

Polybius witnessed the aborted revolution of the Gracchi, political reformers who in the late Republic tried to rehabilitate the Roman *hoi mesoi*, or middle class. If the Gracchi had succeeded, the contest of demagogues that carried Rome from plutocracy to monarchy would have likely been averted. But the Gracchi were murdered by plutocrats, and within a century Rome had transformed into imperial monarchy. From kings to emperors, Anacyclosis ran its full course in Classical Antiquity.

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*The Gracchi tried to reverse an extreme concentration of wealth and rehabilitate the hoi mesoi, but were murdered by the plutocracy*

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Polybius recognized Anacyclosis at the precipice of that final, irrevocable turn to monarchy. Unlike his predecessors – Herodotus, Plato, Thucydides, and Aristotle – Polybius saw the conquest of the entire Mediterranean basin by a single power. It was not the history of a city-state or confederation that inspired Anacyclosis, but the evolution of the entire Mediterranean world. The ancient superpower which became the Roman Empire was no fleeting polity bound to a warlord or dynasty. It was a stable political singularity, the product of territorial, economic, and legal integration, with few languages, one ruler, and no rivals prevailing, which survived for centuries. Polybius has an authority his forebears lack because he looked from a vantage they never had; his history beholds an integrated global civilization such as existed before the Age of Discovery.



*Tiberius and Caius Gracchus, two brothers who sacrificed their lives trying to restore a middle stratum and save a republic*

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*From the ruin of the middle class arises the tournament of demagogues*

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What comes after democracy? Today we confront essentially the same trends that confronted the Gracchi when Polybius first described Anacyclosis centuries ago: A middle class crashes into the ground as a plutocracy hurls into the stratosphere. We've thus entered the age of plutocracy. Social stratification is expanding, dependency is intensifying, subsidies are increasing, and demagogues are ascendant. If an independent middle class is not soon restored, next, and once again, comes demagarchy.

ἀνακύκλωσις

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What comes after  
democracy?

Democracy is a cherished principle of Western civilization, but another, bigger idea lurks behind it that democratic peoples would be wise to acknowledge, at least if they want to remain democratic. This idea is “Anacyclosis,” and it’s no coincidence it comes from the Greeks, the very people who invented democracy to begin with.

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### *Democracy is only a phase in the cycle of revolution*

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Anacyclosis is the recurring sequence of political evolution; democracy is but one phase in the cycle. According to the revised model of Anacyclosis developed by The Institute for Anacyclosis, political society begins in tribal chiefdom. Chiefdom crystallizes into kingship. Kingship corrupts into tyranny. The last tyrant is deposed or forced to share power with an aristocracy. Aristocracy degenerates into an oppressive oligarchy. Occasionally, an independent middle economic stratum – a middle class – emerges; the *hoi mesoi* in Aristotelian terms. If this middle class is entrenched, some form of democracy emerges alongside oligarchy. Meanwhile, as money becomes ubiquitous, oligarchy further degenerates into plutocracy. The wealth of the middle class is reconcentrated in the plutocracy, stratifying society between opulent and dependent. The hopes of the dependent masses fuel an intensifying competition among their political patrons, transforming democracy into demagarchy – rule by demagogues. This tournament of demagogues rages among a narrowing field of popular leaders until a single champion arises victorious, dragging political society back to some form of monarchy, completing the cycle.

### *The full sequence of evolution combines an internal process of sociopolitical revolution with an external process of territorial integration*

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While the internal revolutionary cycle runs its course, separate states meanwhile undergo a separate but related process of integration. By copying, consent, colonization, and conquest, leading states spread their culture. Just as the internal revolutionary cycle is consummated under one victorious person, this external process of integration is consummated under one dominant polity. Political evolution begins with many nations and ends in one state.

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### *Abstract thinking and a wide field of vision are required to perceive Anacyclosis*

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Both processes take centuries to complete, proceed at uneven paces, and are often interrupted by accidents of history. Sufficient time, however, averages out the occurrences of chance. The outline of history, like that of the Earth, is only visible from afar.

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### *An independent middle economic stratum, or middle class; a “hoi mesoi” in Greek terms, is the sine qua non for authentic democracy*

The full sequence of Anacyclosis is rarely seen on the global scale because an independent middle class is historically rare, which makes democracy historically rare. Until modern times, most societies never advanced as far as democracy. World history is replete with the earlier stages of Anacyclosis, however, with oligarchy and plutocracy the most persistent states of political society. Advanced global integration is likewise historically rare.

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### *By accident of history, the processes of revolution and integration converged in Augustus, who came to rule the Mediterranean world*

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The last time these dual processes converged on the world stage, the champion was Augustus, the world state was the Roman Empire, and its leading cultures were Latin and Greek. When history so recurs, these dual processes will eventually converge in a single chief ruling a world state dominated by its leading cultures. We should not presume to foretell the future with particularity, but global dominance of the English language may foreshadow what is to come. Though Anacyclosis will likely not be consummated for several generations, we appear much nearer the end than the beginning.

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### *Anacyclosis was discovered in the age of the Gracchi*

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Anacyclosis was first described by Polybius, Greek historian of the Roman Republic.