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The Janus Legacy: Ancient Theorists of the Roman Mixed Regime

Ronald J. Lettieri

Jean-Jacques Rousseau for once falls into the mainstream of traditional Western republican thought in claiming the Roman mixed regime as "*the* model for all free peoples."¹ Indeed, the notion that classical Rome constituted the most outstanding historical example from antiquity of the well-ordered republic pervaded republican thinking from the fifteenth through the eighteenth century.² Although they deliberately sought to improve upon the Roman mixture in their teachings, Italian Renaissance and Anglo-American theorists nonetheless deeply wedded a veneration for the ancient Republic to modern republicanism. By often portraying their efforts at founding new republics as the resurrection of an expired classical ethos, modern republicanists envisioned Rome as the "eternal city" for their followers as well as those of Christianity.

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The location of an idealized political order in the Roman Republic did not, however, originate in modern republican historiography. The genesis of this fusion between the historically real and theoretically ideal regime actually is to be found in the political and historical writings of classical Greek and Roman theorists. For students of political thought, this development has taken on immense significance, particularly in regard to the birth of modern political analysis. According to such notable scholars as the Carlyles, George Sabine, Charles McIlwain, F.W. Walbank, and Robert Cumming, the attempt by ancient theorists to identify the Roman Republic as the actualized ideal regime constituted a radical departure from the Socratic approach to the study of political life, and in fact provided the theoretical foundations for modern political thought. Pointing toward the Roman assumption that politics in general, and regime forms in particular, can be investigated only in terms of their historical development and not absolutist philosophical categories, this body of scholarship has depicted the classical republican thinkers as the theoretical predecessors of Machiavelli's "new method" of political analysis.³

Although these scholars have shed much light on this development in terms of its broad methodological significance to the study of political life, little attention has been directed toward the impact of the new Roman school of political inquiry on the classical theory of the mixed regime.⁴ This paper will explore the theory of the mixed regime contained in the works of Polybius, Cicero, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, and Plutarch, not only as a subject matter deserving of its own separate study, but also in terms of its relationship to the theories advanced by earlier Greek proponents of this constitutional model. It will first locate each ancient theorist as a follower of the Roman historical approach to the study of political life and then proceed to examine their individual views on the mixed regime, focusing constant attention on the relationship of their separate teachings to those of Plato and Aristotle, as well as to each other. The paper will conclude with a brief appraisal of the significance of the Roman theory to the subsequent history of Western republican thought until the nineteenth century.

The Romanized Greek historian, Polybius, first transferred the notion of the mixed regime from classical Greek philosophy to Roman historical analysis.⁵ In his multi-volumed *Histories*, Polybius advanced not only a new model of the properly mixed regime, but also, a radically novel approach to the study of political life in general which provided the model's theoretical foundation.⁶ According to Robert Cumming, Polybius offered his new approach to politics as a grandiose attempt to reconcile the ambiguities on the vision of the ideal regime contained in Plato's *Republic* and *Timaeus*. In these dialogues, Socrates advanced two seemingly disparate views on the

nature of the ideal political construct. In the *Republic*, Socrates intended his political ideal to exist purely in the theoretical realm of speech; while in the *Timaeus*, he yearned to transfer the ideal from its ideational and moral context to an actual historical existence so as to better judge its excellence.⁷

Polybius' solution to the Platonic dilemma of the value of history for political inquiry did not take on the guise of an attempted synthesis between philosophy and history. Instead, the *Histories* stands as a manifesto for the superiority of historical analysis over abstract philosophy as the means of determining what is best in political life. Rejecting Plato's "Republic" from consideration as the best regime because it had not actually existed in time and space, Polybius restricted his search for the ideal regime to the annals of history.⁸ As such, he replaced the Socratic emphasis upon philosophical inquiry with historical analysis as the true acid test for all political forms. Polybius' championing of history over philosophy constituted an act of intellectual tyrannicide: no longer would man engage in the politically futile quest for the philosopher-king. The realm of the philosopher was the imaginary, and political life consisted exclusively of historical reality.

Because of these novel precepts, Polybius, unlike either Plato or Aristotle, presented his teachings on the ideal mixed regime in the form of an historical analysis of an actual regime. For Polybius, the Roman Republic offered the highest mixture that history had spawned. Although he agreed with his predecessors that a mixed regime alone could escape from the dreaded naturally induced anacyclosis (a perpetual cycle of constitutional revolutions) and thus provide stability in a world of flux, Polybius radically departed from the mixtures advanced by Plato and Aristotle in his treatment of Rome. The Republic owed its excellence not to the philosophical wisdom of a single lawgiver like Lycurgus, but to the fact that it had evolved naturally over centuries. Apparently in concord with Cato's maxim that the cumulative wisdom of centuries was vastly superior to the wisdom of any one man, Polybius judged the Roman mixture superior to any Greek mixture (either theoretical or historical) believed to be the conscious creation of a single lawgiver.⁹ In addition, Rome deserved the title to the actualized ideal form of the mixed regime because it perfectly blended the three just regimes of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy. So perfect was the equilibrium achieved in the Roman mixture that "it was impossible for a native [Roman] to pronounce with certainty whether the whole system was aristocratic, democratic, or monarchical."¹⁰ In claiming the Consuls as the regime's monarchical ingredient, the Senate the aristocratic, and the Tribunes the democratic, Polybius thus associated the properly mixed regime as a blending of three regime forms. As a result, he agreed

with Aristotle that a proper mixture required three ingredients rather than the Platonic two. Unlike Aristotle, however, Polybius championed a mixture which allowed no one ingredient to dominate and blended the three regime forms equally.

Not only was each element of the Roman mixture associated with a specific regime form, but each also wielded an equal portion of the power in the regime. In his explanation of the manner in which he actually distributed political power among the three elements of the Republic, Polybius presented his novel idea of the checks and balance system upon which all modern mixtures would rest. The key to the Roman distribution of power, according to Polybius, was "how each of the three parts is enabled, if they wish, to counteract or cooperate with the others." Thus, the Senate and Tribunes held the Consuls in check, while also restraining each other. Because he believed that a well-ordered regime required a perfect balance of its separate elements, Polybius championed the rigid Roman system of checks and balances and presented the most structurally oriented teachings on the mixed regime in antiquity.¹¹

Polybius continued his praise of the structural excellence of the Roman mixture with an elaborate discussion of its stability. In times of common danger to the Republic, the three elements combined to act in unity and thus enhance the powers of the regime to defeat its common enemy. Thus, under the condition of foreign threats, the Roman mixed regime became unified, acting essentially as if it were a single element. Although Polybius obviously intended this passage as a rebuttal to the Aristotelian contention that a mixed regime could easily be destroyed by forces outside the regime because of its internal divisions, the champion of Rome depicted the cardinal advantages of the Republic in terms of its institutional safeguards during peace. In the absence of foreign enemies, the Roman mixture was able to maintain its stability through a principle of institutional dynamism contained within the structure of the mixture. According to Polybius, the Roman regime was capable of rendering internal conflict harmless in times of peace because of its elaborate system of checks and balances. As a result, Polybius discovered the stability sought by the ancients not through their prescription for institutional rigidity and stasis, but through an internal dynamic of constant motion and flexibility contained within Rome's institutional apparatus.¹²

Polybius concluded his teachings on the mixed regime with a comparison of the Roman and Spartan mixtures and a prophesying on the future of the Roman mixture. In his discussion of Rome and Sparta, he once again departed from his Socratic predecessors on a vital element for the ideal mixture. Polybius lauded the Spartan mixture (prior to

Rome, universally acclaimed as the best historical mixture) because of its capacity to thwart the vices of cowardice and ambition.¹³ Yet, by praising Sparta's ability to produce brave and temperate citizens, Polybius conspicuously omitted the remaining Socratic virtues of wisdom and justice from his appraisal, and consequently dismissed the Platonic critique that the Spartan mixture was faulty because it was capable of promoting only the lowest form of the four virtues.

Because of his nearly wholesale rejection of the role of philosophy in political life, Polybius also offered a new teaching on the ends of political life. For Plato and Aristotle, the purpose of the ideal regime was to promote the virtuous man. Yet, because he had discovered his ideal regime existing in actual time and space, Polybius transformed the four Socratic virtues (wisdom, justice, moderation, and courage) into one cardinal element: the preservation of the actualized ideal Roman mixture. Thus, because the ideal regime had been achieved, the four virtues were no longer needed as philosophical guidelines to judge the merits of the regime. Instead, Polybius weighed the virtues promoted by the ideal regime in terms of their abilities to control the vices that were the cardinal threat to the stability of the ideal mixture.

Sparta earned Polybius' plaudits primarily because of its capacities to control the vices of cowardice and ambition, the two elements deemed vital for the preservation of any regime. Despite this ability, however, the Spartan mixture failed to harness the regime's imperial ambition to rule over Greece due to a defect in the original Lycurgean laws. In turning toward the actualized ideal Roman mixture, Polybius first praised its ability to control ambition among its three governmental institutions. The checks and balance system harnessed the desire for absolute control by any one institution. In moving his discussion of ambition from an institutional sphere to the actual citizens in the regime, Polybius again contended that Rome, in its excellence, had the necessary constitutional provisions to withstand this internal threat. Pointing toward the mixture's sole ruling capacity over the dispersal of honor and the infliction of punishment in the regime, Polybius believed the city capable of curbing mounting ambition among the ranks of its citizens.¹⁴

Despite these accolades, Polybius depicted a fate for Rome no better than Sparta's. Regardless of its elaborate institutional safeguards, the Republic would fall prey to a cycle of constitutional revolutions (anacyclosis) and internal decay. Unlike Sparta, however, Rome's degeneration would be the result of external conditions.¹⁵ Throughout the *Histories*, Polybius contended that the Roman mixed regime was at its height and nearest to perfection whenever it was under foreign threats. Only in his concluding passages in Book VI did Polybius allude to

the idea that the loss of external enemies would lead to Rome's decay.¹⁶ Peace would bring prosperity to Rome, but prosperity would be accompanied by luxury and a decline in internal harmony due to the loss of all potential enemies. Luxury would further unleash the vice of ambition among the citizenry to such a degree that the regime could not control it. Finally, this wave of uncontrolled ambition would thrust the Republic into mob rule.

Polybius thus shrouded his analysis of Sparta and Rome in an apocalyptic tone that would greatly influence modern republicanism. The ideal mixed regime was condemned to only a limited existence in time. Yet, in contrast to Rome, the Spartan mixture, despite its faults, lasted unaltered for eight centuries. Rather than conclude that Sparta proved superior to Rome because of its greater ability to forestall degeneration, however, Polybius presented future republican theorists and statesmen with a choice. If a people desired only to remain "in secure possession of their own territory and to maintain their freedom," then they must emulate the Spartan mixture.¹⁷ If, however, a people aspired to greatness, a quality Polybius defined strictly through the measure of imperial conquests, then Rome proved the ideal mixture. As such, Polybius bequeathed a dilemma to future republicans in the form of an Achilles syndrome of greatness or longevity.

Cicero's *Republic* and *Laws* proposed the first solution to Polybius' temporal dilemma concerning Rome as the actualized ideal mixed regime. Unlike Dionysius and later Renaissance theorists who would attempt to solve the dilemma in terms of its own categories, Cicero sought to dismantle the fundamental precepts upon which Polybius had based his historical prophecy. Cicero sought to pierce Polybius' apocalyptic strain concerning the Republic's durability by demonstrating that, as the historical embodiment of the ideal regime, Rome had the unique virtue of promoting harmony during peacetime in addition to achieving imperial greatness. In his exploration of the causes of this unique Roman capacity, Cicero injected a host of Socratic ingredients into his Polybian-styled historical analysis. Consequently, Cicero's theory of the mixed regime stood as an attempted synthesis of the Socratic and Polybian approaches. By grounding his vision of the ideal mixture in historical reality and by accepting Cato's maxim on cumulative historical wisdom, Cicero clearly fell under the general methodological prescriptions of Polybius. General similarities aside, however, Cicero tempered the Polybian approach to politics by granting a formative, albeit subservient, role to philosophy in political life. For Cicero, political wisdom, although derived primarily from actual experience, could also be gained through philosophical inquiry. Rather than depict the two entities as separate and distinct as did Polybius, Cicero collapsed the polarities by rendering political philosophy a direct

derivative from practical statesmanship. According to Cicero, the ideals presented in abstract philosophy were political ideals only because they had previously been realized in practice by political rulers.¹⁸

Cicero accomplished his reconciliation of philosophy and history by rendering philosophy subservient and totally dependent upon actual political experience. This view pervaded the entire teachings of the *Republic* as well as its dramatic structure. All characters in the dialogue are experienced Roman statesmen who, under the guise of a religious holiday, engage in an abstract discourse on the ideal republic. The main character, Scipio, was selected to present his vision of the ideal mixture by his interlocutors because of his wisdom and experience as a statesman, rather than a vast knowledge of Greek philosophy. Furthermore, in Book III Scipio defined the superior man as one who gains wisdom through both experience and philosophy, even though it was acknowledged that Roman statesmanship had spawned the "precepts and discoveries" of the latter.¹⁹

Like Polybius, Cicero rejected Plato's "shadowy commonwealth of the imagination" in favor of Rome as the actualized ideal mixed regime that served as the best of all political forms. In addition, he followed Polybius' general view that the Roman Republic owed its excellence to its natural evolution and its perfect blend of the simple forms of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy as an escape from anacyclosis. Although the *Laws* provided ample evidence that Cicero did not follow Polybius' straightforward identification of the regime forms with governmental institutions, he adopted wholesale Polybius' view that a regime defined its character from the nature of its ruling elements. Thus, Cicero borrowed his general criteria for depicting Rome as the actualized ideal directly from Polybius.²⁰

Although Cicero agreed with Polybius that the best use of wisdom was discovered in the founding and preservation of regimes, he refused to depict the preservation of the Roman regime as the highest political virtue. Instead, he markedly broke from his Roman predecessor by constantly identifying the essence of a political community as primarily "an association and partnership in justice." By constituting justice as the principal bond that united a regime and its citizens, Cicero returned the cardinal task of a mixed regime to the positive Socratic function of promoting virtue among a citizenry. Thus, the virtue of justice (such an essential ingredient in the composition of the Socratic ideal) was restored as a component of the Roman Republic. Consistent with his syncretical purposes, Cicero also justified the need for justice in the actualized ideal mixture through a practical argument extracted from Roman history. Accordingly, he heralded justice as a keynote to the Republic's

excellence, not only as the primary bond among citizens, but also because it spawned the harmony and concord so essential to the preservation of the regime. As a result, Cicero was able to justify the Republic's commitment to equal justice both from its intrinsic merits and the ends that it served.²¹

The Ciceronian notion of justice also served to resolve the Polybian dilemma concerning the temporal dimensions of the Republic. Although he agreed with Polybius that the regime's stability was in large measure indebted to its balancing of duties and functions along institutional lines, Cicero, because of his great concern for justice, upheld citizens' rights as a necessary ingredient for the Republic's delicate balance. For Cicero, this required the construction of a Romanized "even balance of rights, duties, and functions," so that "magistrates have enough power, the counsel of eminent citizens enough influence, and the people enough liberty." Such a balance was so vital for Cicero's ideal mixture that unless the regime subscribed to it, the polity would not "be safe from revolution."²²

Cicero separated himself further from Polybius' teachings on the nature of the balance among the elements of the Republic in his treatment of the Republic's social structure. Polybius limited his notion of balance strictly to an institutional sphere with little regard for the relationship of the institutional structure to the existing orders of society. Cicero, however, grafted an Aristotelian ingredient onto the ideal Roman mixture by injecting a socio-economic analysis into his discussion of harmony. Although sometimes restricting his divisions of society into only "leading citizens" and "the many," Cicero opted for a threefold classification scheme which envisioned the Republic's harmony as a product of the blending of the social orders.²³ For Cicero,

. . . just as in . . . music, . . . harmony is produced by the proportionate blending of unlike tones, so also is a State made harmonious by agreement among dissimilar elements, brought about by a fair and reasonable blending together of the upper, middle, and lower classes, just as if they were musical tones²⁴

Cicero did not limit his reliance on Socratic categories in his historical analysis of Rome to a treatment of justice and a harmonious class system. Unlike Polybius, Cicero did not depict the Roman distribution of power among its institutions as one that was in perfect equilibrium. Instead, he interpreted the Republic as a mixture dominated by the aristocratic element of the Senate. Like Aristotle, Cicero believed this aristocratic ingredient to be the repository for wisdom in the mixture, as well as serving as the moderating force between the extremes of

monarchy and democracy. Furthermore, the Senate, composed of the leading citizens in the Republic, would serve as virtuous models for the vast majority. Although Cicero denied the Senate absolute power over the regime, he invested it with the greatest sphere of control, especially in regard to the Tribunes and the people. Thus, the internal harmony of the Republic's institutions was realized not by an internal dynamic of constant motion among three equally potent agencies, but through the domination of the moderating force of the Roman aristocracy.²⁵

For Cicero then, the excellence of the Roman mixed regime was indebted to a variety of ingredients derived in part from the disparate teachings of Polybius and his Socratic predecessors. Despite his efforts to include rationally derived categories as formative elements in his historical analysis, Cicero fully recognized that reason could not act sufficiently as the sole ruling element over the Republic's affairs. Instead, the history of Rome demonstrated that irrational forces, defined fundamentally as the quest of the people for liberty, would constantly threaten the ideal. Foreshadowing Tacitus' chide that mixed regimes were easier to theorize about than put into actual practice, Cicero likened the ideal regime contained in the *Republic* to a beautiful painting whose colors were fading and whose configuration was not preserved.²⁶ Thus, Cicero's actualized ideal was not, as with Polybius, in current existence at Rome, but contained deep within the city's past. By advancing such a view, Cicero allowed, however slightly, an apocalyptic vision to enter into his pantheon to Roman republicanism.

The attempt to thrust Socratic-derived viewpoints into an historical narrative of the Roman Republic was a notable feature of another post-Polybian theorist of the mixed regime. By establishing the chronological boundaries of his *Roman Antiquities* from Rome's founding to the First Punic War, Dionysius of Halicarnassus clearly sought to place his historical analysis within the tradition of Roman republican historiography established by Polybius. As Zera Fink has observed, however, in Dionysius' hands "[Roman] history was moulded to prove and illustrate the theory of the superiority of mixed government." Although he attempted to complete Polybius' history of the rise of the Roman Republic, Dionysius rejected the evolutionary paradigm of Polybius and Cicero for a vision of the actualized ideal mixture that was moulded fundamentally by Socratic perspectives.²⁷

In order to dismiss the view that Rome's excellence resulted from its natural evolution, Dionysius employed the exalted Socratic figure of the lawgiver.²⁸ As the living embodiment of philosophical wisdom, Plato and Aristotle had depicted the lawgiver as the necessary first condition for establishing a mixed regime. The lawgiver's wisdom enabled a regime to transcend the dimension of time

and enter the static realm of philosophy, and thus achieve a state of permanence and stability. The lawgiver's function stood in direct contrast to the apocalyptic and evolutionary theories advanced by Polybius and Cicero.²⁹ Dionysius drew upon the figure of Lycurgus who most closely approximated the lawgiver in history for the classical Greeks. Through his depiction of Romulus as a Roman Lycurgus and the unchanged political structure of the Republic from its Romulean origins, however, Dionysius transformed Rome from an historical into a timeless, philosophical entity and consequently rebuked the central evolutionary premise of Roman republican historiography.

Although Cicero considered Romulus the father of Rome, he did not cast Romulus as its sole lawgiver since the Republic had evolved into its mixed form naturally. In his treatment of Romulus, Cicero judged him capable of only mixing monarchy and aristocracy and ruling in Rome as a tyrant. Operating under the assumption that the lawgiver was vital to the establishment of a truly ideal mixture, however, Dionysius presented the Ciceronian "tyrant" as the sole cause for Rome's greatness as the actualized ideal mixture. Dionysius contended that Romulus' wisdom provided the city with a mixed form of government at its inception and that as the ideal, the Romulean provisions remained unchanged for over six centuries. It was not until the tribuneship of Gaius Gracchus, who foolishly tampered with the ideal mixture of Romulus, that the Republic degenerated into bloody civil strife and was subjected to the dictates of time.³⁰

Although he depicted Rome as the actualized ideal mixture, Dionysius, through his treatment of Romulus, had transformed the Republic into a "Greek city" and brought the theory of the mixed regime almost entirely back to its Socratic origins. Consequently, additional Greek elements emerged in his historical analysis. To a much greater degree than Cicero, Dionysius restored the close relationship between a regime's form and the character of its citizens that was the core of Socratic political philosophy. Dionysius believed that the internal harmony so essential to the Republic's survival arose primarily from the prudent and moderate character of its citizens. In true Socratic fashion, Dionysius contended that the cultivation of just, moderate, and brave Romans resulted solely from "the form of government when this has been established wisely." Thus, Dionysius praised Polybius' venerated institutional balance not as an end in itself, but because of its capacity to produce the virtuous citizenry that was the keynote to the Republic's harmony and stability.³¹

Rather surprisingly, however, Dionysius spiced his historical narrative of the Republic with references to intense factional strife and the lack of harmony in the regime. He attributed the seemingly constant civil dissension in Rome for the most part to the base economic

drives of the plebs and the demagogic nature of the Tribunes. Although he acknowledged the Tribunes as a necessary institutional check upon the Consuls, Dionysius considered their democratic proclivities the gravest danger to the Republic's harmony and stability. It was in such a context that he championed a mixture in which the aristocratic element, as the sole repository of wisdom, served as a moderating force over the base democratic passions of the many. As a result, Dionysius' actualized ideal mixture distributed power unevenly among the three ruling elements and in fact provided for an aristocratic domination of the Senate. Like Cicero before him, Dionysius had broken from Polybius' evenly-balanced arrangement of power through the Aristotelian notion of a dominant and moderating middle element.³²

Despite his profound theoretical innovations, Dionysius' discourse on the mixed regime still remained within the Roman historical tradition by recognizing the Republic as the actualized best mixture and by advancing his teachings through an historical narrative framework. In contrast, Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*, while keeping within the general approach to the theory, would dismantle any claims of the Roman Republic as the historical embodiment of the ideal mixed regime. As a result, Plutarch's theory of the mixed regime serves as an apt introduction to the modern republican view of Rome as a tragically defected ideal.

Although Plutarch directed his *Lives* more toward extracting the virtues necessary for the proper statesman to emulate than toward "the abstract merits of different constitutions," the work nonetheless contained an exposition of the mixed regime. Unlike his predecessors, Plutarch presented his theory through an analysis of the Spartan, rather than Roman, mixture. Despite his familiarity with Dionysius' exalted vision of Rome and Romulus, Plutarch offered little praise for Romulus. Instead, he cast the Dionysian founder as a hateful monarch who owed his rise to power solely to good fortune rather than philosophical wisdom. Concerning Romulus and the mixed regime, Plutarch blatantly rejected Dionysius' contention that Romulus was the Roman mixture's lawgiver. Instead, Plutarch saw Romulus as a Roman tyrant who forced the Roman aristocracy to listen in silence to his commands. As a result, Romulus brought about the political emasculation of the aristocracy, the transformation of the regime from kingship to tyranny, and the establishment of a politically precarious mood of belligerency in the regime. Finally, Plutarch severed the remaining republican historical claim to Roman greatness by dismissing the results of Rome's imperial conquests as a cause of its grandeur. For Plutarch, the final fruits that were plucked from the tree of Roman imperialism were the vices of luxury and wealth, and the transformation of the Republic into the Empire.³³

Rather than Rome or Romulus, Sparta and Lycurgus

earned Plutarch's "highest praise" regarding the mixed regime.³⁴ Lycurgus' wisdom in establishing a mixed regime for Sparta was produced not by his political experience, but through his study of Greek poetry. Given the Aristotelian chide that poetry by nature was more philosophical than history, Plutarch, in viewing the poetry of Homer and Thales as the source of Lycurgus' political wisdom, thus issued a rebuke to the Roman view of political life.³⁵ Indeed, so potent was this new source of political sagacity that Lycurgus sent the poet Thales to Sparta to promote harmony and obedience in its citizens through the "measured rhythms" and "ordered tranquility" of his lyric verses. Thus, the genesis of actualized mixed regimes was to be found in Greek poetry.

Despite these radical departures from the Roman republican tradition on the mixed regime, Plutarch could not break completely from the sway of their teachings. In his discussion of the specific measures comprising the Spartan mixture, Plutarch actually reverted to the tradition he had nearly dismantled. Thus, he considered the Lycurgean mixture superior to the Platonic because the former existed in space and time whereas the latter occupied only the theoretical sphere of speech. Furthermore, the properly mixed regime was one composed of the three cardinal regime forms of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy which directly correlated with the three governing institutions of the regime. Plutarch further echoed the theory of his Roman predecessors by envisioning the aristocratic Senate as the dominant element of the three, which, because of its tendency to moderate between political extremes, served as a "ballast" in the Spartan mixture. He also followed the earlier theories by attributing Sparta's degeneration to the spread of internal decay through luxury.³⁶

Plutarch's combined attraction and repulsion to the Roman historical tradition can best be seen in the ambiguities inherent in his approach to the study of political life. Relying upon the genre of biography, Plutarch was able to use an historical analysis yet still define the good in society as an extension of the virtuous life of the individual citizen. Similarly, through the use of parallel lives taken from separate historical regimes, he showed that political virtues were absolute and not governed by time and space. Finally, although he recognized that philosophy was of value to political life, he defined philosophy in a Roman rather than Socratic sense. The use of philosophy did not produce "statues doomed to stand idly on their pedestals and no more." Instead, he envisioned philosophy as an active agent in political affairs, striving to transform all it contacted into activity and efficiency, and moving all objects under its dominion toward the honorable, useful, and great. By defining philosophy as "the good life in action," Plutarch had synthesized the contrasting perspectives on political life that

had existed in the classical republican tradition.³⁷

The Roman theory of the mixed regime thus appears as a complex portrait whose contours were shaped unevenly by the canvas of classical republican historiography and the intricate brush strokes of Socratic political philosophy. By seeking to infuse selective Socratic elements into their historical analyses, post-Polybian theorists clearly displayed an indebtedness to their theoretical predecessors on the mixed regime. Although varying in degree in their reliance upon Plato and Aristotle, Cicero, Dionysius, and Plutarch presented their theories through the genres of historical narrative and biography and thus adhered to Polybius' revolutionary mode of political analysis. By employing the borrowed Socratic categories within an historical framework, they substantially altered the traditional meanings attached to many of these concepts. The Roman theorists, by unflinchingly presenting their vision of the ideal through history, became theoretical founders, as well as preservers, within the classical tradition of the mixed regime.

Despite its chauvinistic trappings, the Roman contention that their city served as the eternal model of republicanism profoundly influenced the development of Western republican philosophy. Although rejected outright by Augustine and Aquinas as the actualized ideal republic, the classical Roman mixture enjoyed its own particular revival during the Italian Renaissance. Most clearly depicted in the writings of Machiavelli, civic humanists, although partisans of the ancient Republic, praised it in a more circumspect fashion than their intellectual forebears. By recognizing the Republic's collapse into despotism as a symptom of defects in the polity's construction, Renaissance republicans consciously advanced novel models of the properly mixed regime as historical replacements for the Roman mixture. Thus, the Renaissance's veneration of the eternal republican city actually included the recognition of a theoretical gulf between the ancient polity and the ideal mixed regime.³⁸

The quest to discover the defects evident in the Roman Republic and advance new mixtures as the actualized ideal also lay at the core of Anglo-American republican thought from the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries. This Roman-inspired tradition reached its apex in English and American writings during the last half of the eighteenth century. On the English side of the Atlantic, Montesquieu viewed the English constitution as the perfect embodiment of the ideal mixture. Pointing toward pervasive ministerial corruption and the seemingly omnipotent power of the monarch, however, American republicans, beginning in the 1760s, vehemently rejected the English model as the historical heir to classical Rome. Instead, they proclaimed their newly gained independent republic as the embodiment of the perfected Roman mixed regime.³⁹

Despite their ability to widen the theoretical gulf between the Roman Republic and the ideal mixed regime, Renaissance and Anglo-American republican thinkers advanced their theories within the general context of the classical tradition. In their assumption that a mixed regime provided the soundest structure for a republic and their quest to posit the ideal in historical reality, these theorists belied the continuation of the Roman theory of the mixed regime as a formative element in modern political thought. Although the English and American tradition of viewing their regimes strictly through classical Roman lenses was brought to its end by the separate efforts of Bagehot and Lincoln during the 1860s, the Roman republican theories received their most telling blow from Karl Marx. Operating under a novel historical perspective, Marx sought, through one bold and masterful stroke, to sever modern political consciousness from its classical roots. Marx depicted the Roman republican tradition as "a nightmare on the brain of the living," and in his *Eighteenth Brumaire* condemned these time-honored teachings as bourgeois society's attempt to escape from the reality of the class struggle and infuse a mock heroism into its debased political existence.⁴⁰ It remains for modern republicanism to determine whether it will envision its own essence as the historical heir to a venerated classical ideal or as a cowardly self-deception as depicted by Marx.

NOTES

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1. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "To the Republic of Geneva," in *Discourse on the Origin and Foundation of Inequality among Men*, trans. by Roger Masters (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1964), p. 80.
2. See pages 68-69 above and accompanying notes.
3. R.W. Carlyle and A.J. Carlyle, *A History of Medieval Political Thought in the West* (London: W. Blackwood and Son, 1936), vol. 1, p. 2; George Sabine, *A History of Political Theory* (New York: Holt, 1962), p. 141; Charles McIlwain, *The Growth of Political Thought in the West* (New York: Macmillan, 1932), p. 114; F.W. Walbank, "Polybius and the Roman Constitution," *Classical Quarterly* 37 (January 1943): 82-83; Robert Cumming, *Human Nature and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), vol. 1, pp. 87-333.
4. See especially Cumming, *Human Nature and History*, vol. 1, p. 179, n. 41. Students of the mixed regime have not fared much better in their treatment of the ancient theorists as a distinct school of thought on the subject. For most of these latter scholars, classical antecedents of the construct are of little significance in understanding seventeenth and eighteenth century mixtures, and, as a result, receive scant attention. For the extreme position of this school of thought, see Martin Diamond, "The Separation of Powers and the Mixed Regime," *Publius* 7 (Summer 1978): 35-43. Notable exceptions to this general observation are Paul Eidelberg, *Philosophy of the American Constitution* (New York: The Free Press, 1968), and *Discourse on Statesmanship* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1974); and Gilbert Chinard, "Polybius and the American Constitution," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 1 (January 1940): 38-58. For Eidelberg, Aristotle provides the key to understanding the American Constitution, while Chinard's study is too brief to do justice to his subject.
5. Polybius' place in the annals of historiography as an early practitioner of the genre of universal history and as the historian of Republican Rome's rise to world hegemony has been well established by a host of twentieth century

historians. These same scholars, however, have been negligent in recognizing the role of Polybius' novel historiographical genre in the history of political philosophy. According to F.W. Walbank and Arnaldo Momigliano, the political teachings of Polybius relied upon Greek political theories to interpret the realities of the Roman Republic and led to significant historical inaccuracies. Those scholars who have attempted more elaborate analyses of Polybius' political thought have not fared much better, and, except for Robert Cumming, have viewed Polybius strictly as the founder of the constitutional theory of checks and balances. On Polybius and universal history, see J.B. Bury, *The Ancient Greek Historians* (New York: Macmillan, 1909), pp. 217-223; R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (London: Clarendon Press, 1956), p. 33; T.R. Glover, "Polybius," in *Cambridge Ancient History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1930), vol. 8, p. 17; F.W. Walbank, "Polybius," in T.A. Dorey, ed., *Latin Historians* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), pp. 43, 49. For the appraisals of Walbank and Momigliano, see F.W. Walbank, *Polybius* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), p. 155 and Arnaldo Momigliano, *Essays in Ancient and Modern Historiography* (Middletown, Ct.: Wesleyan University Press, 1977), p. 76. On the Polybian theory of checks and balances, see Kurt Von Fritz, *The Theory of the Mixed Constitution in Antiquity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954), passim; M.J.C. Vile, *Constitutionalism and the Separation of Powers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 36; Leon Homo, *Roman Political Institutions* (New York: Knopf, 1930), pp. 113-118; T.A. Sinclair, *A History of Greek Political Thought* (New York: Meridian Books, 1968), pp. 269-274; Gilbert Chinard, "Polybius and the American Constitution," pp. 38-59; William Dunning, *A History of Political Theories Ancient and Medieval* (New York: Macmillan, pp. 113-118).

6. This latter point is developed more fully in Cumming, *Human Nature and History*, vol. 1, pp. 87-161; John Kayser and Ronald Lettieri, "Aquinas' Regimen Bene Communitatis and the Medieval Critique of Classical Republicanism," forthcoming in *The Thomist*; and Ronald J. Lettieri, "Republican Rome in the Eyes of Polybius and Other Post-Hellenic Greeks," paper delivered at the New England Historical Association, October 1977.

7. Cumming, *Human Nature and History*, vol. 1, p. 136; Plato, *Republic*, 472E and *Timaeus*, 19B-C.

8. Polybius, *Histories*, 6, 47.7-10.

9. *Ibid.*, 6, 9.11-14; 10.13-14.

10. *Ibid.*, 6, 9.11-14; 10.13-14; 11.11-13. See also Harry Jaffa, "Aristotle," in Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey, eds., *History of Western Political Philosophy* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1972), pp. 80-94 and 125-126.

11. Polybius, *Histories*, 6, 12-18.8; 15.1-17.9.

12. *Ibid.*, 6, 18.2-4; 18.6-8.

13. *Ibid.*, 6, 43-58; 46.7-9; 48.2-6.

14. *Ibid.*, 6, 14.3-5; 46.7-9; 48.2-6; 48.6-49.10.

15. Namely, Roman dominion over the world. See *ibid.*, 6, 50.6.

16. *Ibid.*, 6, 18.1-8; 57.4-10.

17. On the apocalyptic strains in republican consciousness, see J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), pp. 50-56, 108-112, 213-215. Polybius, *Histories*, 6, 50.1-2. It is interesting to note that the issue of what categories constituted Roman greatness were still widely debated during the eighteenth century. In *Causes of the Greatness of the Romans*, Montesquieu accepts Polybius' notion of a territorial scale of imperial conquests when speaking of Roman grandeur. Conversely, Gibbon, in Chapter 2 of *Decline and Fall* rejects this imperial measuring stick in favor of the advance of philosophy and liberty. Charles Montesquieu, *Considerations on the Causes of the Greatness of the Romans and Their Decline*, trans. by David Lowenthal (New York: The Free Press, 1965), pp. 23-25, 92-94; Edward Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (New York: Modern Library, 1932), vol. 1, p. 25.

18. Dionysius attempted this solution through the myth of six centuries of Roman excellence under the mixed regime. This solution to the Polybian dilemma was revived during the sixteenth century regarding republican myths concerning the Venetian commonwealth. Dionysius, *Roman Antiquities*, 2, 11, 2-3; Gaspari Contarini, *History of Venice*, trans. by Lewis Levekenor (London: n.p., 1599); William J. Bouwsma, *Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), passim; Cicero, *Republic*, 1,2,2; 2,1,1.

19. Cicero, *Republic*, 1,22,36; 3,3,5; 3,4,7. On the characters and the dramatic structure of the *Republic*, see especially Cumming, *Human Nature and History*, vol. 1, pp. 184, 207; George Sabine and Stanley Smith, "Introduction," in *Cicero's On the Commonwealth* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1929), pp. 4-6.

20. Cicero, *Republic*, 1,27,44; 1,29,45; 1,44,68; 1,46,70; 2,16,30; 2,23,42; 2,30,52; 2,39,65-66; *Laws*, 2,10,23-34; 3,5,12-13. Even though Cicero's *Laws* contains alterations of the actual Roman mixture, the addition of the permanent office of the Censors and the curbs on the Tribunes are "modest" changes as depicted by Ronald Syme. See Cicero, *Laws*, 2,5,13; Ronald Syme, *Ten Studies in Tacitus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 119. For a general discussion of the ideal regime presented in the *Laws*, see C.W. Keynes, "Original Elements in Cicero's Ideal Constitution," *American Journal of Philol-*

ogy 42 (1921): 309-323.

21. Cicero, *Republic*, 1,7,12; 1,25,39; 1,32,49; 2,42,69.
22. *Ibid.*, 2,34,57; 3,8,16.
23. *Ibid.*, 1,49,69.
24. *Ibid.*, 2,42,69.
25. *Ibid.*, 1,34,52; 1,35,55; 2,22,39; *Laws*, 3,10,23-24; 3,12,27-28; 3,14,31-32; 3,17,38.
26. Cumming, *Human Nature and History*, vol. 1, p. 252; Cicero, *Republic*, 5,1,2; Tacitus, *Annals*, 4,33,11.
27. Ernest Carey, "Introduction," in *Roman Antiquities of Dionysius of Halicarnassus* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1937), p. xii; Zera Fink, *The Classical Republicans* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1945), p. 8. Clearly, my analysis of Dionysius' theory of the mixed regime is at odds with K.J. Dover's view that "Dionysius does not command respect as a historian or as a critic of historiography." K.J. Dover, "Thucydides," *Greek and Roman Survey* 7 (1973): 9.
28. Aristotle, *Politics*, 2,9,11-12; 3,9; 4,1,12; 4,1,14; 5,8; 6,1,6; 7,14.
29. Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, pp. 168-173; 188-193.
30. Cicero, *Republic*, 2,7,12-18; 2,13,43; 2,28,50; Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities*, 1,4,2-3; 2,7,1-2; 2,11,2-3.
31. Dionysius, *Roman Antiquities*, 1,89,1; 2,3,4-6; 2,14,1; 2,27,1.
32. *Ibid.*, 3,11,8-9; 6,22,1; 6,71; 7,8,1; 7,65,1-3; 7,66,4-5; 8,81,1; 9,27,1; 10,1,1; 10,3,1; 14; Fink, *Classical Republicans*, p. 10.
33. C.P. Jones, *Plutarch and Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 111; Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*, "Romulus," 26,1; 27,1-2; "Numa," 8,1; "Lycurgus and Numa," 4,7. Compare Plutarch's treatment of post-Romulean Rome with the inflamed state of Sparta under its kings as depicted in Plato, *Laws*, 691e. On this point, see especially Alan Wardman, *Plutarch's Lives* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974), p. 201.
34. C.J. Gianakaris, *Plutarch* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1970), p. 123.
35. Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*, "Lycurgus," 4,1-4; Aristotle, *Poetics*, 9,3, 145lb.
36. Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*, "Lycurgus," 5,2-8, esp.7; 6,1-3; 30,1; 31,2.
37. Wardman, *Plutarch's Lives*, pp. 6, 19-20, 211-212; Jones, *Plutarch and Rome*, p. 109; Plutarch, *Moralia*, 776c-d.
38. Augustine, *City of God*, 2,2; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1-2, 95,4, and 1-2, 105,1. Thomas depicted the founding of the Roman Republic merely as a transition from despotism to simple aristocracy and replaced Rome as the ideal mixture with the divinely sanctioned Hebraic mixture contained in the Old Testament. Thomas Aquinas, *De Regimine Principum*, 1,4. For a discussion of the Thomistic theory of the mixed regime, see John Kayser and Ronald Lettieri, "Aquinas' Regimen Bene Commixtum and the Medieval Critique of Classical Republicanism," forthcoming in *The Thomist*; Thomas Gilby, *The Political Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), pp. 289-295; Alexander D'Entreves, *Medieval Contribution to Political Thought* (New York: Humanities Press, 1959), pp. 39-40; Dino Biongiari, "Introduction," in *The Political Ideas of St. Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Hafner Press, 1953), pp. xxix-xxxi; Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, "Preface" to Books 1 and 2; 1,2-24; 3,1. On the various theories of the ideal mixed regime advanced during the Renaissance, see Fink, *Classical Republicans*, pp. 10-20; Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, pp. 99-104, 299-310.
39. On the English theory of the mixed regime, see especially, John Kayser and Ronald Lettieri, "'The Last of All the Romans': Shakespeare's Commentary on Classical Republicanism," *Clio* 9 (Winter 1980): 197-227; Corrine Weston, *English Constitutional Theory and the House of Lords, 1556-1832* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), pp. 9-179; Fink, *Classical Republicans*, pp. 28-190; M.J.C. Vile, *Constitutionalism and the Separation of Powers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), pp. 1-137. For the various interpretations of the American theory of the mixed regime, see especially, Roy Lokken, "The Concept of Democracy in Colonial Political Thought," *William and Mary Quarterly* 16 (Oct. 1959): 568-580; J.R. Pole, "Historians and the Problem of Early American Democracy," *American Historical Review* 67 (April 1962): 626-646; Malcolm Sharp, "The Classical American Doctrine of the Separation of Powers," *University of Chicago Law Review* 2 (April 1935): 385-436; Gordon Wood, *Creation of the American Republic, 1783-1789* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969), pp. 197-222; Paul Conkin, *Self-Evident Truths* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1974), pp. 143-184; Eidelberg, *Philosophy of the American Constitution*, pp. 3-260; Martin Diamond, "The Separation of Powers and the Mixed Regime," *Publius* 7 (Summer 1978): 35-43; Ronald Lettieri, "Connecticut's 'Publius': The Landholder Series and the Theoretical Fabric of Confederation Republicanism," forthcoming in *Connecticut History*; Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws*, 11,6.
40. This is not to imply that Marx did not render the subject of political theory under the sway of historical analysis. Indeed, along with Hegel and Comte, Marx was one of the nineteenth century's dominant voices advocating the historical approach to the study of political life. On Bagehot's severing

the English constitution from the theory of the mixed regime, see Weston, *English Constitutional Theory*, pp. 217-257; on Lincoln's attempt at a new founding of the American Republic, see Harry Jaffa, *Crisis of the House Divided* (New York: Doubleday, 1959), pp. 308-346; on Marx's views of the poverty of the classical republican tradition, see Karl Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," in Institute of Marxism and Leninism, ed., *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: Selected Works* (Moscow, 1969), vol. 1, pp. 398-399.