of Art-Religion-

Philosophy relations; likewise, the 8th section of *Capital, Volume 1* contradicts the simplistic dialectical scheme of productive forces/productive relations.

16. *Society Against the State*; also by the same author, the two articles published in volumes 1 and 2 of the journal 'Libre'.

17. Translator's note: Both italicised terms can be translated as 'consumed', though they refer to two different senses of the word. There are, however, no other words that come as close in terms of accuracy. As such, the terms I've used are far from adequate representations of Châtelet's argument, which can perhaps be completed by giving the definitions of the original French terms. '*Consommer*' refers to consumption akin to eating; it refers to the consumption of goods discussed in economic discourse. '*Consumer*', on the other hand, refers to a more violent sense of consumption: the gradual destruction of something until nothing remains, like the burning of an object. Overlaying these two meanings on top of each other reveals a Marxist critique within Châtelet's wordplay.

18. Translator's note: The term *statut* is the French equivalent of both the English words 'status' and 'statute'. Given the political nature of Châtelet's argument, both meanings of the word should be considered.

19. Translator's note: Châtelet opts to use the word 'œuvre' rather than 'travail'. The latter refer to work as one might normally think of it. However, the former refers to work in the context of artwork. What is at play, then, is something creative at its very essence.

20. Translator's note: 'Foule' could alternatively be translated as 'crowd'.

21. Translator's note: It is worth remembering the legal origins of the term prerogative, referring to an exclusive right that is afforded under the law or government.

22. Cf. for all of this, see P. Levêque and P. Vidal-Naquet, *Clisthène*

23. Translator's note: Neighbourhood here does not refer to the physical space in which one lives, but rather the collective of neighbours themselves, and the relations between them. One could think of *voisinage* as the state of being a neighbours and having neighbours in turn.

24. Relevance *overall*. In this connection, it is necessary to make one remark and note two reservations. The remark concerns the fact of the pertinence of this description in no way invalidates the relevance of Marx's critiques developed in 1843: standing, not from the point of view of the State like Hegel, but from the point of view of the Society, like we say today, Marx notes that this State does not bring satisfaction: the Reason in action clashes with the dysfunctions that are misery and rebellions, and, to be a citizen, the real producer is no less unhappy. As for the reserves, one touches on the Hegelian prediction of the formation of nation-States that are increasingly powerful and decreasingly leading, by means of deadly wars, to the world State; so far deadly wars have reinforced the principle of the nation-State and multiplied its empirical realisations the form of the nation-State resists globalisation of civil society. The other is that contemporary technobureaucracy is supported, not by philosophical Reason as conceived by Hegel, but on Science and its development as a technique of appropriating nature and society: this has important consequences concerning the type of power exercised by the apparatuses of the State, therefore constitutive of civil society (cf. §1).

25. Translator's note: The term 'apparatus' is often used in translations of French philosophy from this period. It should be noted that Châtelet uses the term 'appareil' in his text. As such, we should not associate these apparatuses of power with the Foucauldian 'dispositif', which is sometimes translated as apparatus. It should be noted, however, that 'appareil' is the term used by Louis Althusser in his discussion of the Ideological State Apparatus. Later, Châtelet *does* employ the term *dispositif* in the context of institutions.

26. Translator's note: This is the first instance in the text where Châtelet uses the term 'ville' rather than 'cité' in referring to Athens. One should be mindful of this difference and infer that there is a difference between the 'Ville' and what is represented by the 'Cité'—even if both are referring to Athens.
27. cf. the interesting analyses of P. Legendre in *L'Amour du Censure*, Paris, 1974
28. Translator's note: The 'graphē paranomōn' refers to a trial for the offence of proposing a law that conflicts with the existing law in some way.
29. Translator's note: See Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "On the Social Contract," in *Rousseau: The Basic Political Writings*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 147–50.
30. Translator's note: See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, trans. Alan Sheridan-Smith, vol. 1 (London, UK: Verso, 2004), 348–404.
31. Translator's note: The phrase 'sociétés actuelles' is used in French to refer to current or present societies, in the sense of, societies that 'actually' exist. However, there is a potential connection here to the philosophical notion of actuality, which is present in Châtelet's work. Despite his criticisms of these societies, they are nonetheless an actualization of Hegelian philosophy.
32. One exception, of course: Pericles, renewed as the "general-in-chief" for ten years, was still brought to trial.
33. Translator's note: As is common with classical Greek philosophy, the meaning of these three terms is contingent upon how a specific author employs and understands them. We can understand these terms generally as referring to self-sufficiency, equality before the law, and equality of speech respectively.
34. Translator's note: As has been noted in translations of French psychoanalytic theory, there is no proper English equivalent to the word 'jouissance', which is used to refer to the enjoyment of rights and property as well as sexual pleasure. As such, 'jouissance' could be said to encapsulate both enjoyment and pleasure, or to be located somewhere in between them. See Jacques Lacan, *Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Allan Sheridan, vol. 11, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), 281. While I do not wish to impose a Lacanian understanding of jouissance onto Châtelet's text, the definition that is here provided is useful for understanding the meaning of the original French term.
35. Translator's note: The use of 'and' twice in this sentence, which is considered a grammatical error, also appears in the original text. For this reason, it has been preserved for the sake of producing a faithful translation of Châtelet's original text.
36. Translator's note: There is no English equivalent to this term, as the *société anonyme* is not found within the common law system. It refers to a type of publicly traded company found in some countries that have adopted a system of civil law (mainly those which also happen to use a Romance language). Their name is derived from the fact that shareholders initially could remain anonymous, receiving dividends by exchanging a coupon attached to the certificate of their shares.
37. Lecture delivered at the French Cultural Center of Rome, January 25th, 1978.