CARNEADES AND THE CONCEPT OF ROME:
TRANSHISTORICAL APPROACHES TO IMPERIALISM

I believe the world needs an effective liberal empire and that the United States is the best candidate for the job.\(^1\)

Was it by justice or judiciousness that our state rose from the least of states to be the greatest empire of all?\(^2\)

In a recent contribution to *Greece & Rome*, Thomas Harrison illustrated how the concept of the United States as the ‘New Rome’ colours our knowledge of both the ancient world and our own. His deceptively light-hearted approach and examples illustrated that the transhistorical approach is certainly one that can be used for fun; however, at its core, the article poses a much more serious question – can the transhistorical approach to imperialism be used for profit? Or, as Harrison posed the question, ‘Can an understanding of ancient imperialisms cast light on contemporary experience?’\(^3\)

Acutely, Harrison points to the symbiosis between interpretations of the past and the present, illustrating the abundance of what might be termed ‘palimpsestic’ readings of modern empires, which are generated by writing through the history of past empires.\(^4\) These historically informed accounts of current conditions are complemented by new understandings of the empires of the past that are informed by current circumstances and forms of knowledge.\(^5\)

Given this intricate relationship between an ever-present past and a historically understood present, a related question arises that is perhaps a more methodological or theoretical one: what light can ancient theories of imperialism shed on present discussions and present theories? In short, the answer to this appears to be that, while the finer grain of historical research suggests that all empires are different and should be treated as such, the current framing of questions related to an abstract notion of ‘imperialism’ in contemporary Anglo-American discussions bears a startling resemblance to the contending lines of discussion discernible in Polybius and Thucydides, which were famously (or perhaps notoriously) brought together in Carneades’ addresses to the Romans in 156–155 BC and, later, in Cicero’s *De republica*.

Prior to evaluating transhistorical understandings of imperialism, we must find a guiding line of inquiry for approaching contending discourses of imperialism both in Graeco-Roman antiquity and in the present. Usefully, Harrison provides such a guiding principle when he points to the transhistorical phenomenon of ‘empires [that] tend to project their values as universal’, through their positioning of life inside the empire as life in accordance with ‘order and “truth”’, and life outside the empire as ‘a state of “commotion”…subscribing to the “lie”’.\(^6\) He points, acutely, to the case of Polybius, for whom history is structured by and made meaningful through the universality of Rome.\(^7\)

Given that the ‘universal’ values of which empires have claimed to be the vehicle have differed radically across time, and given also the rather severe dent that theorists such as Jean-François Lyotard have put in the notion that there are any universal values that an empire might project,\(^8\) it is arguably far more difficult for the United States than it may have been for Rome to present itself as the vehicle for values that transcend a particular historical and geographical context. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that Polybius’ positioning of Rome as the vehicle for universal law did not go uncontested – even at the heights of its second-century-BC expansion. Rather, a debate on the existence of universal law, which had been ongoing since at least the time of Plato’s *Republic*, was transplanted to Rome via Carneades, who posed the question of whether there was, in fact, any universal law for Rome to champion, or whether the claims of the imperialist ruler were necessarily based on self-interest.

Carneades’ question has a remarkably contemporary ring to it. Once again, a new historical context has brought to the fore a new interest in the history and values of empires, particularly Rome.\(^9\) In the charged

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5. Harrison (n. 3), 4.
6. Ibid., 16.
9. One product of this is Maria Wyke’s edited volume *Julius Caesar in Western Culture* (Oxford, 2000). See in particular Christopher Pelling’s contribution to this anthology, ‘Judging Julius
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environment of contemporary US military power projection in the Middle East, the debate over the nature of empire has been reignited, with some commentators arguing for the transcendent, civilizing good of empire and others arguing that empires are of necessity a matter of judicious politics. For example, in 2007, reflecting upon events in Iraq, Niall Ferguson chastised the United States for not being imperialist enough. Accusing the Bush administration of having approached their penetration of the Middle East 'on the cheap, with insufficient man power and an excessively short time horizon', Ferguson repeated his long-held belief that a United States empire was desirable, so that it might bring the benefits of empire to the world – namely the 'economic benefits, the cultural benefits and the military benefits or geopolitical benefits in terms of global security'. Implicit in Ferguson's argument both here and elsewhere was the notion that imperialism, if practised properly, is a vehicle for justice, the exercising of power on behalf of others unable to do so. He argues that empire is a moral choice for the US: 'we might therefore make what might be called an altruistic argument for the United States to engage in something resembling liberal imperialism in our time'. Imperialism, for Ferguson, is not merely a politically astute form of realpolitik that reinforces the interests of the United States through the management of global political and economic relations, but in fact represents an ethical duty. Imperialism is not merely the judicious choice for US interests; it is the just choice.

This line of argument has led in some quarters to a re-evaluation of the philosophical arguments for the 'just empire', with Christopher Morris 'one cheer for empire' one of the more obvious examples. Imperialism once again rises from the shadows, as 'better suited to securing global order today than the apparent alternatives' and as the bearer of a 'mission civilatrice' that 'should be taken seriously'. This pro-imperial argument has been met with a great deal of scepticism by those who point to the, at best, patchy record of various empires as vehicles for justice. Opposing Niall Ferguson and his supporters, it is fair to say, is a countervailing view of imperialism as a vehicle for the self-interest of the imperial power and the marginalization of the interests of those that constitute the objects of empire. According to this tradition, imperialism is a vehicle not for justice but for judicious self-interest.

Why should these recent developments be of interest to ancient historians? Primarily, it is because none of these positions is particularly new, even if the contemporary historical context within which this thought has arisen has created some novel permutations to an old debate. Essentially, the debate between Niall Ferguson and his anti-imperial opponents is the resurrection of the philosophical duel between Socrates and Thrasymachus on the question of justice and rule, mediated via ancient theorists of empire such as Carneades, Panaetius, and, ultimately, Cicero. It is intrinsically related to the debates between rhetoric and philosophy, and to the antique question of the existence of a transcendent universal justice that might be ascertainable. It is an ancient debate but a nonetheless critical one, given the re-emergence of empire as an area not only of scholarly concern but of political possibility. As Christine Walde has pointed out, a classicism that does not engage with the world that surrounds it is one that risks falling into a 'self-chosen stupor'. With this in mind, the time is perhaps right for a reappraisal of Carneades' dialectical approach to imperialism, which might enable the construction of an intellectual lineage for the positions taken by modern theorists of empire.


12 C. Walde, 'Caesar, Lucan's Bellum Civile and their Reception', in Wyke (n. 9), 58. Walde of course also warns against simply cloaking contemporary political arguments in classical 'scholarship'.

13 For a useful and theoretically informed overview of Roman imperialism during the Republican and early Empire, see C. B. Champion and A. M. Eckstein, 'Introduction: The Study of Roman Imperialism', in C. B. Champion (ed.), Roman Imperialism. Readings and Sources (Oxford, 2004), 1-10. The rest of the volume is a similarly useful summary of some of the more important positions on the nature of Roman imperialism. The trend towards a theoretically informed understanding of Roman imperialism is also evident in the two authors' recent monographs: see A. M. Eckstein, Mediterranean Anarchy, Interstate War and the Rise of Rome (Berkeley, CA, 2006)
Carneades, Rome, and the Sceptical approach

On the philosophical plane, the ancient dialectic of imperialism is perhaps best seen in the stylized debate that Plato narrated between Socrates and Thrasymachus in *The Republic* on the question of justice. Put simply, Thrasymachus articulated the position that ‘justice or right is simply what is in the interest of the stronger party’ (Pl. *Resp.* 1.338c). On the question of states, Thrasymachus argued further that ‘justice or right is really what is good for...the interest of the stronger party or ruler at the expense of the subject who obeys’ (Pl. *Resp.* 1.343c).

Not surprisingly, this has been linked to Thucydides’ Melian Dialogue, the set-piece philosophical disputation fashioned in the sophist mode that has usually been read as more a critique of imperialism than a narration of any real negotiations between Athens and a desired imperial possession. Crucial to this debate was, of course, the Athenians’ assessment of justice in an imperial setting – namely that ‘the standard of justice depends on the equality of power to compel’, and, more bluntly, that ‘the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept’ (Thuc. 5.89). This sentiment was reinforced, although not in the same overtly philosophical manner, in the Mytilenean debate, in which Cleon reminded the Athenians, ‘what you do not realise is that your empire is a tyranny exercised over subjects who do not like it... [Y]ou will not make them obey you by injuring your own interests in order to do them a favour’ (Thuc. 3.57). In refuting the genocidal impulses of Cleon, Diodotus similarly raised not the injustice of killing the entire male population of Mytilene and enslaving all of the women and children but rather the pragmatic question of its utility to the Athenian project of imperial rule. That is, the question is not so much whether they are guilty as whether we are making the right decision for ourselves’ (Thuc. 3.44). Under the logic of this imperial calculus, ‘we should be looking for a method by which, employing moderation

in our punishments, we can in future secure for ourselves the full use of those cities which bring us important contributions’ (Thuc. 3.46).

Against Thrasymachus and, implicitly, Thucydides, was the Platonic notion that ‘no ruler of any kind, qua ruler, exercises his authority... with his own interest in view, but that of the subject of his skill’ (Pl. *Resp.* 1.342e; see also 1.346e–347a). On the question of why nature grants the just with empire, Plato asserted that ‘just men are more intelligent and more truly effective in action’ (Pl. *Resp.* 1.352b) – and, as such, justice translates into success in any endeavour. Just rulers are granted more rule. More emphatically, Plato boldly pronounced that the just state is the state within which those suited to govern are able to do so, while those most naturally suited to being ruled over permit this to occur (Pl. *Resp.* 1.434). How this might be extrapolated to an empire requires no elaboration.

This is the (Hellenic) dialogical context of the antique debate regarding just rule, wherein two highly elaborated theoretical positions had emerged well before the ascendency of Rome. Both lines of argumentation came to debate the question of rule and the question of its justness, and, critically, the two engaged one another continuously as the binary opposites that gave each other dialectical form and substance. When Carneades arrived in Rome, some 250 years later (by which time Plato’s own Academy had turned Sceptic), these arguments were still the dominant parameters for debate on the question of rule and political power within Greek philosophy. With Rome having conquered the Greek world, the scene was set for a rehearsal of the debate between Thrasymachan realpolitik and Platonic just authoritarianism in the imperial metropolis of Rome. Carneades did not disappoint expectations, effectively inverting the Platonic rendition of the Socrates–Thrasymachus dialectic by offering a philosophical justification for justice on his first day of speaking, only to soundly demolish the concept on the second. The result

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23 That Carneades saw his arguments as related to fifth- and fourth-century-nc discussions of justice and empire is attested by Lactantius who was working from a more complete Book 3 of Cicero’s *De republica*. See Lactantius, *Divin. Inst.* 5.14 (trans. M. F. McDonald [Washington, DC, 1964]).

was not just the confusion that this caused among the gilded youth
of Rome but the confounding of the centuries-old dialectic between
Socrates and Thrasymachus, through the proffering of both positions
as simultaneously equally tenable and thereby undermining the truth
claims of either position.

Arguably, Carneades' second speech, which overturned the Platonic
notion of imperialism as being in line with the dictates of a transcendent
justice, operated via recourse to an implicitly Thucydidean reading of
imperialism. Justice, the argument ran, rather than representing the
adherence to and enforcement of universal law, is little more than
expediency. There is no natural justice implicit to imperialism, no
justice 'in itself' as Capelle wrote,25 for such justice, if it could be
seen anywhere, would lead to the ruin of the just, as the Athenian
representatives in Melos had argued (Thuc. 5.95). Although Cicero's
reconstruction of the argument is fragmentary, the depiction of the
nature of imperialism in Carneades' second speech appears to have
demonstrated the incoherence of the principal of universal justice.
If the Romans were really interested in a Platonic, transcendent
justice, Carneades posited, they would have to 'return all foreign
possessions and return to their original huts to subsist in poverty
and misery' because the 'advantage of the Fatherland' rests on the
'disadvantage of other states and peoples', the 'destruction of cities
and the annihilation of peoples', which is then bravely 'scientifically
justified' by philosophers as justice.26 To paraphrase Tacitus' later anti-
hero Galbaus, the Romans, like the Athenians before them in Melos,
'give the lying name of empire to robbery, slaughter and plunder. They
make a wasteland and call it peace' (Tac. Agr. 29–32).27

In fact, for Carneades, at least in his second speech, the real
opposition was not between imperial 'justice' and imperial 'injustice',
but rather between 'justice' (tantamount, according to Carneades, to
self-defeating lunacy whereby the just do nothing and hope that all
others will do the same — that is, wait to be conquered by the unjust)
and imperialistic judiciousness. To reconstruct the second Carneadean
argument, what is called 'justice' is not universal law but rather a
product of the dictates of pragmatic government in culturally and
temporally diverse sites of rule (Cic. Rep. 3.8–11). Carneades appears
to assert a positivist form of justice that reflects the underlying power
differentials of imperial settings. Under this reading, the notion of
justice itself is an invention of not only the imperialist, who pretends
to be serving its dictates, but also of those who perceive themselves to
be weak, who offer it as an intellectual bulwark aimed at protecting
themselves from the imperialist predations of the strong. Both sides of
the imperial equation, ruler and ruled, attempt a mystification of the
fundamental power dynamics that characterize the imperial situation
(Cic. Rep. 3.13).

Imperialism, then, according to this tradition, far from being
a vehicle for universal law or justice, is the master–slave dialectic
quintessentially at the level of the state, where judiciousness calls for rule
over as many as possible, while justice is an invitation to annihilation. 'No
polity', Carneades argued, 'would be so foolish as not to prefer to be
unjust masters rather than just slaves' (Cic. Rep. 3.14–18). Not only
are empires not just, justice and empire are mutually incompatible.

To return to Thucydides' Mytilenean debate for a moment, the
fact that empire (as characterized in the second speech of Carneades)
is about self-interest rather than justice is not to preclude a form of
'enlightened' self-interest as preached by Diodorus, where imperial
rule is best preserved through careful and considerate administration
of the empire, rather than through Cleon's iron-fist policy of
smashing all opposition. However, in accordance with Thucydides'
own refiguring of Carneades' second Roman speech, this is not a
question of empire as a vehicle for transcendent, universal law. Rather,
remains a vehicle for pragmatism, following the logic of the principle
of the maximization of power. When self-interest calls for ruthlessness,
it must be available as a permissible option, irrespective of the dictates
of notional forms of justice. Diodorus' argument was not that a
massacre would be immoral, but that it would be inopportune and
self-defeating as a means of maximizing what was to be gained from
the imperial periphery. Under a Thucydidean reading, drawing on
Thrasymachus and rehearsed in Rome by Carneades on his second
euting, imperial self-interest inevitably and necessarily trumps altruism
and universal laws of just conduct, even when an empire appears to
operate altruistically.

The effect of Carneades' affirmation, then repudiation, of the
calls to justice in imperial rule had a pronounced effect on the youth
of Rome's ruling Senatorial elite, insofar as Plutarch's later narration

25 Capelle (n. 24), 86: 'Gerechtigkeit „an sich“'.
26 As reconstructed by Capelle (n. 24), 86–7.
of events can be believed. 'All young Romans who had any taste for literature' sought to listen to him, with the effect that Carneades was supposed to have 'so bewitched all the youth of the city that they seemed to have abandoned all their other pleasures and pursuits and to have run mad after philosophy'. A worried Cato attempted to have him expelled from Rome so that the Roman youth could once again focus on more tangible elements of Roman power— the law and the magistrates (Plut. Vit. Cat. Mai. 22–3). For Cato, philosophy, and in particular casting doubt upon the justness of empire, diverted the Roman young from their proper role of administering their empire; while self-reflexive, 'Greek' speculation on the justness of their rule was taken as a sign of Rome's imminent decline. Pliny, too, relates the distaste that such loose talk elicited in Cato, who is said to have remarked

I will tell you...what I found out about those Greeks in Athens, and that it is a good thing to taste their literature but not to devour it. I will drive home the point that their society is utterly vile and undisciplined. And believe me...once they give us their literature, it will corrupt everything... (Plin. HN 70.13-14)\(^\text{20}\)

That Carneades had also offered an important (and ostensibly equally compelling) proof of justice in his first speech, which was in fact the point of the exercise from an Academic point of view, was apparently lost on the Romans, who came to remember Carneades as one who had castigated the Romans for their delusions of just rule. This, at any rate, is how he is presented in Cicero's De republica.

Rome, however, did not have to wait long for a Greek answer to the Scepticism of Carneades. As Capelle argues, the Middle Stoic philosopher (and friend of the influential Roman senator Scipio Aemilianus), Panaetius offered a rehabilitation of imperialism, based on the notion that nature had ordained some to rule and others to be ruled in their own best interests—a reiteration of Platonic authoritarianism.\(^\text{20}\) That is, 'dominion has been granted by Nature to everything that is best, to the great advantage of what is weak' (Cic. Rep. 3.25). The argument, fragmentary in Cicero, is also summarized by Augustine, who stated that Cicero had argued

that servitude is in the interest of such men as the provincials, and that it is established for their benefit, when rightly established—that is when unprincipled men are deprives of the freedom to do wrong with impunity...the subjugated will be better off, because they were worse off before subjugation.

August. De civ. D. 19.22\(^\text{21}\)

This just imperial rule was further differentiated—there is the benign rule over those who are 'ruled like sons on account of their ready obedience' and rule over others who are 'restricted more strictly, like slaves' (Cic. Rep. 3.25).\(^\text{21}\)

The argument that hierarchically differentiated rule is implicitly just is of course to be found in Plato and Aristotle; indeed, even Cicero's delineation of the 'fatherly' and 'masterly' forms of just rule are to be found in Aristotle.\(^\text{22}\) In effect, Panaetius reiterates the Platonic/Aristotelian notion that justice is universal but applied differentially in accordance with status. The Panaetian theory of empire asserted that 'one eternal and unchangeable law will be valid for all nations and all times...Whoever is disobedient...is denying his human nature, and by reason of this very fact he will suffer the worst penalties' (Cic. Rep. 3.22).

This narration of imperialism situated the Romans squarely as the upholders of this universal law. Far from seeking advantage through empire, 'our people by defending their allies have gained dominion over the whole world' (Cic. Rep. 3.23). Under this reading, the Roman Empire was just and, as such, virtuous. That the Romans had profited by this empire was welcome but, if the world had so ungraciously as to rebuke the Romans for their virtuous empire, it would nevertheless have been 'soothed by many consolations, and firmly upheld by its excellence' (Cic. Rep. 3.28). So long as the Roman Empire continued to embody the principles of universal justice, nature would allow it to reign. Should it degenerate into one of pure force, without reference to 'the principles and customs' of the Romans (the vehicle for universal law), then the maintenance of empire might well become impossible, as nature granted dominion to that which was best, not necessarily

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21 Capelle (n. 24), 94ff. Hermann Strubacher denied both that Cicero was reproducing the arguments of Panaetius and that the Middle Stoic had come to an accommodation with Roman imperialism: H. Strubacher, 'Pseuston of Problems of the Roman Empire', JRS 55 (1965), 40–53. I follow Claire Franklin in reinstating Capelle's interpretation that the Middle Stoic had come to accept Roman imperialism, as Cicero implies in De republica. See C. Franklin, 'To What Extent Did Poseidonion and Theophrastus Record Pompeian Ideology?', Digeonius Suppl. 1 (2003), 99–110. This is also in line with Walford's position (n. 24), 13-15.
22 Niall Ferguson would find much here with which to agree.
23 See also August. De civ. D. 14.24. Cicero refers here to the forms of mastery over the body and thought; however, the fragment concluding 3.25 suggests an analogous, longer discussion of how imperial rule was differentiated among various provinces, dependent on their nature.
strongest (Cic. Rep. 3.29). That is, nature rewarded those acting in accord with universal law and transcendent justice.39

Just as the sophist Thrasymachus had his position written into history by Thucydides, so too is the reproduction of a Panaetian theory of Roman imperialism discernible in Polybius’ history of Rome. It is fair to say that Polybius self-consciously followed this Panaetian line of argument and saw his work as a contribution to a theoretical debate on the nature of imperialism, as well as a genre piece in the mode of historia.40 According to Cicero, it was a regular event for Scipio Aemilianus (the destroyer of Carthage), Panaetius, and Polybius to discuss political theory, and between them they ‘assembled many arguments to prove that the form of government handed down by our ancestors is by far the best of all’ (Cic. Rep. 1.21).41 Certainly the underlying ‘bestness’ or suitability of Rome for imperialism is the leitmotiv of Polybius’ Histories. For Polybius, in accordance with the Panaetian Middle Stoa, Roman imperialism was a product not of cynical realpolitik but rather of its inherent superiority.

Central to Polybius’ argument is a theoretical proof of this ‘bestness’, which he offered in Book 6, where he constructed a modified version of the Platonic/Aristotelian political cycle of anacyclosis and, crucially, sought to demonstrate that the Roman constitution had allowed Rome to break out of this cycle. Throughout Book 6, the superiority of the Romans is endlessly foregrounded. They possessed a superior constitution (Polyb. 6.18, 6.50, 6.51, 6.52, 6.56), superior religious practices (Polyb. 6.56), superior military arrangements (Polyb. 6.38, 6.42, 6.50, 6.52), superior cultural formations (Polyb. 6.53–5), and superior physical attributes (Polyb. 6.52). All of this, Polybius argued, explained precisely ‘by what means and by virtue of what political institutions almost the whole world fell under the rule of one power, that of Rome, an event which is absolutely without parallel in earlier history’ (Polyb. 6.2). Further, as Walbank argued, this development was in accordance with a ‘transcendental plan, the work of Tyche’ or ‘fortune’,42 as Polybius made clear when he stated that ‘Tyche has steered almost all the affairs of the world in one direction and forced them to converge upon one and the same goal’ (Polyb. 1.4). Roman rule, a product of its bestness, was not only in accordance with universal law but offered history its fundamental meaning.

From Carneades to Ferguson

The pre- (and, for that matter, post-)Carneadean antique debate on imperialism was between those who argued that imperialism was the pragmatic rule of the strongest (Thrasymachus, Thucydides) and those who believed it to be the just rule of the best operating in accordance with universal law (Plato, Aristotle, Panaetius, Poseidonius, Polybius, Cicero). Critically, Carneades the Academic Sceptic, in arguing both for and against the concept of just imperialism did so from within a tradition that viewed knowledge and definitive truth claims as problematic, and saw meaning as negotiated and temporally and culturally situated.43 His critique of empire as the vehicle of universal law came not from an insistence on ‘realist’ political economy, as per Thrasymachus, as a substitute for theories of imperial justice as a form of universal law but from his problem with the concept of universal law and apprehensible truth per se. Importantly, Carneades argued both for and against justice, not merely to demonstrate that the notion of a historically stable notion of imperial justice was a trope employed within a pro-imperialist discourse that covered something more pragmatic but to show that arguments for and against imperialism could be mounted with equal claim, in accordance with the position of the particular theorist who mounted the case. Carneades simultaneously rejected the notion of a necessarily just empire and, more broadly, the Platonic insistence on eidos (‘verifiable knowledge’) as opposed to dōxa (‘commonly agreed-upon position’) or (the Aristotelian) endoxa (‘scientific paradigm’).44 As an Academic/Sceptical reading of empire,

39 This idealist rendering of Roman imperialism was reiterated after Panaetius by Poseidonius. In the Christian era, Rome’s service to universal law was transformed to Rome operating as the vehicle of God’s will. See, for example, Origen’s statement in his Contra Celsum, ‘God was preparing the nations for his teaching by submitting them all to one single emperor’; Origen, Celsi, cited in A. Momigliano, ‘The Disadvantages of Monarchism for a Universal State’, CQ 81 (1986), 291.


41 See also Walbank (n. 24), 1, 12–14. The intertextuality evident in Republican theories of imperialism is even more appreciable when it is remembered, as Walbank points out, that Polybius was actually in attendance at Carneades’ speeches on Roman justice.

42 Walbank (n. 24), 3.

43 This has some parallels that might be worth exploring with Derrida and Lyotard’s critique of universal ‘Enlightenment’ values. See B. Mathews, Twentieth-Century French Philosophy (Oxford, 1996), 165–86.

44 Pl. Rep. 6.510F. That both sides of the debate, for and against imperialism, had to be equally convincing were central to the methodology of Academic Scepticism. See J. E. G. Zetzel, ‘Natural Law and Poetic Justice: A Carneadean Debate in Cicero and Virgil’, CQ 91 (1996), 298, n. 4.

both the content and format of Carneades’ speeches argued for an approach that moved beyond (in modern parlance) both ‘realist’ and ‘idealist’ renderings of empire. It sought to replace these approaches with an understanding of the status of pro- or anti-imperialist theories as impressions (phantasia), elaborations that enunciated that which they presumed as a premise, rather than the apprehension of a reality that existed beyond their enunciative function (katalepsis), as the Middle Stoa of Panatetius thought attainable. As James Allen has pointed out, the Academy at the time of Carneades, in opposition to the Stoa, saw all ostensible truths as grounded in a context that constructed the apprehension of an impression. Academic Scepticism demanded no less than an acceptance that ‘there are no impressions which are prevented from being false by their own intrinsic character.]

Hence, for Carneades, imperialism could (at least ostensibly) be argued for or argued against without reference to any guiding transhistorical perspective that presumed a universalizing telos. Given that the particular assumptions regarding hierarchy stemmed from the context of the (pro- or anti-imperialist) utterance rather than from a universal standard of ascertainable truth, arguments regarding imperial justice in the abstract become redundant arguments, not because empires per se are morally justifiable or intrinsically worthy of condemnation but because views of empires do not necessarily relate to a knowable, transhistorical, and universal ‘nature of rule’ that can be truly perceived and apprehended. Questions of imperial justice in the abstract were, for Carneades, questions of doxa, not episteme. They were questions of commentary, not knowledge. Under a Carneadean reading, both renderings of imperialism (whether ancient or modern) as a transcendent form of justice that accords with ‘the design of nature...the direction of history’, as Polybius saw it, and Thucydidean views of imperialism, as something stemming from the self-interest of the imperial centre, are based on the erroneous assertion of definitive knowledge of a transhistorical phenomenon, ‘imperialism’. Both the Thucydidean and/or the Polybian view would present itself to Carneades as a mystification of the central Academic insight that to speak of the nature of ‘empire’ and ‘justice’ is to partake in epicuretic rhetoric, not apodeictic logic.

The twin arms of the Carneadean dialectic of imperialism quite clearly persist in the study of modern as well as ancient empires. Carneades’ dialectic of the Polybian and Thucydidean views of empire has been reproduced quite unwittingly in the work of modern theorists such as Niall Ferguson, Michael Hardt, and Antonio Negri (as well as their critics), albeit shorn of Carneades’ refusal of the harmonizing effects of a dialectical Aufhebung. As these modern theories are unwitting (and in many regards less sophisticated) reproductions of a nuanced antique debate, they have not been complicated by Carneadean etonous – the enlightening falsehood that both positions remain: one true and false which are therefore resistant to any attempt at sublation. Instead, these modern theories of imperialism, despite their often diametrically opposed lines of argumentation and interpretations of evidence, share the view that their position towards imperialism approaches the apprehension of a universal law or truth regarding the nature of imperial rule. As such, despite their other (enormous) differences, the disparate recent approaches to empire can be viewed comfortably through the lens of the argumentation presented in either ‘day one’ or ‘day two’ of Carneades’ discussion of imperial justice.

The progress narrative implicit in Niall Ferguson’s work on imperialism, for example, suggests that imperialism is the unfolding of justice and betterment – represented by US political, cultural, and economic practices – across the globe. In his preface to Colossus, explicitly drawing upon a (rather bleak) rendering of the post-Roman world, Ferguson speaks of a stark choice between American empire and apocalypse: ‘wanning empires, religious revivals, incipient anarchy, a retreat into fortified cities: these are the Dark Age experiences that a post-imperial world could conceivably find itself reliving’. Ferguson, it seems, not only holds what might be called a Polybian or Panatetian view of British and US imperialism but his reason for holding it is explicitly grounded in an arch-Polybian reading of Roman history. Either imperial progress or ruinous devolution is Ferguson’s historically buttressed, dichotomous model – Rome or barbarism. The acceptance,

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29 On the centrality of the question of apprehension in Academic Scepticism, see C. Brittain’s introduction to Cicero, On Academic Scepticism, trans. C. Brittain (Indianapolis, IN, 2006), xix-xxi, xii.
32 Ferguson (n. 1), 24-5.
33 A less apocalyptic appraisal of the post-Roman world can be found in P. Brown, The World of Late Antiquity, AD 150–750 (London, 1989).
34 Ferguson (n. 1), xxvii.
Indeed embrace, of the US as the new Rome, as the vehicle for the principle of universal order, is, for Ferguson, a necessary condition if a descent into barbarity is to be averted. The Scottish Ferguson, now ensconced at the heart of American scholarship at Harvard, is a veritable modern Panaitius, travelling from an old imperial world to a new one to affirm that misguided lands ‘require the imposition of some kind of external authority’. The antique parallel is hard to resist: Panaitius, conversing with Scipio Aemilianus and Polybius, confessing that ‘servitude is in the interest of such men as the provincials...when unprincipled men are deprived of the freedom to do wrong with impunity’.  

To turn to the modern left, despite the fact that Marx shared Ferguson’s progressivist enthusiasm for empire, as a means of ‘laying the material foundations of Western society in Asia’, which he viewed as a necessary part of the march of a transcendental, universal progress in lands that have ‘no history at all’, 47 Marxist historiography has more generally fallen in behind the critique of imperialism as structural injustice. Under this (Thucydidean) reading, imperialism operates as a transparent manifestation of the powerful ruling as they can and the ruled submitting as they must. Here, we are at day two of Carneades’ lectures, where (a more pragmatic form of) ‘wisdom urges us to increase our resources, to multiply our wealth, to extend our boundaries’ (Cic. Rep. 3.15).

Perhaps a surprising development is the emergence of a Left delineation of empire that meshes better with the first day of Carneades’ speeches in Rome, and with a Panaitian view of empire. This is Hardt and Negri’s work Empire, 48 which posited that we are in an age of ‘Empire without imperialism’ (which is a means of saying just expansion without injustice). Hardt and Negri’s claim that the Gulf War of 1991 ‘presented the United States as the only power able to manage international justice, not as a function of its own national motives but in the name of global right’ 49 is a powerfully Panaitian/Polybian narration of imperial power projection as the propulsion of justice into the world. Their depiction of modern global politics, which they characterize as ‘empire’ is the rule of a form of Polybian ‘bestness’, a transcendental balance between the three positive forms of rule that can, seemingly, stave off the cyclical decline predicted in the Greek political theory of anacyclosis. Indeed, more broadly, their claim that the contemporary world is best characterized as one of ‘empire’ amounts to a Panaitanian attempt to offer an argument for a positivist concept of universalized progress and justness. 50 In case this seems to be rendering their argument in a direction that they would resist, it is worth quoting precisely how they see this process:

Just as in the first century of the Christian era the Roman senators asked Augustus to assume imperial powers of the administration for the public good, so too today the international organizations (the United Nations, the international monetary organizations, and even the humanitarian organizations) ask the United States to assume the central role in a new world order. 51

There is much that is wrong with this but, to unpack the version of the Principate offered here, Augustus was of course ‘asked’ by Roman Senators to assume imperial powers not on behalf of the ‘public good’ but only after the early years of his reign of terror had eradicated any Senatorial opposition to his grip for power. 52 Rome’s Senators practically begged Augustus to save them from Augustus. The importance of this lies in the fact that Hardt and Negri’s discussion of Augustus, by no means a Roman ruler who would fit easily into their Polybian tripartite political schema, points not to balance and decreed, universalized biopower, but to Thucydidean power politics based on the ruthless control and utilization of a monopoly on state violence. In this context, their characterization of Thucydides’ Melian Dialogue as ‘a negotiated, contractual process’ is even more alarming. 53 Of all of the current uses of antique theories of imperialism that abound, Hardt and Negri’s attempt to find negotiated, decreed

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48 Cícero, as paraphrased by Augustus, De cõs. D. 19.21.
49 K. Marx, ‘The Future Results of British Role in India’, in K. Marx and F. Engels, On Colonialism (New York, 2001). The not dissimilar Hegelian notion that India was a land external to the world spirit of history until the coming of the Europeans has been usefully critiqued by Ranajit Guha in History at the Limit of World History (New York, 2002).
50 For recent restatements of the classical Marxist position on imperialism as structural injustice, see Boron (n. 17), Petrás and Veltmeyer (n. 17), and Petrás (n. 17). These restatements of the Marxist position on imperialism have, of course, been flushed out by M. Hardt and A. Negri, Empire (Cambridge, MA, 2000).
51 Hardt and Negri (n. 49), 180, emphasis in original.
52 On Hardt and Negri’s attempt to re-establish teleology-driven history, see R. Fillion, ‘Moving Beyond Biopower: Hardt and Negri’s Post-Foucauldian Speculative Philosophy of History’, Hût 84 (2005), 47-72.
53 Hardt and Negri (n. 49), 181.
55 Hardt and Negri (n. 49), 183.
CARNEADES AND THE CONCEIT OF ROME

power in the Roman Empire, despite their appeals to Polybian political theory, is perhaps one of the least successful or convincing. Given all of these problems, why do they use the analogy of Rome? It is perhaps worth considering the idea that Hardt and Negri's *Empire* does not exist devoid of its own dialogical context, which helps to determine what can be said about contemporary power projection, as Harrison's model of a palimpsestic symbiosis between a past read through the present and a present read through the past suggests.64 The internal logic of Hardt and Negri's discussion of 'Empire' overlaps significantly, indeed self-consciously, with the Panaetian universalist rationalisation for Roman control over the Mediterranean world so carefully delineated by Cicero in *De republica* and Polybius in Book 6 of the *Historiae*. Hardt and Negri's understanding of this is evinced by their overt appropriation of Polybius Book 6 and his theory of the mixed constitution to characterize contemporary global power relations.65 In identifying balanced 'monarchic', 'aristocratic', and 'democratic' elements in the modern global political landscape, in line with Polybius' view of the Roman constitution, Hardt and Negri seek to echo the Polybian argument of Scipio Aemilianus in *De republica* that this 'balanced' rule, able to halt the cycle of decay integral to *anaclytos*, is a superior, progressive form of rule (Cic. *Rep.* 2.39)66 —that is, that bestness underwrites the just 'expansive tendency'.67

As Inglis and Robertson rightly argue, Polybius' philosophy of history (as an antecedent of Hegel's philosophy of world history) saw the history of Roman imperialism as the beginnings of world history as 'an organic whole', with Rome ruling not for Rome but for the world.68 However, Polybius based the universalist aspects of his theory of history not on empirical observations of the effects of Roman imperialism but on an *a priori* verdict on the bestness and therefore the justness of Roman rule, which contrasts starkly with the nuanced empirical observations that sustain the less theoretical sections of his history. Hardt and Negri offer a similarly rarefied ontological proof for their construct 'Empire' that lacks tangible evidence to justify their belief in it. Just as Polybius used Rome's 'mixed constitution' as a means of elaborating a justification for Roman imperialism,69 so Hardt and Negri use the notion of a balanced global political infrastructure as a means of explicating the current forms of global power and the 'expansive tendency'. With power balanced and operating for 'essential values of justice', the organs sustaining the forms of power have achieved immutability and universality —there is no 'outside' of Empire.70 Hardt and Negri, it seems, are more optimistic than even Niall Ferguson about the existence and medium-term potentialities of a global infrastructure, or empire, looking to the US (as its monarchic principle) as the engine of a rapidly totalizing 'bestness' to create 'a universal republic, a network of powers and counterpowers structured in a boundless and inclusive architecture' that will serve as the Trojan horse for the real vehicle of universal justness — the Multitude.71

Whether it be the neo-Victorianism of Ferguson, the anti-imperialist Marxism of James Petras, or the post-structural utopianism of Hardt and Negri, recent theories of empire significantly reproduce the substance of Carneades' two discussions of justice, minus his positioning of both within a framework of dialectical irony (*simulatio, eironia*) that effectively undermined the legitimacy of both positions, and thereby denied the sublation required for any transhistorical narration of empire, whether materialist or idealist. For modern theorists, as for those ancient philosophers outside the school of Academic Scepticism, the imperial state is, by its very nature, either a vehicle of transcendental justice or a vehicle for exploitation. Lost amid these two positions is the implied meaning of Carneades' lectures to the Romans. Both positions, although seemingly mutually exclusive, are equally plausible renderings of the same phenomena. For Carneades, imperialism was neither 'just' nor 'unjust'. Rather, he demonstrated, it could be understood as having two mutually exclusive but nonetheless plausible natures, an understanding that does not correspond to 'true' knowledge of the ontological possibilities of empire but at least illustrates how any knowledge of imperialism qua...

64 Harrison (n. 5), 4.
66 See also Hardt and Negri (n. 49), 314–15.
67 Ibid. (n. 49), 17–20; emphasis in original.
68 Ibid., 166; see also 17–19. In the long term, Hardt and Negri argue rather shakily, the Multitude will emerge from within Empire and displace its forms of governmentality, even as it adheres to Empire's furthering of universal justice.
69 John North has characterised this 'mixed constitution' as a 'competitive oligarchy' with tightly controlled recourse to assemblies that chose between options carefully delineated by the Senatorial oligarchy. This critique of Polybius precisely mirrors the Marxist critique of Hardt and Negri's *Empire*. See J. North, 'Politics and Aristocracy in the Roman Republic', *CPh* 85 (1990), 277–87.
70 Ibid., 166; see also 17–19. In the long term, Hardt and Negri argue rather shakily, the Multitude will emerge from within Empire and displace its forms of governmentality, even as it adheres to Empire's furthering of universal justice.
imperialism is derived from the instrumental logic of the (contextually bound) discursive traditions from which descriptions of it arise. By presenting diametrically opposed but equally compelling narrations of imperial rule that stemmed from differing philosophics of history, Carneades sought to illustrate that, in the abstract, imperialism was potentially both just and unjust, or (more importantly) neither just nor unjust—a syllogistic impossibility that nonetheless enabled a more probing appraisal of a particular empire (namely Rome) in light of the material and cultural conditions not of ‘imperialism’ (which as an abstract noun refers to an intangible) but of the dynamics of a single empire. This is precisely what happened, with Carneades’ appraisal of the Roman Empire endlessly interrogated long after he had left, as Polybius’ *Histories* and Cicero’s *De republica* attest. With ‘imperialism’ both just and unjust, the focus of his audience (and his critics) was forcibly returned to the historical specificity of one empire at a particular time—of Rome.

Truth claims about the intrinsic, transhistorical nature of ‘imperialism’ are most likely to fail the test of Carneadean Scepticism because attempts to apprehend ‘imperialism’ are undermined by variances in historical context. ‘Imperialism’, as a signifier deployed to represent an immutable signified, can only operate to reiterate the paradigmatic assumptions of the twin Polybian and Thucydidean discourses of imperialism that constituted the parameters of the Carneadean dialectic. ‘Imperialism’ however, within this dialectic, exists only within the episodic or interpretative imaginary, where ostensible *katalepsis* (‘attainment of knowledge’) is mere *phantasia* (‘appearance of knowledge’); presumed *episteme* (‘knowledge’) is actually *doxa* (‘belief’/’opinion’). This Carneadean approach towards understanding representations of ancient and modern imperialism discursively, that is, as shaped by an antique dialectical tradition, might be seen as an attempt to take seriously Homi Bhabha’s call for ‘the intervention of a Third Space of enunciation’, which operates from an agonistic position that refutes the assumption of ‘a progression or evolution of ideas-in-time’.82

In internalizing the Carneadean dialectic of empire, the student of imperialism is left with the task of not simply praising or blaming imperialism *in toto* via recourse to either arm of that dialectic. Rather, discussions of empires, as the effect of Carneades on the debate of

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