



## BIROn - Birkbeck Institutional Research Online

Gray, Benjamin (2022) The invention of the social? Debating the scope of politics in the Greek polis from the later Classical to the early Roman period. *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 77 (4), pp. 633-671. ISSN 0395-2649.

Downloaded from: <https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/id/eprint/48817/>

*Usage Guidelines:*

Please refer to usage guidelines at <https://eprints.bbk.ac.uk/policies.html>  
contact [lib-eprints@bbk.ac.uk](mailto:lib-eprints@bbk.ac.uk).

or alternatively

This article is forthcoming in the *Annales HSS* in 2023 (to be published first in French, then in English).

## **The Invention of the Social? Debating the Scope of Politics from the Later Classical to the Early Roman Polis<sup>1</sup>**

Benjamin Gray, Birkbeck College, University of London ([b.gray@bbk.ac.uk](mailto:b.gray@bbk.ac.uk))

### Abstract:

This paper applies to ancient Greece an approach to modern political thinking developed by P. Rosanvallon: the integration of philosophical texts with the most everyday documents to better grasp a society's understanding of its political life. For ancient Greece the more everyday evidence of cities' inscriptions, especially their collective decisions published on stone, can help to modify our understanding of Greek political thinking. The paper focusses on the example of changing ideas about the nature of political and private life – and especially the space between them – in the Greek cities of the Roman period. In an approach very influential on modern political theory and interpretations of ancient Greek society, Classical Athenian democrats and philosophers had tended to insist on a sharp binary distinction between public or political life, on the one hand, and private life, on the other. This left little space for a notion of an intermediate third space of polis life, similar to a 'social sphere' or 'civil society', in which public and private interactions and motivations were thoroughly intermingled. This pattern remained dominant in the Hellenistic and Roman period, but, after the Roman conquest, some Greek citizens and intellectuals developed, above all in inscriptions, a much more explicit, complex and subtle notion of 'social life' between politics and private life, sometimes describing it with new words such as *synanastrophe* and *symbiosis*. The paper concludes by asking what the different ancient concepts and interpretations discussed here can contribute to current historiographical debates about the nature of the Greek city after c. 146 BC, especially about how to move beyond the traditional

---

<sup>1</sup> My work on this paper has benefited greatly from the guidance of the *Annales*' readers and editors, especially Vincent Azoulay. I am most grateful too for comments on different versions from C. Ando, M. Canevaro, L. Eberle, M. Haake, A. Heller, M. Hirsch, G. Kantor, J. Ma, W. Mack, J. Meister, W. Nippel, and B. Raynor. I would also like to thank the Humboldt-Stiftung for the fellowship which enabled me to write the first draft. Following my university's policy, I assert that a CC BY licence is applied to the Author's Accepted Manuscript.

picture of ‘depoliticisation’ now that recent studies have shown the continued vibrancy of civic political institutions and debates. The conclusion also calls into question the orthodox narrative of the development of ideas of ‘the social’ or ‘civil society’ over many centuries up to the modern age.

## 1. Introduction

The status of activities such as communal dining in clubs ‘is relatively simple in societies like ours, when the social has a well-defined place somewhere between the state and the individual. But Greek cities knew nothing of such a tripartite division.’ So writes P. Schmitt-Pantel, analysing the place of ‘collective practices’ beyond political institutions in Classical Athens.<sup>2</sup> Classical Athenians tended to insist on a simple conceptual division between public (or political or civic) and private, sometimes treating ritualised relations with the gods as a third category (see section 2). Ando and Rüpke have recently raised the question whether this type of analysis should be extended to the ancient Greco-Roman world more generally: ‘was it in fact true that antiquity lacked the ability to conceptualise non-familial collectivities and non-household spaces except through the paradigm of the public?’<sup>3</sup>

This tendency in Classical Athens, and well beyond it, left little intermediate space for a distinct category corresponding to the modern notion of ‘the social’. This term can cover all human interaction, but I use it here in a more specific sense, close to that to which Schmitt-Pantel appeals: to refer to the category of interactions which fall between public (or political) and private life, and are shaped by a corresponding mix of interests and dynamics. I do not intend, for the purposes of this article, to evoke any particular developed modern theory of the social (contrasted with the political), but rather the very generic conceptual space (that is to say, a very general notion to be filled with specific ideas) sketched by my definition, within which most such modern theories fall.<sup>4</sup> Many modern theorists have filled this broad

---

<sup>2</sup> P. Schmitt-Pantel, “Collective Activities and the Political in the Greek City”, in *The Greek City from Homer to Alexander*, ed. O. Murray and S.R.F. Price (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 199–213, here 212.

<sup>3</sup> C. Ando and J. Rüpke (eds.), *Public and Private in Ancient Mediterranean Law and Religion* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), in their introduction (1–9), 3.

<sup>4</sup> For recent analysis, see M. Bull, *The Concept of the Social: Scepticism, Idleness and Utopia* (London: Verso, 2021), ch. 1; for different French conceptions of ‘the social’, see P. Rosanvallon, *Le modèle politique français ; la société civile contre le jacobinisme de 1789 à nos jours* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2004), esp. part II.

conceptual space with notions of ‘civil society’ distinguished from the state, but the fundamental difference between polis and modern state makes the idea of ‘civil society’ problematic for Greek history.

Classical Athenian denial of the social has deeply influenced modern estimations of the polis and its contemporary relevance, especially to theories of democracy and liberty. One tradition, that of Rousseau and Arendt, welcomes what is taken to be a general ancient Greek rejection of a distinctively social sphere, as a means of banishing from the polis the egoism, particular attachments and groupings, and unsystematic sympathy for individuals characteristic of it.<sup>5</sup> This tradition has had significant influence on modern republicanism, especially in France since 1789, where a dominant approach, inspired partly by understandings of ancient citizenship, treats any form of ‘intermediate’ association or corporation as a potential threat to the unity and common will of the political community.<sup>6</sup> A rival tradition, taking much of its inspiration from Constant, celebrates the freedoms which come from modern liberal democratic embrace of an intermediate space between political and private life: a sphere of sociability, co-operation and exchange which enables new forms of personal liberty, distinct from the political freedom of ancient citizenship.<sup>7</sup>

This article’s contribution is to argue that some Greeks’ approaches to this question developed in new directions after the Classical period, as part of the evolution of polis life and ideology in response to the complex conditions of the expanded Hellenistic world (and Hellenistic monarchies) and, especially, of the early Roman Empire. For this later period there is wide-ranging evidence for thinking on these questions, not only from Athens, but also

---

<sup>5</sup> See (e.g.) H. Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

<sup>6</sup> For this tradition, see Rosanvallon, *Le modèle politique français*, part I, e.g. 59–65, 72–5; for its continuing force, compare C. Neveu, *Citoyenneté et espace public: habitants, jeunes et citoyens dans une ville du Nord* (Villeneuve d’Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2003), 198 (on immigrant groups).

<sup>7</sup> See B. Constant, *Ecrits politiques. Textes choisis, présentés et annotés par Marcel Gauchet* (Paris: Le Livre de poche, coll. Pluriel, 1980). On resulting debates: W. Nippel, *Antike oder moderne Freiheit? Die Begründung der Demokratie in Athen und in der Neuzeit* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2008), esp. chs. 7–9. In a distinctive new theory, with some loose connections with this second tradition, Bull, *The Concept of the Social*, has recently proposed celebrating ‘the social’ as a model for a more anarchic, sceptical way of living together, free from the normative constraints of political life (note his pp. 12–15, on Arendt’s idea of ‘the social’, which he repurposes as a positive model).

from the many other Greek-speaking cities across the Mediterranean which published civic decisions in inscribed form, or educated or hosted political thinkers whose works survive. I wish to stress that older binary ways of thinking survived – even remained dominant – across the Greek cities, deep into the Roman Imperial period. Nevertheless, I argue here that, especially after c. 150 BC, some Greeks, probably always quite a small minority, did begin to sketch more explicitly something like a distinct social sphere, neither purely public nor purely private, with its own character and virtues. Since there was never a wholesale shift towards consensual acknowledgement of an intermediate social sphere (or its value), this article should be understood rather as identifying a broadening of what was ‘sayable’:<sup>8</sup> what thoughts could be conceived and expressed in available political and ethical language. The new way of thinking is identifiable only in quite a small proportion of surviving texts, but is nonetheless very significant for its departure from a well-established consensus.

It might be objected immediately that my appeal to the modern notion of ‘the social’, loosely inspired by modern debates, is illegitimate as a way of reconstructing ancient ways of thinking and speaking, my main aim here. It is worth reiterating that I am using the word ‘social’ to designate a very generic conceptual space. I do not wish to argue that any ancient Greek thinkers filled it with ideas closely comparable in character or sophistication with modern ones (compare above, on ‘civil society’); rather, that certain ancient Greeks gestured towards this conceptual space, and the need to accommodate it in understandings of communal life.

My method gains legitimacy from rich recent studies which have shown how ancient and modern conceptions of ‘the political’, distinguished from ‘the private’, can be brought into fruitful dialogue: while the ancient and modern conceptions of ‘the political’ (and ‘private’) are fundamentally different from each other, they are sufficiently contiguous to be studied together, as a result both of the genealogy which links them and of their conceptual and functional homologies.<sup>9</sup> If it is valid to compare and contrast ancient and modern understandings of ‘the political’ (and its shadow, ‘the private’), then it is also legitimate to

---

<sup>8</sup> For this concept applied to the history of political thinking and interaction: W. Steinmetz, *Das Sagbare und das Machbare. Zum Wandel politischer Handlungsspielräume - England 1789–1867* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1993), esp. 24–34.

<sup>9</sup> See especially V. Azoulay, “Repolitiser la cité grecque, trente ans après”, *Annales HSS* 69.3 (2014): 689–719.

ask how ancients and moderns respectively have tackled the intermediate space between (their distinctive articulations of) these two shared categories.

Indeed, the development of the new strand in Greek political thinking can be understood only in the context of developments in understandings of the political: new conceptualisations of the social were the corollary of subtle engagement with longstanding Greek debates about the complex notion of *politeia*, which had always had a wide range of meanings, from ‘citizenship’ or ‘the constitution’ to simply ‘political life’.<sup>10</sup> This article analyses the Hellenistic and early Roman-era development of these interlinked ideas, and their implications for modern interpretation of the polis and its evolution.

The article begins (section 2) by analysing the roots of the Classical Athenian aversion to acknowledging a social sphere. It then traces (section 3) the gradual emergence in the Hellenistic period of conceptualisations of collective life which did not put the accent on politics, but rather evoked social forms of interaction. Section 3 shows that these new ideas could sometimes even replace older politics-centred language in mainstream civic ideology and polis-focussed philosophy. Section 4 then addresses the question to what extent new ideas tracked new realities of civic interaction. It argues that new language and ideas were probably partly a response to social, political and cultural changes which became particularly pronounced from the later Hellenistic period (c. 150 BC–AD 14) onwards, with the arrival of the Romans, perhaps especially the changing role of civic elites<sup>11</sup> and of club-like associations within poleis.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> See J. Bordes, *Politeia dans la pensée grecque jusqu'à Aristote* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1982); V. Harte and M. Lane (eds.), *Politeia in Greek and Roman Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

<sup>11</sup> Ph. Gauthier, *Les cités grecques et leurs bienfaiteurs* (Athens and Paris: Ecole Française d'Athènes, 1985); P. Fröhlich and Ch. Müller (eds.), *Citoyenneté et participation à la basse époque hellénistique : actes de la table ronde des 22 et 23 mai 2004* (Geneva: Droz 2005).

<sup>12</sup> For a recent analysis: V. Gabrielsen and C.A. Thomsen (eds.), *Private Associations and the Public Sphere: Proceedings of a Symposium held at the Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters, 9-11 September 2010* (Copenhagen: The Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters, 2015).

This first half of the article might seem to revive an old stereotype of the Hellenistic and Roman polis: that of ‘depoliticisation’.<sup>13</sup> However, any claim that the Hellenistic and Roman poleis turned away from rigorous politics, in practice or in self-understanding, needs to be carefully nuanced. I argue in sections 5–8 that many Hellenistic and early Roman-era Greeks themselves reasserted the importance of political life for their cities. Some of them revised their understanding of the political world, as part of the same process in which they began to imagine the social. In doing so, they were engaging with, and adapting, the two main traditional Greek ways of thinking about the scope of political life, *politeia*. Ancient abstract ideas of *politeia* (introduced more fully in section 2) ranged from quite narrowly institutional conceptions<sup>14</sup> (compare my sections 6–7) – close to modern theoretical notions of ‘politics’ or ‘la politique’ – to much broader understandings, which made *politeia* diffuse much of the collective life of the community (compare section 5).<sup>15</sup> These latter understandings resemble modern ideas of ‘the political’ or ‘le politique’, derived from Lefort, according to which everything which sustains the unity and structure of the community counts as political.<sup>16</sup> These narrower and broader conceptions of *politeia* and political life, and corresponding practices and institutions, coexisted and interacted in the Hellenistic and Roman world, even within single cities; this was a continuation of the complex interaction between them which recent studies have vividly shown for the Classical Athenian democracy.<sup>17</sup> The tenacity of the narrower understanding of *politeia* was one of the crucial factors which stimulated new thinking about the social, as a way of capturing all elements of collective life excluded from this view of *politeia*.

As well as addressing later phenomena and cities beyond Athens, this article also seeks to expand our picture of Greek debates about *politeia*, and its relationship with other dimensions of city life, by foregrounding assumptions and reflections outside the canonical intellectual elite. These are well attested, especially for later periods, in the rich record of public decision-making in the inscriptions of the Greek cities. This is a result of the Greek cities’ tendency to publish on stone their most important decisions, especially honorific decrees in praise of civic

---

<sup>13</sup> See P. Veyne, *Le pain et le cirque : sociologie historique d'un pluralisme politique* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1976).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Schmitt-Pantel, “Collective Activities”, e.g. 203.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. O. Murray, “Cities of Reason”, in Murray and Price, *The Greek City*, 1–25.

<sup>16</sup> See C. Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory* (Cambridge: Polity, 1988).

<sup>17</sup> See especially Azoulay, “Repolitiser la cité grecque”.

benefactors, which set out the ideal civic virtues those benefactors had mastered. Though proposed by individuals, these decrees had to be endorsed by the citizen-body as a whole in assembly. Their inscription in turn established them as guides to civic life for all citizens. Such documents thus give vivid insights into civic rhetoric and ideology on the ground,<sup>18</sup> more direct than those offered by literary and philosophical texts, though they necessarily often lack the complex argumentation or idiosyncratic flourishes of those latter sources.<sup>19</sup> Honorific decrees were often dominated by formulaic expressions, but, as some examples discussed here help to show, there was also considerable scope for citizens to adapt formulae and introduce new rhetoric to reflect their specific concerns.

Giving prominence to this more routine political discourse, and integrating it with ancient political philosophy, requires drawing on a range of modern methodological tools. My method has much in common with the so-called ‘Cambridge’ approach of studying canonical texts of political theory in their broad discursive context,<sup>20</sup> though I include, not only lesser known theoretical works, but also the more pragmatic texts preserved in inscriptions. In this respect, my close attention to the evolution of the use of individual, interlinked terms (e.g. *politeia*, *sympiosis*) across theoretical and more everyday discourse owes much to *Begriffsgeschichte*,<sup>21</sup> though I am also interested in ancient concepts and ways of thinking which cannot be subsumed under any individual ancient word. In pursuing this approach, including attention to silences, tensions and inchoate ideas, I am much indebted to the tradition of political anthropology within French ancient history. This approach, usually applied so far to Archaic and Classical Greece, demonstrates how to move outwards from

---

<sup>18</sup> On these inscriptions as (neglected) sources for the history of (praise) rhetoric: L. Pernot, *La rhétorique dans l'Antiquité* (Paris: LGF, 2000), 109–112.

<sup>19</sup> Compare the juxtaposing of literary and epigraphic texts to reconstruct changing ideology in G. Salmeri, “Empire and Collective Mentality: the Transformation of *Eutaxia* from the Fifth Century BC to the Second Century AD”, in *The Province Strikes Back: Imperial Dynamics in the Eastern Mediterranean* (Helsinki: Foundation of the Finnish Institute at Athens, 2008), ed. B. Forsen and G. Salmeri, 137–55.

<sup>20</sup> E.g. Q.R.D. Skinner, *Visions of Politics. Vol. I: Concerning Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>21</sup> E.g. R. Koselleck, *Begriffsgeschichten* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp, 2002).



everyday political practice and representations to illuminate and reinterpret ancient philosophical theory.<sup>22</sup>

For this particular article, perhaps the single most important methodological model is Rosanvallon's 'philosophical history of the political'. This is a central part of Rosanvallon's pursuit of a broader picture of modern political debates, extending far beyond formal institutions and formal theory. Delving into debates about politics and the political in modern democracies, mentioned above, Rosanvallon calls for attention to the full range of reflections about life in common – including apparently throwaway remarks and ephemeral documents, from pamphlets to songs – in order to reconstruct the richest picture of modern society's understanding of itself.<sup>23</sup> Rosanvallon has shown in depth how, for modern France, expanding the source focus can transform understanding of ideas about the scope of the political, by exposing rich reflections about the value (and dangers) of associative and sociable activities which escape the grip of state power and ideology.<sup>24</sup> The representations of collective life in ancient Greek cities' inscribed decrees provide some of the best available evidence for such a 'philosophical history of the political' – and of the social – for ancient Greece.

## 2. Classical Athenian Debates

A quite narrow, institutional conception of *politeia*, close to modern notions of 'la politique', was exploited by Classical Athenian orators. They could use the language of *politeia* and πολιτεύεσθαι ('to engage in politics') to circumscribe the formal political sphere of assembly, council and magistracies. Aeschines states in the *Against Timarchus*, in the context of a bar on assembly speaking by those who have sold their own bodies, that the law examines those engaged in formal politics, not those focussed on their private affairs (οὐδὲ γὰρ ὁ νόμος τοὺς ἰδιωτεύοντας, ἀλλὰ τοὺς πολιτευομένους ἐξετάζει) (Aeschines 1.195).

---

<sup>22</sup> E.g. P. Schmitt-Pantel, *La cité au banquet. Histoire des repas publics dans les cités grecques* (Rome: Ecole Française, 1992); N. Loraux, *La cité divisée : l'oubli dans la mémoire d'Athènes* (Paris: Payot, 1997); or the contributions to *Annales HSS* 69.3 (*Politique en Grèce ancienne*), ed. V. Azoulay.

<sup>23</sup> P. Rosanvallon, *Democracy: Past and Future* (New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2006), chs. 1–2, esp. 74–5; cf. P. Rosanvallon, *Pour une histoire conceptuelle du politique* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2003).

<sup>24</sup> Rosanvallon, *Le modèle politique français*.

Significantly, in keeping with Schmitt-Pantel's view (see my opening), the opposition Aeschines draws is between formal political life and the 'private' realm (τὰ ἴδια). That is also the main relevant distinction made in other fourth-century Attic speeches,<sup>25</sup> as well as in civic epigraphy: a pervasive formula of honorific decrees throughout antiquity was that the benefactor had proved himself useful both to citizens 'in private' or 'individually' (ἰδίαι) and towards the whole polis or *demos* ('people') 'in public affairs' or 'in common' (κοινῆι). The latter part of this formula captures formal interaction with the *demos* as a whole, mediated through its institutions, laws and magistrates, as opposed to the one-to-one, more informal interaction conveyed by ἰδίαι.

As these examples begin to show, Classical Athenians usually treated the public or civic (κοινόν or δημόσιον) sphere and the political sphere as roughly co-extensive, which is reflected in the partial convergence from the mid-fifth century BC in the application of the terms κοινόν, δημόσιον and πολιτικόν.<sup>26</sup> Ritualised interactions with the gods (τὰ ἱερά) could sometimes be treated as a separate sphere,<sup>27</sup> but they were also often bundled together into this single, overarching category of public, civic or political life.<sup>28</sup>

As noted in my introduction, this all left little room for explicit recognition of an intermediate, mixed social sphere, outside politics but not private. This is not to suggest that no such social sphere existed in practice in Classical Athens: Ismard, for example, shows the value for sociological analysis of ancient Athens of distinguishing a 'relatively autonomous'

---

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Demosthenes 24.155; [Demosthenes] 52.28.

<sup>26</sup> See A. Macé, "La genèse sensible de l'État comme forme du commun. Essai d'introduction générale", in *Choses privées et chose publique en Grèce ancienne. Genèse et structure d'un système de classification*, ed. A. Macé (Grenoble: Éditions Jérôme Millon, 2012), 7-40, here 11, 13 (convergence of κοινόν and δημόσιον); A. Fouchard, "Demosios et demos : sur l'état grec", in *Public et privé en Grèce ancienne. Lieux, conductes, pratiques*, ed. F. de Polignac and P. Schmitt Pantel, *Ktèma* 23 (1998), 59-70, at 60 (on κοινόν and δημόσιον) and 67-8 (on δημόσιον and πολιτικόν). As these scholars show, there were also continued divergences between these three words: e.g. δημόσιον could be used in a more technical sense than the others, to refer to polis property or other 'official' items (Macé, "La genèse sensible de l'État", 14-15, with table 1 (pp. 463-471)).

<sup>27</sup> E.g. Demosthenes 57.3 (τῶν ὑμετέρων ἱερῶν καὶ κοινῶν μετεῖχον); cf. N. Papazarkadas, *Sacred and Public Land in Ancient Athens* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>28</sup> See J. Blok, *Citizenship in Classical Athens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), esp. ch. 2. For a similar view concerning polis land: D. Rousset, "Sacred and Public Property in the Greek City", *JHS* 133 (2013), 113-133.

sphere of civic politics and a broader social sphere of interaction, which partly overlapped with each other.<sup>29</sup> The latter sphere included different types of voluntary relations and associations common in the Greek world, based on (for example) commercial exchange, conviviality, education or unofficial cult, which all had overlapping private and public dimensions. Crucially for this article, Ismard also denies as part of his argument that the Classical Athenians themselves explicitly identified an intermediate social sphere with its own dynamics, even while they participated in something very like it; the Classical notion of *κοινωνία* ('community') was much broader and looser, including also the family and whole polis.<sup>30</sup>

Some reasons can be reconstructed for this Classical Athenian resistance to acknowledging a third space of polis life. As Schmitt-Pantel shows, drawing on Veyne and Meier, collective activities such as communal dining and resulting social groupings had been central to the Archaic polis. Indeed, as recent studies have shown, they played a crucial role in the very emergence of ideas and practices of citizenship, still in gestation in the Archaic world.<sup>31</sup> Such collective practices and groupings remained important in fifth-century Athens. However, newly sophisticated fifth-century conceptualisations were so predicated on treating political equality and political engagement as hallmarks of collective civic life that they normally left everything 'private' except formal polis activities (participation in political institutions, war or ritual) in which citizens were demonstrably equal and polis-minded.<sup>32</sup> This assertion of the newly dominant political over the social would have been a way of resisting some of the hierarchical and fissiparous tendencies of the Archaic legacy: the threat that informal groupings could enable patronage or faction-building.

---

<sup>29</sup> P. Ismard, *La cité des réseaux. Athènes et ses associations VI<sup>e</sup>-I<sup>er</sup> siècle av. J.-C.* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2010), esp. 409; compare now, for Hellenistic Rhodes, C.A. Thomsen, *The Politics of Association in Hellenistic Rhodes* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), chs. 7–8.

<sup>30</sup> Ismard, *La cité des réseaux*, 14–15, 31.

<sup>31</sup> Ismard, *La cité des réseaux*, ch. 1; A. Duploux, "Les prétendues classes censitaires soloniennes : à propos de la citoyenneté athénienne archaïque", *Annales HSS* 69.3 (2014), 629–658.

<sup>32</sup> Schmitt-Pantel, "Collective Activities", 204, discussing Chr. Meier, *Die Entstehung des Politischen bei den Griechen* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1980) and P. Veyne, "Critique d'une systématisation: les *Lois* de Platon et la réalité", *Annales ESC* 37 (1982): 883–908.

As early as the later fifth century, however, some Athenian rhetoric pushes against the sharp κοινόν/ἴδιον ('public'/'private') distinction, while continuing to uphold it. Thucydides' Pericles gestures towards an intermediate social sphere in his argument (2.37.2–3) that the Athenians conduct their civic life (πολιτεύομεν) in a spirit of freedom not only in public affairs (τά πρὸς τὸ κοινόν), but also with regard to (lack of) suspicion in everyday dealings with one another (ἐς τὴν πρὸς ἀλλήλους τῶν καθ' ἡμέραν ἐπιτηδευμάτων ὑποψίαν). However, he then immediately resolves this apparent contrast between political and social life into the familiar, less nuanced opposition between 'public' and 'private', attributing social relations to the latter: despite the easy-going approach to private affairs (τὰ ἴδια) which he has just sketched, the Athenians are very respectful of the law in formal civic affairs (τὰ δημόσια).<sup>33</sup>

This pushing at the bounds of the κοινόν/ἴδιον ('public'/'private') distinction became more intense in the fourth century. Demosthenes suggests in his *Against Timocrates* (24.192–3), while arguing against leniency towards those who have transgressed in public life, that the laws of a polis are concerned with two sets of questions: first, with questions of how we should treat one another, have (business) dealings, determine how to behave in private affairs and live in general with one another (δι' ὃν χρώμεθ' ἀλλήλοις καὶ συναλλάττομεν καὶ περὶ τῶν ἰδίων ἃ χρὴ ποιεῖν διωρίσμεθα καὶ ζῶμεν ὅλως τὰ πρὸς ἡμᾶς αὐτούς); and, second, with questions of how each individual should behave towards the collective polis (τῷ κοινῷ τῆς πόλεως), if he wishes to engage in politics (πολιτεύεσθαι) and claims to care for the polis. The first category again gestures towards a third sphere of social interaction, not least because Demosthenes lists the issue of how citizens should interact separately from that of how they should regulate their 'private' life. Nonetheless, when he seeks in the next sentence to summarise the two categories, he has to fall back, like Thucydides' Pericles, on the κοινόν/ἴδιον dichotomy, identifying social relations with τὸ ἴδιον ('the private'): laws 'concerning private affairs' (περὶ τῶν ἰδίων) must be gentle and humane (ἠπίως κείσθαι καὶ φιλανθρώπως), for the benefit of the common people, but those concerning relations with the public sphere (περὶ τῶν πρὸς τὸ δημόσιον) must be harsh and severe, so that those engaged in formal politics (οἱ πολιτευόμενοι) will not wrong the people. Demosthenes thus expresses an inchoate division between a strictly political sphere, demanding stern rules and virtues, and a

---

<sup>33</sup> For this interpretation, cf. V. Azoulay, "Isocrate, Xénophon ou le politique transfiguré", *REA* 108 (2006): 133–153, here 135–6.

sphere of informal civic interaction, requiring gentle, humane virtues. This partly prefigures many of the developments analysed in sections 6–7 below. However, Demosthenes does not explicitly identify the latter of these spheres as something separate from, and richer than, ‘the private’.<sup>34</sup>

If practical rhetoric started almost to call out for a more explicit, systematic recognition of a distinct social sphere, this might have been expected to push fourth-century intellectuals in that direction. In reality, however, they did not take that conceptual leap, presumably still wary of the consequences for civic equality and solidarity of social interaction free from political scrutiny. As Azoulay has shown, adapting Schmitt-Pantel’s view,<sup>35</sup> those fourth-century intellectuals who took account of this trend did not so much distinguish social from political life as expand the scope of *politeia* to cover much of what is classed in modern political theory as ‘le politique’, including a much wider range of interactions, including the informal ones of symposium, club or chance meeting. Azoulay draws attention to the speech Xenophon gives to the herald Kleokritos, urging his opponents in civil war in 403 to recognise their wealth of shared experiences, including religious and educational ones, which have great political importance as foundations of concord (ὁμόνοια).<sup>36</sup>

As Azoulay has also shown, this example forms part of a broader attempt by Xenophon, in concert with Isocrates, to focus political attention on informal customs, norms and interactions, in dialogue with advocates of more traditional, narrower conceptions of *politeia*. Isocrates explicitly distinguished (4.78) laws concerned with the private sphere of contracts (τοὺς περὶ τῶν ἰδίων συμβολαίων) from those laws, taken much more seriously by the Athenians of old, which handle the everyday practices of citizens (τοὺς περὶ τῶν καθ’ ἑκάστην τὴν ἡμέραν ἐπιτηδεύματων). His aim was not to class these ‘practices’ (ἐπιτηδεύματα) as a third category between private and political, but rather to show, like

---

<sup>34</sup> Compare similar dynamics in Demosthenes 18.268.

<sup>35</sup> Schmitt-Pantel, “Collective Activities”, 207–8, 212, argues that collective activities beyond political institutions came to be conceived in the fourth century as making up a very general, broad category of the ‘common’ (κοινόν), of which political life is merely one component; this interpretation does not quite match the texts she cites (see next paragraphs on Xenophon and Aristotle). Compare too F. de Polignac and P. Schmitt-Pantel (eds.), *Public et privé en Grèce ancienne. Lieux, conductes, pratiques, Ktèma* 23 (1998), in their introduction (5–13), at 7–8.

<sup>36</sup> See Azoulay, “Repolitiser la cité grecque”.

Xenophon, that any effective understanding of *politeia* or exercise of citizenship and political rule (ἀρχή) must treat customs and practices as intrinsic to political order,<sup>37</sup> rather than supplements to it.<sup>38</sup> These ideas are strongly consistent with fourth-century philosophers' broad definitions of *politeia*, which partly built on traditional Greek thinking.<sup>39</sup>

Perhaps the richest Classical conceptualisation of the collective life of a polis beyond political institutions is Aristotle's discussion (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1160a8–23) of a polis' component 'communities' or 'associations' (κοινωνία), including associations of sea-travellers, soldiers and demesmen as well as religious groups and dining clubs. Significantly, however, Aristotle was not here singling out these associations as a separate sphere from institutionalised politics, complementary but not subordinate to it. Rather, Aristotle still regarded the polis as a single political κοινωνία, an overarching structure which actually subsumes and regulates the other κοινωνία. This is necessary because the polis aims at what is advantageous for the whole of life, whereas the other associations aim at one particular advantage related to their particular purpose (such as safe travel or pleasurable dining).<sup>40</sup> Any form of organised collective life with its own character and goals, independent from the polis' unifying political project of the good life in common for all, would be tantamount to factionalism or even strife (*stasis*). Aristotle's approach was consistent with Athenian practice: sub-polis associations tended to be structured like poleis-in-microcosm, and were also subject to supervision by the polis as a whole.<sup>41</sup>

This overview of Classical Athenian approaches can shed new light on a question which is the subject of intense current debate: did Classical Athenians understand citizenship (πολιτεία) as a broad composite of different forms of participation in the collective life of the polis, as J. Blok has recently argued with an emphasis on its religious dimension?<sup>42</sup> Or did they rather conceive citizenship principally as a matter of participation in formal political

---

<sup>37</sup> Cf. especially Isocrates 12.144.

<sup>38</sup> V. Azoulay, "Isocrate, Xénophon ou le politique transfiguré", esp. 136–40.

<sup>39</sup> E.g. Plato *Republic* or *Apology* 30b–32a; Aristotle *Politics* VIII.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Ismard, *La cité des réseaux*, 13–15.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Ismard, *La cité des réseaux*, 405–406.

<sup>42</sup> Blok, *Citizenship in Classical Athens*.

institutions, a traditional view restated forcefully by P. Fröhlich in response to Blok?<sup>43</sup> The most convincing response to this debate is to recognise that the two views co-existed within Classical Athenian thought, even within the thinking of an individual such as Aristotle.<sup>44</sup> This must be partly explained by the widely shared reluctance to recognise a third, social sphere of polis life, for fear that this would be a backdoor to inequality or factionalism. This reluctance meant that, when confronted with interactions which did not easily fit into the political-private binary, two options remained open: to accommodate them, first, within a particularly capacious notion of the private sphere (consider the examples of Thucydides' Pericles and Demosthenes above) or, second, within a particularly capacious notion of the political sphere (consider the examples from Xenophon, Isocrates and Aristotle). These two options carried with them correspondingly narrow and broad conceptions of πολιτεία, which were mutually sustaining because each captured something important but not, by itself, the full complexity of citizenship.

### 3. Asserting the Social over the Political

Perhaps the first emphatic challenge to the overwhelmingly political conception of communal life dominant in Classical Athens came from Epicurus in the later fourth century. Epicurus urged wise men to break free of the 'prison' of routine and political life (ἐκ τοῦ περὶ τὰ ἐγκύκλια καὶ πολιτικὰ δεσμοτηρίου);<sup>45</sup> they should not engage in politics (πολιτεύεσθαι).<sup>46</sup> As part of this move, Epicurus developed strongly social rather than political conceptualisations of desirable communal life, which excluded conventional political institutions and activities. To describe the human interactions which give rise to shared standards of justice and the common good, Epicurus referred to participation in mutual 'community' or 'dealings' (ἐν τῇ πρὸς ἀλλήλους κοινωνία, ἐν ταῖς μετ' ἀλλήλων συστροφαῖς); those who achieved security with regard to their neighbours 'lived together most pleasantly' (ἐβίωσαν μετ' ἀλλήλων ἡδιστα).<sup>47</sup> Citizenship is not entirely absent from this picture – the community (κοινωνία) in question is once qualified as 'of the fellow

---

<sup>43</sup> P. Fröhlich, 'La citoyenneté grecque entre Aristote et les modernes', *Cahiers du Centre Glotz* 27 (2017): 91–136.

<sup>44</sup> Contrast the institutional focus of Aristotle *Politics* III with the broader vision of Books VII–VIII.

<sup>45</sup> A.A. Long and D.N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), text 22D = Epicurus *Sententiae Vaticanae* 58.

<sup>46</sup> Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, text 22Q = Diogenes Laertius 10.119.

<sup>47</sup> Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, texts 22A–C = Epicurus *Kyriai Doxai* 33, 36–7, 40.

citizens' (τῶν συμπολιτευομένων, *Kyriai Doxai* 38) – but Epicurus' emphasis, perpetuated by his successor Hermarchus,<sup>48</sup> was squarely on more informal social intercourse.

This counter-cultural stress on the primacy of the social dimension of communal interaction was paralleled in some third-century outsider accounts of civic life: Heraclides Creticus, for example, offers in his travellers' guide to Athens a socio-cultural portrait of monuments, festivals, spectacles and philosophy, without any trace of political institutions.<sup>49</sup> The 'social' approach to civic life was not, however, immediately echoed in the polis discourse and political theory of insiders, who were predictably hostile to it. This is evident from a rich record of inscriptions. Many of the most revealing derive from the eastern Aegean and western Asia Minor, the regions which dominate the rest of this article. In their inscriptions, the early and mid-Hellenistic poleis (late fourth–early second century BC) presented an image of their communal life very familiar from the Classical Athenian democracy: a unified space of formal civic activities, including fighting and ritual but especially collective political participation, which was governed by a single set of norms, focussed on citizen equality, collective autonomy and the common good.<sup>50</sup> This left little room for a distinct social sphere. These inscriptions do not contain explicit reflection on the spheres of civic life like that attested for Classical Athens, but very often assert the familiar binary κοινόν/ἴδιον ('public'/'private') division.<sup>51</sup> It might be expected that the more experimental new political units of the early and mid-Hellenistic world, including new mixed foundations and unions of two or more existing poleis in *sympoliteiai* or federations, would have encouraged rethinking

---

<sup>48</sup> Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, text 22M = Porphyry *De Abstinentia* 1.7 (note εἰς τὴν τοῦ βίου κοινωνίαν τῶν ἀνθρώπων καὶ τὰς πρὸς ἀλλήλους πράξεις); cf. A. Alberti, "The Epicurean Theory of Law and Justice", in A. Laks and M. Schofield, *Justice and Generosity: Studies in Hellenistic Social and Political Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 161–90, here 165.

<sup>49</sup> Chr. Habicht, *Athens from Alexander to Antony* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 171–2.

<sup>50</sup> See Gauthier, *Les cités grecques et leurs bienfaiteurs*; V. Grieb, *Hellenistische Demokratie: politische Organisation und Struktur in freien griechischen Poleis nach Alexander dem Großen* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2008); J. Ma, "Whatever Happened to Athens? Thoughts on the Great Convergence and Beyond", in *The Hellenistic Reception of Classical Athenian Democracy and Political Thought*, eds. M. Canevaro and B. Gray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 277–98. For Asia Minor and the eastern Aegean, see (e.g.) examples from Eresos (Rhodes-Osborne, *GHI* 83), Erythrai (*I.Erythrai* 503) and Ilion (*I.Ilion* 25) in D. Teegarden, *Death to Tyrants! Ancient Greek Democracy and the Struggle against Tyranny* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), chs. 4–6.

<sup>51</sup> E.g. *I.Priene*<sup>2</sup> 6, ll. 25–6; 46, ll. 12–13.



of the spheres of collective life. There is, however, no clear sign in our admittedly limited evidence for these communities' ideology for radical questioning of the κοινόν/ἴδιον binary at this stage.<sup>52</sup>

The basic binary was to remain a prominent foundation of Greek political consciousness even in the later Hellenistic and Roman periods. However, a more social conceptualisation of communal life does begin to emerge in some literature and official documents of the second and first centuries BC. This is strongly, but certainly not exclusively, evident in representations of interaction not confined to any one polis. Two different texts of those centuries – a second-century inscription granting privileges to the Athenian branch of the theatrical guild of Dionysiac Artists, passed by the Delphic Amphictyony (the federation responsible for the Delphic sanctuary), and a speech invented by the first-century historian Diodorus Siculus for a fifth-century Syracusan – praise the civilised interactions of humanity in general, said to be inspired by Athens' example. Between them, these texts present civilised human relations as based on χρησις ('intimacy'), πίστις ('trust'),<sup>53</sup> κοινὸς βίος ('common life') and συμβίωσις ('living together', 'symbiosis').<sup>54</sup> This latter abstract noun συμβίωσις ('living together', 'symbiosis'), used to refer to social relations and sociability (and sometimes marriage), seems to have come into regular usage in the second and first centuries BC,<sup>55</sup> though the root verb was clearly well-established much earlier.<sup>56</sup> All the terms cited evoked quite open-ended interaction, which did not require common citizenship and political institutions, but could suffuse the new Roman cosmopolis across the Mediterranean, binding together local communities but also much more far-flung individuals whose interests happened to coincide.

---

<sup>52</sup> For the evidence for federal states' public language, see the epigraphical appendix in E. Mackil, *Creating a Common Polity: Religion, Economy, and Politics in the Making of the Greek Koinon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 409–504.

<sup>53</sup> *CID* 4.117 (118/7 or 117/6 BC), ll. 11–14.

<sup>54</sup> Diodorus Siculus 13.26.3.

<sup>55</sup> Compare Liddell-Scott-Jones, s.v. συμβίωσις, citing Polybius (5.81.2; 31.25.10) and Diodorus Siculus (4.54), as well as documentary sources.

<sup>56</sup> The root verb συμβιῶ ('to live together') was used in earlier texts of spouses or friends and associates (compare Isocrates 15.97; Plato *Symposium* 181d): Aristotle even used the infinitive as a substantive (τὸ συμβιῶν, 'living together') to refer to friends' or associates' shared life (Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 1126a31, cf. 1165b30–1; *Magna Moralia* 2.15.9).

Crucially, in a much more substantial departure from past trends, this social conceptualisation of human interaction in some cases came to supplant more political conceptualisations even of internal polis life, in poleis' own discourse and political theory. This was far from a uniform tendency, but some citizens and political thinkers came to deploy concepts previously mostly used to describe relations among strangers who were certainly not fellow citizens, and usually lived in different places, to praise interactions among citizens within a single polis. One such concept was peace (εἰρήνη),<sup>57</sup> and another was 'humanity' (φιλανθρωπία). Though this latter virtue had featured quite prominently in earlier civic rhetoric, before the later Hellenistic period it was never used in inscriptions, and only rarely in literary texts, to refer to relations among fellow citizens of the same polis. In the later Hellenistic period it became quite common to use it in this way across different genres.<sup>58</sup>

Concepts such as these cut across traditional political conceptions of internal civic interaction. Their intrinsic connection with relations among separate states, or strangers, carried connotations of flexible, voluntary interaction. Consequently, when these concepts were applied to ongoing, intensive relations among residents of the same place, those connotations helped to conjure something close to social interaction. The word φιλανθρωπία also suggested unconditional benevolence, rather than justice,<sup>59</sup> which also distanced it from traditional political virtue. It often even had connotations of top-down charity or patronage, very evident in Xenophon and Isocrates,<sup>60</sup> but it could also have a more neutral meaning of benevolent openness and compassion for others as fellow humans, consistent with its etymology,<sup>61</sup> which must have eased its adoption to describe relations among notionally equal fellow citizens.

---

<sup>57</sup> B. Gray, "Civic Reconciliation in Later Classical and Post-Classical Greek Cities: A Question of Peace and Peacefulness?", in *Peace and Reconciliation in the Classical World*, eds. E. Moloney and M. Williams (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2017), 66–85.

<sup>58</sup> B. Gray, "The Polis Becomes Humane? *Philanthropia* as a Cardinal Civic Virtue in Later Hellenistic Honorific Epigraphy and Historiography", *Studi ellenistici* 27 (2013) (= *Parole in movimento. Linguaggio politico e lessico storiografico nel mondo ellenistico*, eds. M. Mari and J. Thornton): 137–62

<sup>59</sup> Compare Demosthenes 24.51–2.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Azoulay, "Isocrate, Xénophon ou le politique transfiguré", 148–51.

<sup>61</sup> E.g. Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 1155a16–22; Polybius 4.20.1; compare the Karzoazos decree from Olbia, discussed below.

In some exceptional cases, ‘social’ language even drove out talk of *politeia* from contexts where it had been axiomatic. Greek cities often vividly revealed their self-understanding in inscriptions recording how the citizen-body had been reconciled after a period of strife, often with the help of a board of foreign arbitrators or judges. In the Classical and early to mid-Hellenistic periods, documents of this type tended to stress that the aim of the reconciliation had been to restore the polis as a structured political community of participatory citizens. Indeed, according to a formula attested several times in Hellenistic poleis, the aim of measures of reconciliation was explicitly that citizens should ‘conduct their political life’ (πολιτεύεσθαι) in concord (ὁμόνοια).<sup>62</sup>

A first-century BC decree passed by the citizens of Mylasa for their leading citizen, Ouliades, contains a section (*I.Mylasa* 101, ll. 37–46), concerning his efforts to resolve disputes among his fellow citizens, which appears to perpetuate this tradition,<sup>63</sup> but also adapts it, revealing changes in civic self-understanding. The citizens of Mylasa singled out Ouliades as a lone individual: he was not one member of a board of foreign judges charged with reconciliation, as in the normal Hellenistic pattern, but an almost king-like domestic benefactor, who rose above the civic fray to bring concord single-handedly. It was probably not unconnected with this shift that they also presented the results of Ouliades’ reconciliation in a novel way: they quite literally ‘depoliticised’ the familiar formula about bringing the citizens to ‘conduct their political life’ (πολιτεύεσθαι) in concord, by attributing to Ouliades the different aspiration that citizens should, not πολιτεύεσθαι, but rather ‘conduct their shared life with one another’ (τὴν μετ’ ἀλλήλων συναναστροφὴν ποιῆσθαι) in concord (ll. 38–9).

The implication was that Ouliades’ intervention enabled citizens not so much to resume stable, free self-government (πολιτεύεσθαι) as to pursue in concord a more general shared life (συναναστροφή) of social interaction and interdependence, in which specifically political activities (free debating, voting, ruling) had no special priority. Indeed, those political

---

<sup>62</sup> See *IG XII 4 1 132* (Telos, later fourth century BC), ll. 4–5, 38–9; *IG XII 6 1 95* (Samos, third century BC), ll. 16–17; *Tit. Cal. Test. XVI* (Kalymna, third century BC), ll. 37–8.

<sup>63</sup> E.g. the preference for mediation over legal judgement found here was a hallmark of that tradition: A. Dössel, *Die Beilegung innerstaatlicher Konflikte in den griechischen Poleis vom 5.-3. Jahrhundert v. Chr.* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2003), 256, 262–3.

activities had partly been transferred upwards: other parts of this decree emphasise the personal leadership and expenditure of Ouliades himself, especially in diplomacy (see ll. 15–38), of a kind which would not have been open to less wealthy citizens.

The abstract noun *συναναστροφή* ('shared life') seems to have first come into regular use, like *συμβίωσις* ('living together', compare above), from the second century BC: the only attestations of the noun dating earlier than c. 200 BC are, interestingly, Epicurean ones.<sup>64</sup> In this case, the root verb is also scarcely attested earlier, though it does feature in an Epicurean treatise and, interestingly, a later third-century epigraphic formula in Delphian decrees granting the status of *proxenos* (a form of official representative) to foreigners (see the conclusion to this section).<sup>65</sup> The contemporaneous rise of the abstract nouns *συμβίωσις* and *συναναστροφή* in itself suggests a later Hellenistic search for new abstract terms to convey collective relations which did not fit established models of the public or political. From the second century onwards, *συναναστροφή* is attested in multiple sources. Many derive from later centuries, but already in the second and first centuries BC it was used in inscriptions,<sup>66</sup> Epicurean philosophy<sup>67</sup> and other literary texts,<sup>68</sup> to refer to relations of sociability or friendship.

Downplaying politics in favour of the social was, as noted above, a hallmark of Hellenistic Epicureanism; but even the Peripatetics, the school most committed, through Aristotle, to the traditional polis, seem to have adapted their thinking in the later Hellenistic period in the same direction as the citizens of Mylasa. Perhaps the most famous claim of Aristotle's political theory was that man is a 'political animal', who can truly flourish only as a participatory citizen in a polis. As Annas points out, the later Hellenistic Peripatetics adapted this central thesis to give more weight to more general social interaction.<sup>69</sup> Stobaeus

---

<sup>64</sup> Carneiscus *Philistas* (c. 200 BC), *P.Herc.* 1027, 4.21 (compare 4.18 for the verb); cf. Epicurus *Sententiae Vaticanae* 18,

<sup>65</sup> Carneiscus *Philistas*, *P.Herc.* 1027, 4.18; *SIG*<sup>3</sup> 534, ll. 7–8; 534B, l. 8; *FD* III 4 175, ll. 7–8.

<sup>66</sup> As well as the Mylasan text, see *SEG* 26.1817, ll. 11–14.

<sup>67</sup> Philodemus *Peri Theon*, Book III, Kol. a, fr. 87 (Diels) (linking the concept with *συμφυλία*).

<sup>68</sup> *Letter of Aristeas* 169, 246; Diodorus Siculus 3.18.7, 4.4.6; cf. III *Maccabees* 2.31, 2.33, 3.5.

<sup>69</sup> J. Annas, "Aristotelian Political Thought in the Hellenistic Period", in *Justice and Generosity: Studies in Hellenistic Social and Political Philosophy*, eds. A. Laks and M. Schofield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 74–94, esp. 82–7.

preserves a summary of Peripatetic ethics, traditionally attributed to the Augustan philosophy-teacher Arius Didymus. Even if not by that Didymus, this summary certainly preserves themes and language of later Hellenistic Peripatetics.<sup>70</sup> When it turns to address Aristotle's *Politics* at its end, that summary does repeat the claim that man is a 'political animal'.<sup>71</sup> However, in its earlier elaboration of basic Peripatetic ethical teaching about man's nature and relationships, the summary claims that man is, not a 'political animal', but a 'mutually loving and communal animal' (φιλάλληλον καὶ κοινωνικὸν ζῷον).<sup>72</sup>

This partly picks up a claim in Aristotle's own *Eudemian Ethics* (1242a22–b1) that man is a 'social animal' (κοινωνικὸν ζῷον) towards those with whom he shares kinship, but that is a specific description of man's propensity to form sociable family bonds in the structured household (*oikos*), rather than mating randomly. In the Peripatetic summary, by contrast, the more complex and general phrase 'mutually loving and social animal' evokes broader, more open-ended and voluntary forms of sociability and co-operation, with 'intimates' (οἰκεῖοι) and fellow citizens as well as family members; and this solidarity is immediately afterwards explicitly broadened to encompass fellow members of large ethnic groups, and even all human beings.<sup>73</sup> Although solidarity with fellow citizens was still emphasised even here, local political interaction was no longer given quite so central a place in humans' essence.

Something close to this Peripatetic adaptation of Aristotle's 'political animal' argument – to the effect that sustaining communal bonds is essential to a human being's nature – was also advanced in a later Hellenistic honorific decree of Priene, for the citizen Athenopolis. In its introduction, that decree claims that Athenopolis kept his promises to his fellow citizens, thinking that 'what belongs to himself most of all is the maintenance of assiduousness

---

<sup>70</sup> On the fit with the broader later Hellenistic Peripatetic context known from other sources: Ph. Schmitz, "Oikos, polis und politeia – Das Verhältnis von Familie und Staatsverfassung bei Aristoteles, im späteren Peripatos und in Ciceros *De officiis*", *RhM* 160 (2017): 9–35.

<sup>71</sup> G. Tsouni, "Didymus' Epitome of Peripatetic Ethics, Household Management, and Politics: An Edition with Translation", in *Arius Didymus on Peripatetic Ethics, Household Management, and Politics*, ed. W.V. Fortenbaugh (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 1–67, sec. 26 Ts, 148.4; cf. R.W. Sharples, *Peripatetic Philosophy, 200 BC to AD 200: An Introduction and Collection of Sources in Translation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), chapter 15A, section 44.

<sup>72</sup> Tsouni, "Didymus' Epitome of Peripatetic Ethics", sec. 3 Ts, 120.14.

<sup>73</sup> Tsouni, "Didymus' Epitome of Peripatetic Ethics", sec. 3 Ts, 120.9–20.

towards those sharing their lives with him' (νομίζων το[ῦτο α]ὐτῷ μέγιστον ὑπάρχειν τὸ τὴν πρὸς τοὺς συναναστρ[ε]φο[μέν]ους ἐκτένειαν συντηρεῖν) (*I.Priene*<sup>2</sup> 63, ll. 17–21). It is telling that, as in later Hellenistic Peripatetic thought, this quasi-Aristotelian attitude is expressed with the accent on social rather than political interaction: Athenopolis' solidarity is said to be directed towards 'those conducting their lives together with him' (τοὺς συναναστρ[ε]φο[μέν]ους). In an interesting confirmation of the overlap with Peripatetic terminology and thinking, the Stoic philosopher Epictetus (first/second century AD) used this verb συναναστρέφεσθαι, together with the adjectives found in the Peripatetic summary (κοινωνικός, φιλάλληλος), to capture the theory of human natural sociability, when he attacked it in the name of individual self-sufficiency.<sup>74</sup>

In the Prienian decree, as at Mylasa, the concept of συναναστροφή evokes a broad sense of social interdependence and overlapping lives, of the kind which might equally be found in any voluntary association for trade or cult. The verb συναναστρέφεσθαι was, as noted above, already used in later third-century decrees of Delphi. In those cases, however, the verb was used to refer to the interactions of a foreigner (granted proxeny in the decree) with Delphian citizens:<sup>75</sup> these were the loose interactions to be expected between those who were not fellow citizens or even residents of the same polis (compare above on *philanthropia*). It is striking that, in the later Hellenistic period, such loose sociability was expected at Priene and Mylasa even in relations between fellow citizens of the same polis.

#### 4. How far did changing ideas reflect a changing civic reality?

The question arises whether these changes in language and ideas in the Hellenistic and early Roman periods, especially from the mid-second century BC onwards, represented a response to changes in civic life in practice. It would be possible to see the new ways of talking about civic life as new means of conceptualising old practices; they could be seen as a primarily ideological realignment which went together with a partial reduction in the suspicion of inequality and differentiation among citizens so prevalent in Classical Athenian ideology and philosophy. However, it is also possible to point to changes on the ground to which these new conceptualisations would have been responding, as well as helping to foster them.

---

<sup>74</sup> Epictetus *Dissertationes* 3.13.5–6 (ἀπὸ τοῦ φύσει κοινωνικοῦ εἶναι καὶ φιλαλλήλου καὶ ἡδέως συναναστρέφεσθαι ἄνθρωποις).

<sup>75</sup> *SIG*<sup>3</sup> 534, ll. 7–8; 534B, l. 8; *FD* III 4 175, ll. 7–8.

Several developments in civic life after c. 150 BC were not easily reconciled with the traditional self-image of the polis, before then widespread in the Greek world, as a relatively closed community of citizens focussed on their home community and its common good, who shared a single, unambiguous status of citizenship (*politeia*) and governed themselves in accordance with a constitution (*politeia*). At the same time as some power passed upwards to the Roman administration, even within cities the traditional practices of egalitarian interaction among citizens, centred on political institutions which encouraged power-sharing and rigorous scrutiny of decisions, lost some of their dominance of civic life. This was partly the result of the increased prominence of another, also longstanding style of civic life, focussed more on mainly voluntary forms of social, cultural and religious interaction than on obligatory 'ruling and being ruled'.<sup>76</sup>

Citizens (and others) could engage in these alternative forms of interaction within centralised civic contexts, especially civic markets and festivals and the educational programme of the civic gymnasium, though those all also had more formal and official dimensions, supervised by civic magistrates. Relevant interactions were, however, perhaps most concentrated within more specialised educational groupings and voluntary associations, which could be based on conviviality, a particular religious cult (including early Christianity), or pursuit of shared economic or professional interests.<sup>77</sup>

Such associations had always been a key part of polis society, as already noted in section 2, though professional associations became much more prominent in the Roman period. Nonetheless, the surviving inscriptions produced by them expand in number exponentially in the Hellenistic and especially Roman periods.<sup>78</sup> This no doubt partly reflects changing

---

<sup>76</sup> For a recent overview: R. Alston, "Post-Politics and the Ancient Greek City", in *Political Culture in the Greek City after the Classical Age*, eds. O. van Nijf and R. Alston (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 307–336.

<sup>77</sup> See P. Fröhlich and P. Hamon (eds.), *Groupes et associations dans le monde grec (IIIe s. a.C–IIe s. p. C)* (Geneva: Droz, 2012). On particular cities' associations: I.N. Arnaoutoglou, *Thusias heneka kai sunousias: Private Religious Associations in Hellenistic Athens* (Athens: Academy of Athens, 2003); Ismard, *La cité des réseaux*, esp. ch. 5; C.A. Thomsen, *The Politics of Association*.

<sup>78</sup> For the rich evidence for them: J.S. Kloppenborg and R.S. Ascough, *Greco-Roman Associations: Texts, Translations, and Commentary. I. Attica, Central Greece, Macedonia, Thrace* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011); P.A. Harland, *Greco-Roman Associations: Texts, Translations and Commentary. II. North Coast of the Black Sea*,

epigraphic habits. However, recent work has strengthened the view that it also reveals associations' increased prominence in civic life, as a complement, straddling the public-private divide, to traditional public civic institutions. As a recent study of Phrygia in Asia Minor shows, associations' rising prominence was partly due to Roman influence, including the model of local groups of Romans in Greek cities, which played a semi-public role as well as serving the interests in business and sociability of this particular constituency.<sup>79</sup>

All these increasingly prominent forms and contexts of interaction were important mediators of civic power and trust,<sup>80</sup> but they were less directly and unremittingly focussed on political values of the common good, justice and collective autonomy, though those values remained paramount in other contexts. Instead, they gave more scope to individual self-interest, as well as to solidarity based on charity, hospitality or social status. To put this broad argument in spatial terms, the civic assembly and council, the centres of political debate and collective deliberation, ceded some of their prominence in civic life to the commercial agora, civic temples, gymnasium, schools, associations' cult meeting-places and citizens' houses.

It needs emphasising that this change was a matter of degree: voluntary socio-cultural, educational and religious interaction had been important earlier, and narrowly political interaction remained crucial later. It is obviously difficult to demonstrate or prove a subtle shift in emphasis, but some concrete signs can be mentioned. In a continuation of a phenomenon already noted in section 3 with regard to Heraclides Creticus, the festivals, entertainment and opportunities for education and socialising a Greek city could offer, rather than its constitution or laws, became often the main attraction and talking-point for outsiders, not only for Romans who were keen to emphasise that they savoured elite civic Greeks' intellectual companionship,<sup>81</sup> but also for mobile Greeks themselves.<sup>82</sup> Strabo, in his account

---

*Asia Minor* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014); also now the Copenhagen online *Inventory of Ancient Associations Database*.

<sup>79</sup> See B. Eckhardt, "Romanization and Isomorphic Change in Phrygia: the Case of Private Associations", *JRS* 106 (2016): 147–71.

<sup>80</sup> Compare C.A. Thomsen, *The Politics of Association*, ch. 7.

<sup>81</sup> See e.g. Cicero *De Oratore* 1.85–89, with E. Rawson, "Cicero and the Areopagus", *Athenaeum* 63 (1985): 44–67, esp. 53–4.

<sup>82</sup> See *SEG* 39.1243 (Colophon, later second century BC, decree for the citizen Polemaios), col. V, ll. 1–11; cf. col. I, 22–36. Cf. *Acts of the Apostles* 17.17–22.



of the great Greek cities of the eastern Roman Empire, frequently gave most prominence to the cultural and intellectual figures they had produced.<sup>83</sup> Even the self-image of polis insiders was changing in the same direction. Plutarch, an active local citizen in his home polis in central Greece (first/second centuries AD), attests to a shift in focus in disparaging those orators who continue to engage in demagoguery concerning Marathon and Classical military examples; the really relevant *exempla* from Classical Athens are now those of gentle civility and generous forgetting of political rivalries or interests, or of strict justice, out of consideration for others, such as the amnesty of 403 BC.<sup>84</sup> In a similar vein, but this time from within official civic rhetoric itself, cities' honorific decrees in praise of benefactors often, from the later Hellenistic period, foregrounded hospitality and other voluntary contributions, especially to education and festivals, partly at the expense of war, diplomacy, finance and more utilitarian benefactions, though those traditional civic contributions also remained prominent.<sup>85</sup>

The broad shifts discussed here expanded the opportunities for non-citizens, including even outsiders and visitors, to play a central role in civic life, however temporary. This was an expansion of earlier Hellenistic trends towards more meaningful interaction between those who were not fellow citizens of the same polis, especially in the context of *sympoliteiai* and federal systems,<sup>86</sup> as well as voluntary associations, which increasingly enabled mingling between citizens and foreigners. Moreover, from the later Hellenistic period, it became quite common for some individuals to hold multiple polis citizenships in different places.<sup>87</sup> Even the previously usually more straightforward status of polis citizenship (*politeia*) itself could

---

<sup>83</sup> E.g. Strabo 14.5.12–15 (Tarsus); more generally see J. Engels, “Ἄνδρες ἔνδοξοι or “Men of High Reputation” in Strabo’s *Geography*”, in *Strabo’s Cultural Geography. The Making of a Coloussourgia*, eds. D. Dueck, H. Lindsay, and S. Potheary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 129–43.

<sup>84</sup> Plutarch *Praecepta gerendae reipublicae* 814a–c.

<sup>85</sup> Contrast (e.g.) *I.Priene*<sup>2</sup> 68–70 (first century BC) with earlier Hellenistic decrees of Priene, such as *I.Priene*<sup>2</sup> 20–8. For some of the changes discussed here, compare G. Salmeri, “Reconstructing the Political Life and Culture of the Greek Cities of the Roman Empire”, in *Political Culture in the Greek City after the Classical Age*, eds. O. van Nijf and R. Alston (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 307–336, esp. 206–207.

<sup>86</sup> Compare Mackil, *Creating a Common Polity*.

<sup>87</sup> A. Heller and A.-V. Pont (eds.), *Patrie d’origine et patries électives : les citoyennetés multiples dans le monde grec d’époque romaine* (Bordeaux: Ausonius Éditions, 2012).

now increasingly be parcelled, in specific cases, into separate entitlements, which made it possible to confer something like partial citizenship on outsiders.<sup>88</sup>

On the basis of the evidence surveyed in this section, it is a reasonable hypothesis that it was partly the shifting location of power from the mid-second century BC, and especially the increased prominence of forms of interaction which did not easily fit traditional conceptions of either political or private life, which provoked the reflection about, and new conceptualisations of, social life within the polis which I am discussing here. This would mirror how, in the modern world, the challenge of grappling with new forms of interaction has stimulated the intense reflection about, and reconceptualisation of, the political and the social evident in the modern theories discussed in this article.<sup>89</sup> In both cases, the public sphere of political debate proved robust enough to subject new forms of interaction to intense scrutiny.

### 5. Reasserting Political Life in its Breadth and Variety

On the most pessimistic interpretation, the practical and ideological changes discussed so far amounted to ‘depoliticisation’ after c. 150, or even ‘post-politics’.<sup>90</sup> According to advocates of this approach, the new style of civic life, often more informal, cultural and cosmopolitan, gave members of wealthy civic elites new opportunities to exercise power and patronage through avenues, such as lavish hospitality for all citizens in their homes, which lay outside the constraints of traditional civic checks and balances, geared towards equality and justice. Instead of scrutiny and praise according to criteria the same for all, wealthy benefactors received extravagant city honours, couched in abstract ethical praise for their generosity.<sup>91</sup> This interpretation of later Hellenistic developments shares many similarities with Arendt’s

---

<sup>88</sup> Chr. Müller, “La (dé)construction de la *politeia*. Citoyenneté et octroi de privilèges aux étrangers dans les démocraties hellénistiques”, *Annales HSS* 69.3 (2014): 753-75

<sup>89</sup> See O. Marchart, *Post-Foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007); E. Isin (ed.), *Recasting the Social in Citizenship* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008).

<sup>90</sup> Note again Alston, “Post-Politics and the Ancient Greek City”. Cf. R. Osborne, *Greek History: The Basics* (London: Routledge, 2014), 139: ‘the city had been reduced to a mere town.’

<sup>91</sup> See in particular Gauthier, *Les cités grecques et leurs bienfaiteurs*, esp. 56–9. Cf. F. Quaß, *Die Honoratiorenschicht in den Städten des griechischen Ostens* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1993), dating the changes earlier in the Hellenistic period than Gauthier.

picture of the conquest of the political by the social in the modern world: that is, for her, the displacement of free collective action by citizens, aimed at the good life in common, with more instrumental and individualistic forms of interaction, aimed at mere survival.<sup>92</sup> More recent theorists have developed Arendt's critique of modernity, positing the supersession of free, agonistic political debate about the common good by an ethics of charitable philanthropy, 'politics in the register of morality'.<sup>93</sup>

Current research is continuing to uncover the power dynamics of the Greek cities in the Roman period. This work suggests a much more mixed and complex picture than the pessimistic reading: the changes outlined above were entwined in subtle ways with enduring power-sharing and equality, and even democracy and political conflict.<sup>94</sup> This recent work calls into question any straightforward developmental picture, and raises fresh questions about the balance of political life and other spheres.

Crucially, later Hellenistic and early Imperial-era Greeks were already themselves engaged in reflections similar to these now continued by modern historians of the Hellenistic and Roman poleis: they were already asking what place was left for politics and *politeia* in the changed world. Although some accepted or embraced the partial displacement of politics by social life

---

<sup>92</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, esp. 38–49.

<sup>93</sup> C. Mouffe, *On the Political* (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2005), 72–6. For an overview: J. Wilson and E. Swyngedouw (eds.), *The Post-Political and its Discontents. Spectres of Depoliticisation, Spectres of Radical Politics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014).

<sup>94</sup> For this complex, mixed picture, see (e.g.) R. van Bremen, *The Limits of Participation: Women and Civic Life in the Greek East in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods* (Amsterdam: Gieben, 1996); Fröhlich and Müller, *Citoyenneté et participation*; A. Zuiderhoek, "On the Political Sociology of the Imperial Greek City", *GRBS* 48 (2008), 417–445; A. Heller, "La cité grecque d'époque impériale : vers une société d'ordres ?", *Annales HSS* 64.2 (2009): 341–373 and now *L'âge d'or des bienfaiteurs. Titres honorifiques et sociétés civiques dans l'Asie Mineure d'époque romaine (Ier s. av. J.-C. - IIIe s. apr. J.-C.)* (Geneva: Droz, 2020); C. Brélaz, "La vie démocratique dans les cités grecques à l'époque impériale romaine. Notes de lectures et orientations de la recherche", *Topoi* 18.2 (2013): 367–399; H.-L. Fernoux, *Le Demos et la Cité : communautés et assemblées populaires en Asie Mineure à l'époque impériale* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires, 2011); Salmeri, "Reconstructing the Political Life"; Chr. Mann and P. Scholz (eds.), "*Demokratie*" im Hellenismus: von der Herrschaft des Volkes zur Herrschaft der Honoratioren? (Berlin: Antike, 2011); J. Ma, *Statues and Cities: Honorific Portraits and Civic Identity in the Hellenistic World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), esp. Part I; also Ma's earlier "Public Speech and Community in the Euboicus", in *Dio Chrysostom: Politics, Letters and Philosophy*, ed. S.C.R. Swain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 108-24; Müller, "La (dé)construction de la *politeia*".

(section 3 above), others found creative ways to reassert the role of truly political life in their cities, and its interaction with the burgeoning social sphere. This is the subject of the rest of this paper; in the conclusion ancient reflections on these issues will be brought back to bear on the modern scholarly debate.

Among those who insisted on the persistence of politics, some simply preserved old ways of thinking, including the straightforward public-private dichotomy, which remained very widespread both in inscriptions and literary texts. For example, Hierocles, a Greek Stoic of the second century AD, sought to describe in systematic terms the different circles of other people with which an individual should gradually recognise his/her affinity by a process of *oikeiosis* ('appropriation'), until eventually embracing all of humanity. In his list, Hierocles skipped straight from the private circles of the self and different degrees of kin to the public, institutionalised circles of fellow members of the same *deme* or *phyle* (two formal subdivisions of a polis) and of the same polis. This left no space for an intermediate circle of informal social and economic relationships outside the family, but still within the local community.<sup>95</sup>

Meanwhile, other Greek citizens and thinkers of the later Hellenistic and early Roman periods did make changes to the old framework, but in a different way from those considered in section 3: they developed their own ways of accommodating the new force of social life, without exiling politics from the city. In one tendency, some Greek citizens and thinkers developed the attempts of Plato, Xenophon and Isocrates (see section 2 above) to expand the notion of *politeia* to give an ever more prominent place to extra-institutional interactions and customs, such that it resembled the modern idea of 'le politique'. Scholars have tended to see this inclusive approach to *politeia* as the dominant one in the Hellenistic world,<sup>96</sup> preparing the way for more metaphorical conceptions of *politeia* in the Roman Empire and Late Antiquity, when *politeia* came to denote the structure of the world, cosmos or monastic community, or even the general 'culture' or 'life' of a holy man depicted in hagiography.<sup>97</sup>

---

<sup>95</sup> See the report of Hierocles' views at Stobaeus *Florilegium* 4.671, ll. 16–21, with A.A. Long, "Hierocles on *Oikeiosis* and Self-Perception", in *id.*, *Stoic Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 250–63.

<sup>96</sup> E.g. Azoulay, "Isocrate, Xénophon ou le politique transfiguré", 151, 153.

<sup>97</sup> C. Rapp, "City and Citizenship as Christian Concepts of Community in Late Antiquity", in *The City in the Classical and Post-Classical World. Changing Contexts of Power and Identity*, eds. C. Rapp and H.A. Drake (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 153–166.

Already in the first century BC, the related term *politikos* (originally ‘political’) could be used to express a very general sense of civilisation or civility.<sup>98</sup>

The very broad conception of *politeia* is not easy to find explicitly endorsed in inscribed decrees. It was, however, at least implicit in many later Hellenistic decrees, which, as noted in the previous section, gave increasing prominence – and thus political scrutiny – to the benefactor’s civic life beyond formal institutions, including family relations and broader sociability.<sup>99</sup> Indeed, some decrees which explicitly described a benefactor as engaging in political life (πολιτευόμενος) focussed strongly on the benefactor’s cultural contributions, especially to the gymnasium.<sup>100</sup> A broad, multi-faceted conception of *politeia* can also be detected lying behind the concise decree formulae which portrayed a citizen ‘engaging in political life *in every way*’ (πάντα τρόπον πολιτευόμενος)<sup>101</sup> or ‘in all other respects’ (ἐν τοῖς ἄλλοις πᾶσιν).<sup>102</sup>

The broader conception was expressed more systematically in literary texts, especially of the Imperial period. Plutarch invokes it in his *On Whether an Old Man Should Participate in Politics*, stating that *politeia* is not a limited period of office, but lifelong political engagement. Plutarch’s broad conception of political life explicitly ranges very widely across the collective activities of the community, but also across the full range of virtues: the true political agent must exercise not only the obviously political virtues, such as love of polis, but also show himself community-minded (κοινωνικός) and humane (φιλόανθρωπος).<sup>103</sup> These latter virtues are well-suited to more informal, social interactions with a wide spectrum of people (compare section 3). Plutarch’s incorporation of φιλοανθρωπία into the heart of political virtue may partly take its cue from Xenophon and Isocrates, but Plutarch resists their urge to use the term, combined with a broad, loose view of *politeia*, to blur the boundaries between civic leadership and monarchical or aristocratic paternalism:<sup>104</sup> for Plutarch here,

---

<sup>98</sup> E.g. Strabo 3.2.15; 7.4.6; 14.3.2; 17.1.3.

<sup>99</sup> E.g. SEG 39.1243 (Colophon, late Hellenistic), col IV, ll. 24–34.

<sup>100</sup> E.g. SEG 38.1396, later Hellenistic decree of Perge for Stasias, a gymnasiarch, said to be ‘engaging in politics in the finest way’ (ἄριστα πολιτευόμενος, ll. 22–4, 59–60).

<sup>101</sup> IG XII 5 274 or 321 (Paros, Hellenistic); cf. IG IX 1 540 (Leukas, Imperial).

<sup>102</sup> I.Metropolis 1, text B, ll. 27–8.

<sup>103</sup> Plutarch *An seni res publica gerenda sit* 791c, 796c–797a.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. Azoulay, “Isocrate, Xénophon ou le politique transfiguré”, 148–51.

φιλανθρωπία remains within civic constraints, which it itself reinforces. It is integral to true political activity, which must emulate Socrates as much as Pericles, to recolonise the social sphere for political ends of justice and the common good.

Plutarch had an obvious interest in this particular work in emphasising the extra-institutional aspects of politics: these were the avenues open for old men to contribute to political life outside regular magistracies, now held by younger compatriots. However, his approach chimes with hints elsewhere in his own work.<sup>105</sup> His way of thinking also finds occasional explicit parallels in inscribed decrees of the Imperial period. The strongest comes in an honorific inscription set up by the inhabitants (*katoikountes*) of a Lydian settlement, who did not possess full polis status. They summed up the grounds for honours to the benefactor as his being a good man and ‘engaging in politics in a decent and humane way in private towards each individual and in common towards all’ (κα[ὶ ἰδίᾳ] πρὸς ἕνα ἕκαστον κα[ὶ κοινῆ] πρὸς πάντας πολε[ιτευ]όμενον ἐπε[ικ]ῶς κα[ὶ φιλ]ανθρώπως).<sup>106</sup> Elevation of extra-institutional interaction to the status of participation in *politeia* might have been particularly attractive to a sub-polis community like this, without the full range of civic institutions, but this community would also have had an interest in remaining faithful to the norms of wider civic rhetoric and thinking. Like Plutarch, this community co-opted humanity (and decency) as political virtues, even when exercised in informal one-to-one interaction.

## 6. Understanding Politics and Social Life as Complementary Spheres

Crucially for the argument of this paper, the more inclusive conception of *politeia*, subsuming the social, itself had a significant rival, so far less studied: other decrees reasserted quite a narrow, institutionalised conception of *politeia*, close to modern notions of ‘la politique’. This is well attested, for example, in the epigraphy of the cities of the Hellenistic and Imperial Lycian League, in south-western Asia Minor, where the participle *πολιτευόμενος* commonly refers to the narrow realm of institutions, whether it denotes

---

<sup>105</sup> Cf. Plutarch *Praecepta gerendae reipublicae* 800d. By contrast, *De unius in re publica dominatione, populari statu et paucorum imperio* (826c–e) presents a narrower, more institutional understanding of *politeia*, but Plutarch’s authorship is doubtful: G.J.D. Aalders, “Plutarch or Pseudo-Plutarch? The authorship of *De unius in re publica dominatione*”, *Mnemosyne* 35 (1982): 72–83.

<sup>106</sup> *TAM V* 1 166, ll. 6–9 (from the *katoikia* at Encekler in the territory of the polis of Saittai in Lydia, Imperial period).

possessing the legal status of citizenship or participating in formal political institutions.<sup>107</sup> Similarly, a decree of the second half of the second century BC of the polis of Metropolis for the citizen Apollonios marks off political involvement as a distinctive stage in his life, on which he embarked after completing his youthful education and travel (ἐκ τε τῆς ἀποδημίας παραγενόμενος προῆλθεν ἐπὶ τὸ πολιτεύεσθαι).<sup>108</sup> it must here correspond to active involvement in institutionalised politics.

Significantly, some decrees in this category innovatively combined this narrow understanding of *politeia* with a new, richer conceptualisation of extra-institutional interactions: a social realm, with its own dynamics and norms, which was a complement, rather than a replacement, for politics (contrast section 3 above). The number of relevant texts is small, but the contrast with standard forms of thinking and expression makes them stand out.

A striking example is the late first- or second-century AD posthumous decree of Kaunos, in south-western Asia Minor, for the citizen Agreophon. Even at his young age at death, Agreophon, who belonged to a distinguished family of civic magistrates, had already fulfilled many leading civic roles: *stephanephoros*, gymnasiarch, agonothete and liturgist, as well as *dekaprotos* (one of the leading men of the polis, with corresponding financial obligations). His early death provoked widespread public mourning; in this decree he was granted a public funeral.

This decree sums up the virtues of Agreophon’s life (*I.Kaunos* 30, first or early second century AD, ll. 15–18):

<p>... ἐπεικῆ καὶ ἰσότημιον τὸν ἑαυτοῦ  παρεῖχεν βίον αἰδούμενος μὲν τοὺς  πρεσβυτέρους ὡς πατέρας, φιλοστόργως δὲ  καὶ φιλοκαλῶς προσφερόμενος πάσῃ  ἡλικίᾳ, δίκαιος ἐμ πολιτεία, ἀγνὸς καὶ περὶ</p>	<p>... he made his life a decent one committed  to equality of honour, showing respect for  his elders as fathers, behaving in an  affectionate way and a way showing love of  the fine towards people of all ages; just in</p>
---	---

<sup>107</sup> For recent discussions of the debate about this language in Lycia (both favouring the ‘citizenship’ interpretation): C. Kokkinia, “Opramoas’ Citizenships: The Lycian *Politeuomenos*-Formula”, in Heller and Pont, *Patrie d’origine et patries électives*, 327–39; P. Baker and G. Thériault, “Xanthos et la Lycie à la basse époque hellénistique : nouvelle inscription honorifique xanthienne”, *Chiron* 48 (2018), 301–332, esp. 306–307; also their new text (p. 302), ll. 3–5, cf. 20–21.

<sup>108</sup> *I.Metropolis* 1, text B, ll. 10–12.

<p>τὰς δημοσίας πίστεις, ζηλωτὸς τῆς σωφροσύνης, εὐσεβῆς καὶ φιλόστοργος πρὸς τοὺς οἰκείους, ἀμείμητος πρὸς τοὺς φίλους, ἐπεικῆς καὶ φιλόανθρωπος πρὸς τοὺς οἰκέτας.</p>	<p>his formal political activity; and also a man of integrity with respect to public tasks with which he was entrusted; an aspirant to self-control; pious and loving towards his kin; inimitable towards his friends; and decent and humane towards his slaves.</p>
--	--

*Politeia* is here no all-encompassing category demanding the full range of virtues. Rather, it is one dimension of Agreophon’s wider life (*bios*), presumably his formal office-holding and other participation in civic government,<sup>109</sup> a usage first documented by Wilhelm.<sup>110</sup> In that sphere, Agreophon showed the appropriate virtue of justice (δικαιοσύνη). He also showed the related virtue of pure incorruptibility in discharging formal public duties or ‘trusts’. However, he is also presented as having engaged in a wide range of other types of interaction with his fellows, social and familial rather than political. He showed in each case the appropriate virtues, often more sentimental than justice or purity: he showed respect (αἰδώς) towards his elders; he was affectionate (φιλόστοργος) towards people of all age-groups; he was pious and affectionate towards his relations; he was inimitable towards his friends; and, interestingly, he showed decency (ἐπιείκεια) and humanity (φιλοανθρωπία), here clearly a hierarchical virtue, towards slaves. Significantly, the interactions beyond *politeia* are not limited to life within the household, but also include much less restricted relationships, not only with ‘friends’, but also with elders and those of ‘every age’ in general: Agreophon’s social relations range as, or more, widely than his political ones, but have a different nature.

This Kaunian decree thus expresses a sophisticated, multi-part conception of civic life, in which different spheres of interaction and different virtues support one another, rather than fusing into an amorphous whole of generic *politeia*, as in Plutarch. In particular, the gentler virtues of family and social life balance the sterner, incorruptible virtues of formal political life. There is another Imperial honorary decree of Kaunos which also juxtaposes these different virtues, though without dividing them up between different spheres of civic life. The second-century AD decree for Quintus Vedius P.f. Capito, inscribed on a large family monument set up by his son, concludes by praising him for ‘engaging in political life as

<sup>109</sup> Cf. *IOSPE I<sup>2</sup>* 32, third century BC, face B, l. 76: ἐν τοῖς τῆς πολιτείας χρόνοις.

<sup>110</sup> A. Wilhelm, “Zum griechischen Wortschatz”, *Glotta* 14 (1925): 68–84, here 78–82, with many examples.



magistrate in a dignified, virtuous, just and humane way, towards the whole people, in a beneficial way, and in personal dealings with individuals, not giving ground for complaint’ (ἄρχοντα πολειτευόμενον σεμνῶς καὶ ἐναρέτως καὶ δικαίως καὶ φιλανθρώπως τῷ τε παντὶ δήμῳ συμφερόντως καὶ τοῖς κατ’ ἄνδρα vacat ἀπροσκόπως, *I.Kaunos* 139, IIIc, ll. 19–21). This latter decree is in some ways closer to Plutarch’s approach, in that it integrates informal interactions and humane virtue under the umbrella of political activity. At the same time, the addition of the word ἄρχοντα suggests a desire, like in the Agreophon decree, to define a specific realm of institutionalised politics, which in this case can itself accommodate informal, humane interaction.<sup>111</sup>

A closer parallel to the Agreophon decree is another posthumous decree, later Hellenistic or early Imperial, from Synnada in Phrygia. The deceased Philonides’ grandfather had shown good faith and incorruptibility in office (τὴν ἐν ταῖς ἀρχαῖ[ς] πίστιν τε καὶ καθα[ριότητα]), combined with sincerity and humanity towards, not merely his own associates, but *each and every* citizen (τὴν πρὸς ἕνα καὶ ἕκαστον [τῶν] πολιτῶν γνησιότητά τε καὶ φιλανθρωπίαν) (A. Wilhelm, *Neue Beiträge* I, 56–7, ll. 18–19; compare the Lydian *katoikia* decree discussed in the previous section). These comprehensive but informal interactions with fellow citizens evoke a social sphere between public and private.

This desirable balance between robust political life and gentle, humane social life was also praised by the historian and rhetorician Dionysius of Halicarnassus (first century BC/AD). In his account of Rome’s origins, he described (*Antiquitates Romanae* 1.41.1) how Herakles brought civilised interaction to the world, putting down tyrannies and overbearing cities and establishing ‘lawful monarchies, well-ordered political systems and humane and sociable modes of life’ (νομίμους βασιλείας καὶ σωφρονικὰ πολιτεύματα καὶ βίων ἔθη φιλάνθρωπα καὶ κοινοπαθῆ).

Some decrees even used abstract vocabulary (compare Dionysius’ βίων ἔθη, ‘modes of life’) in order explicitly to identify social life as a distinct sphere, alongside politics. An example is an opening part of the later Hellenistic Prienian decree for the citizen Moschion (*I.Priene*<sup>2</sup> 64, ll. 16–23):

---

<sup>111</sup> It is, however, also conceivable that the word ἄρχοντα belongs with the previous part of the sentence; in that case, these lines would be very close to Plutarch’s sentiment.

<p>...βεβιωκῶς εὐσ[εβῶς μὲ]ν πρὸς θεούς,  ὁ[σ]ίως δὲ πρὸς τοὺς γονεῖς καὶ τοὺς  συμ]β[ι]οῦντας ἐν οἰκ[ε]ιότητι καὶ χρήσει  καὶ τοὺς λοιπο[ύς] πολίτας πάντας, δικαίως  δὲ καὶ φιλοδόξως προσε[νην]εγμένος τῆι  πατρίδι καὶ καταξίως τῆς τῶν πρ[ογόνων]  ἀρετῆς τε καὶ δόξης, διαμαρ[τ]υρουμένην  ἐσχηκ[ῶς διὰ παν]τὸς τοῦ βίου τὴν παρὰ  τῶν θεῶν εὐμένεια[ν] κα[ὶ τὴν παρὰ] [τ]ῶν  [σ]υμπολιτευομένων καὶ τῶν  κατοικοῦ[ντων εὐνοια]ν ἐπὶ τοῖς κατὰ τὸ  κάλλιστον πρᾶσσο[μένοις .....]</p>	<p>...having lived piously towards the gods,  and properly towards his parents and those  living together with him in close relations  and intimacy and towards the rest of the  citizens, and having conducted himself  justly and in a glory-loving way towards his  country, and worthily of his ancestors’  virtue and reputation; and having had  confirmed through evidence throughout his  life the favour of the gods and the good will  of his fellow citizens and the residents for  his deeds in conformity with the finest  standard....</p>
---	--

Towards the end of this extract, the Prienians insisted on the still vibrant political dimension of their civic community, describing themselves as οἱ συμπολιτευόμενοι (literally ‘those engaging in political life together’). It was a traditional, narrow, institutional conception of *politeia* which they had in mind: the fellow active citizens, together with ‘the residents’ (οἱ κατοικοῦντες), had provided evidence of their appreciation for Moschion’s good deeds, presumably earlier honorific decrees passed through institutionalised decision-making. This political conceptualisation contrasts strongly with the description of the civic community in the contemporary decree for Moschion’s own brother Athenopolis (first quoted at the end of section 3 above) as ‘those sharing their lives’ (οἱ συναναστρεφόμενοι). The different proposers of the decrees for the brothers thus made distinct choices, to foreground the Prienians’ nature either as a self-governing community (the Moschion decree) or as an interdependent social group profiting from a benefactor’s largesse (the Athenopolis decree); there were rival meaningful ideological options within a single polis.

Crucially, however, rather than ignoring the extra-political dimension of the Prienians’ community so emphasised in the Athenopolis decree, or relegating it to the realm of the private (ἴδιον), the drafter of the Moschion decree identified sociable interaction outside politics as one of several different spheres of polis life. If the highly plausible restoration is correct, the decree praises Moschion for acting rightly (ὁ[σ]ίως) towards his parents and *those living together with him in close relations and friendship* (τοὺς συμ]β[ι]οῦντας ἐν

οἰκ[ε]ιότητι καὶ χρήσει), as well as towards the rest of the citizens. The probable reference to συμβιοῦντες acknowledges that Moschion engaged in collective interaction outside politics with those with whom he shared his life, and with whom he was interdependent (compare Athenopolis' συναναστρεφόμενοι, 'those conducting their lives together with him'). These included his interactions with other kin besides his parents (the main implication of οἰκ[ε]ιότητι), but also with non-relations with whom he enjoyed special bonds (the main implication of χρήσει). These latter perhaps included fellow members of actual voluntary associations, which in other contexts could themselves be described as *symbioseis* ('livings-together'), as well as *koina* ('public things').<sup>112</sup>

These relationships of συμβίωσις ('living together') were identified in this decree as the middle of three concentric circles of relationships which lacked a narrowly political, institutionalised dimension: the inner circle comprised Moschion's relations with his parents and the outer one his extra-political relations with 'the rest of the citizens'. This analysis of concentric spheres extending out from each individual was also a feature of contemporary late Hellenistic Stoic and Peripatetic attempts (compare sections 3 and 7) to grapple with the complexity of informal interpersonal relationships.<sup>113</sup>

As in the decrees from Kaunos and Synnada analysed above, the different dimensions of Moschion's civic activity required distinct, calibrated virtues. As well as piety towards the gods, he needed different virtues in social relations with family, associates and all fellow citizens, on the one hand, and in formal political interaction, on the other. He acted 'rightly' (ὀσίως) in social relations, but relations with the country (πατρίς), and thus with fellow citizens specifically in their political capacity, demanded more directly political virtues of justice (δικαιοσύνη) and love of glory (φιλοδοξία).

There is an interesting overlap here with the ideas and phrasing of the near contemporary Epicurean Philodemus (first century BC). While defending Epicurus against charges of subversive atheism, Philodemus claims (*On Piety*, Book I, ll. 1505–56) that he did not get into trouble with the Athenians for his doctrines and activities, as other philosophers

---

<sup>112</sup> E.g. Harland, *Greco-Roman Associations* II, 195.

<sup>113</sup> See Cicero *De Officiis* 1.50–58; Tsouni, "Didymus' Epitome of Peripatetic Ethics", sec. 3 Ts, 120.9–122.9; sec. 9 Ts, 127.4–9; compare also the later ideas of Hierocles the Stoic, discussed above.

notoriously did. On the contrary, he knew how to defend himself, together with those who truly shared his life (ἅμα τοῖς γνη[σί]ως συνβιώσασι[ν α]ὐτῶι), presumably fellow members of the Epicurean Garden. The very fact that he was relatively unknown at Athens shows that he, like his ‘fellow school members’ ([τ]οὺς συνσχολ[ά]ζοντα[ς αὐτῶ]ι), was not harmful to his fellow citizens (τῶν συνπολε[ι]τ[ε]υομένων). Like in the Moschion decree, there is an implicit contrast between warm relations with those ‘sharing life’ and more impersonal relations with the polis as a political community. Philodemus’ distinction between political life and the life of the educational community also chimes with an earlier decree of Asia Minor (early second century BC), in which the young men (*neoi*) of Xanthos in Lycia distinguished between their gymnasiarch’s contributions to the gymnasium and his activities in the political sphere (ἐν τῶι πολιτεύματι).<sup>114</sup>

To take a similar later example, a long posthumous decree of the Imperial period from Olbia on the north coast of the Black Sea, for the citizen Karzoazos (*IOSPE I<sup>2</sup> 39*), explores in depth the relationship between political engagement and wider life (βίος), which can be fused into συμβίωσις (‘living together’).<sup>115</sup> In the introduction to the decree, the Olbiopolitans praise Karzoazos as ‘a man who has followed finely the path of political engagement and aspired to an unimpeached life’ (ἄνδρα καλῶς ἐπιβεβηκότα τοῖς τῆς πολιτείας ἔχνεσι καὶ ζηλώσαντα βίον ἀλοιδόρητον) (ll. 3–5). The precise components of both his *politeia* and his life are spelled out in the substance of the decree. He responded as an enthusiastic, willing liturgist to civic crises. Whenever his country (*patris*) called on him, he became an example to the young, ‘imitating the life of those *who had engaged in politics* excellently’ (μειμούμενο[ς] τῶν ἄριστα πολιτευομένων τὸν βίον) (ll. 12–14). There then follows immediately an account of his formal political activities as magistrate and ambassador. Significantly, he here showed specific, appropriate political virtues of energy and reliability in service: he behaved ‘with good faith’, ‘strenuously’ and ‘unhesitatingly’ (πιστῶς, πονικῶς, ἀόκνως, l. 15).

---

<sup>114</sup> *SEG* 46.1721, ll. 5–21, with Ph. Gauthier, “Bienfaiteurs du gymnase au Létôn de Xanthos”, *REG* 109 (1996): 1–34. On groups of *neoi* as both inside and outside the polis and its politics: R. van Bremen, “*Neoi* in Hellenistic Cities: Age Class, Institution, Association?” in Fröhlich and Hamon, *Groupes et associations*, 31–59.

<sup>115</sup> Cf. A. Chaniotis, “Political Culture in the Cities of the Northern Black Sea Region in the ‘Long Hellenistic Age’ (The Epigraphic Evidence)”, in *The Northern Black Sea in Antiquity: Networks, Connectivity, and Cultural Interactions*, ed. V. Kozlovskaya (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 141–66.

The decree then turns to the other dimension of his activities relevant for civic scrutiny, his approach to every single individual (ἐν ταῖς πρὸς ἕνα ἕκαστον ὑπαντήσεσι, ll. 19–20). In a standard decree these would be summed up as his ‘private’ or ‘individual’ (ιδία) relations, as if to dispel any suspicion of parapolitical collective activities, bordering on factionalism. In this decree, however, there is no mention of the ἴδιον; what is stressed instead is the broad reach and collective character of Karzoazos’ interactions beyond formal politics. He showed humanity (φιλανθρωπία) and ‘love of foreigners’ (φιλοξενία) towards outsiders, a ‘spirit of kinship’ (συνγενικὸν πάθος) (ll. 21–3). Towards individual citizens in need he showed the traditional civic solidarity conveyed by εὐνοια (‘good will’), more fraternal than the diffuser ‘humanity’ suitable for foreigners. Crucially for the argument here, the phrasing is that he showed good will ‘if any of his fellow citizens mixed with him either on the pretext of business or through the shared habit of mutual association’ (πολιτῶν δὲ εἴ τις αὐτῷ συνέμειξεν ἢ κατὰ συναλλαγῆς ἀφορμῆν ἢ κατὰ συμβιώσεως συνήθειαν) (ll. 23–5). The later Hellenistic coinage συμβίωσις, to refer to social relations, again stands out. The concatenation of four compounds with συν- (the prefix indicating joint action) emphasises that these informal interactions constitute no atomistic, individualistic realm, but a genuinely social one.

### 7. Oligarchy or More Complex Self-Understanding?

In order to explain these distinctive decrees’ sharp division between *politeia* and social life, the most economical account might seem to be a shift towards oligarchy. The implication might be that significant decision-making, especially interaction with the Roman authorities, now lies mainly with those, the recipients of honorific decrees, who qualify for the burden and opportunity of expensive embassies, magistracies and liturgies. While they engage in *politeia*, what is left for ordinary citizens and other city residents, as in the decree of Mylasa for Ouliades (see section 3), is the more everyday world of social interaction and sociability: συναναστροφή or συμβίωσις. The later Hellenistic Colophonian decree for Polemaios even explicitly says that his leadership of an embassy allowed the rest of the citizens to focus, unburdened, on their ‘private affairs’ (ἐπὶ τῶν ἰδίων).<sup>116</sup> This general approach might also seem to release the often unequal relations of the agora or association from political scrutiny and projects of redistribution; they now lie outside politics.

---

<sup>116</sup> SEG 39.1243, col. II, ll. 3–31 (quotation from 16–18).

The ‘oligarchy’ hypothesis cannot, however, fully account for some decrees’ division between *politeia* and social life: in most cities, ordinary citizens, outside the liturgical elite, could still participate in formal, institutionalised politics, especially in the assembly. This was already evident in the reference to the confirmed approbation of Moschion’s fellow active citizens (συμπολιτευόμενοι) at Priene. The late Hellenistic endurance of assembly politics<sup>117</sup> was sustained into the Imperial period: the vibrancy of the Imperial-era poleis’ assembly life, especially in Asia Minor, has been demonstrated by recent studies, which show the political *ekklesia* (assembly) as a living model and foil for the Christian *ekklesia* (church).<sup>118</sup>

Since the realm of institutionalised *politeia* did remain open to many citizens, who could be recognised as engaging in politics with the elite, the division between narrow *politeia* and social life must have been often less about marking off politics as an elite prerogative than about defining two structural dimensions of civic life which divide *any* citizen’s civic engagement in two. This is also the impression created by the most systematic, abstract reflections on this theme by contemporary intellectuals. The geographer Strabo argues in separate passages that education in certain types of edifying myth and communal dining at specified times (something he finds missing in Indian culture) strengthen ‘both social and political life’ (τὸ κοινωνικὸν καὶ τὸ πολιτικὸν τοῦ βίου σχῆμα ἢ τὸν κοινωνικὸν καὶ τὸν πολιτικὸν βίον, 1.2.8 and 15.1.53). He thus held that collective education and commensality, both aimed at the broad population, can help to forge for all a collective life (βίος) which has two parts worth distinguishing with different names: κοινωνικός (‘social’) and πολιτικός (‘political’).

Strabo certainly had his own conception of political action and thought, as the realm of power and rule, centred on ‘the needs of rulers’ (1.1.18; cf. 16.2.38), clearly distinct from more general social relations. Strabo’s conception of politics, which I plan to study in more detail elsewhere, is perhaps the closest equivalent in the Hellenistic or Roman-era Greek world to the reaction of theorists such as Mouffe and Nancy to modern, more consensual notions of ‘le politique’. Inspired partly by C. Schmitt, they, like Strabo, insist that political life, to be truly

---

<sup>117</sup> On the complex mixture of wide participation, citizen initiative and elite dominance in the later Hellenistic poleis: Fröhlich and Müller, *Citoyenneté et participation*.

<sup>118</sup> Especially Fernoux, *Le Demos et la Cité*; cf. Heller, “La cité grecque d’époque impériale”.

worthy of the name, must be distinguished by agonistic assertion of power.<sup>119</sup> This separate evidence for Strabo's narrow understanding of truly political life shows that he was not using the terms *κοινωνικός* and *πολιτικός* in these other passages as near synonyms.

The author of the summary of Peripatetic ethics recorded in Stobaeus, already discussed in section 3, brings further theoretical elaboration to the division. He claims that people desire material and bodily goods partly because they are beneficial 'for both the political and the social life, and also for the theoretical life' (for an individual) (*πρὸς τε τὸν πολιτικὸν καὶ τὸν κοινωνικὸν βίον καὶ δὴ καὶ πρὸς τὸν θεωρητικόν*); for life is measured by political, social and theoretical actions (*ταῖς πολιτικαῖς καὶ ταῖς κοινωνικαῖς πράξεσι καὶ ταῖς θεωρητικαῖς*). Virtue is not self-loving, but social and political (*ἀλλὰ κοινωνικὴν καὶ πολιτικὴν*).<sup>120</sup> The concluding chapters of the summary covering specifically political questions, based on Aristotle's *Politics*, make clear that in this case too the author understood politics as a circumscribed realm, open to citizens. The 'social' should thus again be seen as a complement to, rather than a near synonym of,<sup>121</sup> the 'political'.

Crucially for the argument of this article, the later Hellenistic Peripatetics were here revising Aristotle's views. As noted at the end of section 2 above, Aristotle insisted that the many 'communities' of a polis, with their particular aims, are subordinate to the overarching 'political community', with its focus on the good life in the round. The passages quoted here suggest that, by contrast, the later Hellenistic Peripatetics elevated the world of sociability and associations into an independent realm, worthy of its own place in foundational ethical theorising: they retained Aristotle's fundamental categories of the political and theoretical lives for an individual,<sup>122</sup> but added the social (*κοινωνικός*) life as an equally basic category.<sup>123</sup>

The later Hellenistic Peripatetics doubtless rethought the categories of human life partly in order to take into account Hellenistic associations' increasingly cosmopolitan nature, cutting

---

<sup>119</sup> See J.-L. Nancy, *La Communauté désœuvrée* (Paris: Christian Bourgeois, 1990); Mouffe, *On the Political*. For analysis: O. Marchart, *Post-Foundational Political Thought*, esp. ch. 3.

<sup>120</sup> Tsouni, "Didymus' Epitome of Peripatetic Ethics", sec. 7 Ts, 125.10–23.

<sup>121</sup> For this alternative view see Annas, "Aristotelian Political Thought", 87 (cf. 82).

<sup>122</sup> See e.g. Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* I.5.

<sup>123</sup> Tsouni, "Didymus' Epitome of Peripatetic Ethics", sec. 7 Ts, 125.10–23.

across traditional citizen-outsider divisions; burgeoning *κοινωνία* ('associations') were now less clearly subordinate to the polis of citizens as a single overarching *κοινωνία* ('association') than in Aristotle's day.<sup>124</sup> Interestingly, the word *κοινωνικός* had a close intrinsic connection with formal voluntary associations in fourth-century Athenian texts, including Aristotle's corpus.<sup>125</sup>

Relevant Peripatetics were probably in dialogue with their contemporary rivals, the Stoics. In his *De Officiis*, probably drawing heavily on the late Hellenistic Stoic Panaetius, Cicero lists among the things shared by fellow citizens, not only physical infrastructure and legal and political entitlements and institutions, but also what sounds like a social sphere: 'habitual bonds and ties of sociability and business and dealings contracted by many with many' (*consuetudines praeterea et familiaritates multisque cum multis res rationesque contractae*, 1.53).

## 8. Conclusion

To sum up sections 5–7, some Greek citizens and thinkers found imaginative ways in the later Hellenistic and early Roman era to resist the tendencies studied in section 3: to insist on the persistence of local politics, while harnessing the newly prominent social sphere. The strand in relevant thinking and ideology so far more studied in modern scholarship was to develop fourth-century attempts to expand *politeia* to incorporate, and tame, the social sphere. The resulting broad conception of *politeia* was an effective response to a quandary of many Roman poleis: how to compensate with new areas of political engagement for those now ceded to higher authorities, or made otiose by the spread of peace.

The other approach, experimented with more extensively in civic epigraphy, was to insist on a narrower conception of *politeia*.<sup>126</sup> This approach too served particular needs of the Greek cities. Changes of the later Hellenistic and early Roman periods (see section 4) created new motivations for citizens of Kaunos or Priene to draw a sharp distinction between *politeia* and

---

<sup>124</sup> Compare Annas, "Aristotelian Political Thought", 87.

<sup>125</sup> Aristotle *Nicomachean Ethics* 1161b12–15, *Athenaion Politeia* 52.2; cf. Demosthenes 14.16. The word could also have a more generic meaning in Aristotle: *Politics* 1283a38.

<sup>126</sup> Compare Azoulay, "Isocrate, Xénophon ou le politique transfiguré", 135, n. 6, on the institutional conception of *politeia* in Classical decrees, though those lacked much complementary exploration of the social.



social life. If outsiders had come to accuse these cities of losing political vitality, or citizens themselves harboured doubts, it would have been a bold response to define very clearly a circumscribed realm of institutionalised politics – of magistracies and embassies, but also council and assembly – which was not diluted in the soup of more general social interaction.

This narrower conception of *politeia* was in some striking cases innovatively accompanied by a newly rich conceptualisation of the third space of polis life, only shadily sketched in earlier periods (section 2): this was the world, with its own distinct dynamics and virtues, which was described with new or previously very rare terms such as συναναστροφή or συμβίωσις, or new usages of terms such as κοινὸς βίος, τὸ κοινωτικόν or κοινωτικὸς βίος. It is not always easy to tell exactly what activities these abstract terms were meant to denote in practice; they picked out styles and virtues of collective interaction (gentle, informal, but still wide-ranging) more directly than specific activities. Nonetheless, they probably often referred to a mixture of longstanding practices which had now gained greater prominence in civic life vis-à-vis traditional politics: practices such as voluntary commensality and cult, educational activities, commercial exchange and informal conversations in the agora, which had previously had to be classified as either public or private. Simultaneously, these terms also captured new forms of interaction, such as those connected with increasingly cosmopolitan associations or the expanded role of the gymnasium and schools. Individual, small-scale *symbioseis* (‘livings-together’, ‘associations’) contributed to the composite *symbiosis* of the whole polis.

The different ancient sociologies of the Hellenistic and Roman poleis studied here can help to develop modern scholarly debates about alleged ‘depoliticisation’ raised in the introduction. That some contemporaries saw the social sphere colonising the traditional place of politics (section 3 above) lends some support to the depoliticisation narrative. On the other hand, the contrasting means of reasserting local politics suggest different ways to resist the charge of depoliticisation.

Most modern scholars who have insisted forcefully on the continued vitality of politics in the Hellenistic and Roman polis have done so by emphasising continuities in institutions and

practices with the Classical polis, at least before c. 150 BC.<sup>127</sup> The much broader of the two ancient approaches to the scope of *politeia* discussed above would support moving to the other extreme: the Hellenistic and Roman poleis had a very vibrant political life, not because they imitated Classical Athens, but precisely because they found new avenues for their own brand of politics, more cultured, thoughtful and cosmopolitan. According to this view, it is necessary to move beyond old-fashioned views of power and politics, which see 337 or 146 BC as a watershed of depoliticisation because the Greek polis was emasculated by a loss of military clout. In its place, on this view, must come a much more subtle view of political power and engagement.

According to this interpretation, the rise of peaceful culture, education (*paideia*), the culture-focussed honorific decree and voluntary associations at the core of Greek civic life did not snuff out politics. Rather, it created better conditions for all residents of Greek cities, including women and outsiders, to exercise more profound power and leadership. They could guide and encourage one another, through dialogue, towards the virtue, wisdom and mutual understanding necessary for justice, solidarity, stability and meaningful debate. These were goals in pursuit of which traditional war, and formalised ‘love of honour’ (*philotimia*) in competition for control of money and soldiers, had often been more distractions than aids. On this view, ‘Socratic citizenship’ of questioning, coaxing, dialogue and encouragement, when practised throughout all the complex interactions of Hellenistic and Roman-era polis life (compare Plutarch, discussed in section 5), represented a richer brand of political engagement than the patrolling of citizen exclusivity and constant military mobilisation of the Classical polis.

If neither of the alternatives sketched so far – simply stressing or denying ‘depoliticisation’ – is entirely convincing in itself, the other ancient approach to the scope of political and social life discussed here, which sharply distinguished between the two, suggests a possible middle way between the two extremes, also applicable to other societies in which traditional political activities and equalities appear to be marginalised. It may be more promising to seek to define and understand more precisely each of the varied, interlocking spheres and

---

<sup>127</sup> To take a few examples, consider Gauthier, *Les cités grecques et leurs bienfaiteurs*; J. Ma, “Fighting Poleis of the Hellenistic World”, in *War and Violence in Ancient Greece*, ed. H. van Wees (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2000), 337–76; V. Grieb, *Hellenistische Demokratie*.

communities of Hellenistic and early Roman-era Greek civic life, and to investigate how strict politics related to predominantly social, economic, cultural and religious interaction.<sup>128</sup>

Even if the polis was no longer the habitat of ‘political animals’ focussed predominantly on institutionalised political activity, narrow politics was not necessarily always overshadowed or diluted by other spheres of communal life. Defended and practised in the right way, formal politics could hold its own within the wider civic ecology as one among several indispensable ways of sustaining civic life. For example, it could play the role of asserting and defending rigorous, impersonal standards of justice, incorruptibility and public service. This was an indispensable counterweight to the social sphere’s equally necessary norms of compassionate concern for individuals or prudential pursuit of individual self-interest; those latter norms could, if unchecked, threaten to undermine the cohesion of the polis. In the other direction, gentle social and cultural interaction, in festivals, agora or gymnasium, could smooth over still vibrant political rivalries and build civic harmony – creating a better foundation for strenuous, conflictual politics itself. On this picture, civic political life was not withering away in the Hellenistic and early Roman polis, on a long road towards being supplanted by religious structures in the later Empire. Rather, it was finding its particular niche, and the distinctive contribution it could make to complex city dynamics. Any effective model of the early Roman-era polis must give full weight both to enduring traditional politics (and conflict) and to new forms of civic interaction, and their complex interrelationship.

The ancient differentiation of politics and social life studied here, alongside rival approaches, also represents a little studied chapter in the history of debates about ‘politics’, ‘the political’ and ‘the social’. The Hellenistic and early Roman-era evidence shows that it was possible within the resources of the Greek language to imagine a social sphere, which tends to confirm that the Classical Athenians made a conscious choice (compare section 2) to deny its existence, because they associated it with inequality or division. Hellenistic and Roman-era Greeks who moved away from the Athenian model, in theory and in practice, helped to lay the foundations of later ways of thinking, quite different but also overlapping: not only ideas of a ‘civil society’ distinct from the state, usually thought to be an invention of the

---

<sup>128</sup> Compare K. Vlassopoulos, *Unthinking the Greek Polis: Ancient Greek History beyond Eurocentrism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), chs. 3 and 6; Ismard, *La cité des réseaux*, esp. 405–11.

Enlightenment,<sup>129</sup> but also the influential line of thought, later articulated by Machiavelli and Weber,<sup>130</sup> that gentle, sentimental virtues of kindness, compassion or philanthropy can be counter-productive in political contexts; politics is its own ‘Beruf’, with specific skills and virtues, distinct from general morality.<sup>131</sup> By the same token, obsessive focus on political values of justice and the common good in all contexts may not be the best way to sustain peaceful, harmonious communities. Rather, the different styles of interaction must balance each other in a productive tension.

This article has thus sought to present a detailed example of how a Rosanvallon-style history of political ideas, drawing on the widest range of available evidence, from inscriptions which are apparently banal to the most abstract political philosophy, can yield a revised picture of ancient political thinking, and its links with modern debates. The influential modern picture of the Greek polis with which I started, championed by Arendt<sup>132</sup> and others, relies on a few canonical authors and captures only part of the rich Greek civic tradition of reflection about political and private life, and the space between them. The evidence discussed in this article suggests that there was, in fact, a different, less dismissive Greek approach to that intermediate space, which gained new force and clarity from the later Hellenistic period onwards.

It cannot be entirely coincidental that the application of a method close to Rosanvallon’s yields a parallel result: in the same way as his incorporation of more pragmatic texts, such as legal submissions, and a wider range of thinkers, such as active trade unionists, reveals greater openness than commonly assumed to the intermediate ‘third sphere’ in modern France,<sup>133</sup> so too more attention to inscriptions and lesser studied cities reveals more explicit sensitivity to the ambiguous border zone between political and private life than the standard picture of the Greek polis allows. This basic parallel holds even though the differences

---

<sup>129</sup> Note J. Habermas, *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit. Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1962) and its influence.

<sup>130</sup> See e.g. D. Villa, “The Legacy of Max Weber in Weimar Political and Social Theory” in *Weimar Thought: A Contested Legacy*, eds. P.E. Gordon and J.P. McCormick (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 73–98, here 79.

<sup>131</sup> See M. Weber, *Politik als Beruf* (Munich and Leipzig: Duncker and Humblot, 1919).

<sup>132</sup> See again Arendt, *The Human Condition*, esp. 38–49.

<sup>133</sup> See Rosanvallon, *Le modèle politique français*, esp. ch. 5 (e.g. p. 143) and ch. 10.

between the two contexts are profound, and as revealing as the similarities: for example, the ancient thinkers and citizens studied here never framed their exploration of the intermediate zone in terms of the promotion of liberty and democracy.

I would not go so far as to posit an intrinsic connection between method and findings: indeed, applying the same approach to Classical Athens tends to confirm rather than undermine the standard picture (compare section 2 above). Nonetheless, Rosanvallon's proposed marriage of 'history of ideas' with 'social history' in the study of these questions<sup>134</sup> can be relied upon to bring into relief the complexity and diversity of representations of interpersonal bonds, perhaps especially in societies – such as ancient Greece or post-1789 France – where political thinkers and agents are faced with the challenge of tailoring abstract, demanding ideals of citizenship to a complex, plural and changing social reality. In both the ancient Greek and French contexts, one response to this challenge has been to reject dominant assumptions by declaring social life beyond politics to be a vital component of a flourishing polis, rather than its antithesis.

---

<sup>134</sup> Rosanvallon, *Le modèle politique français*, 11–12.