Thucydides and Political Order

Lessons of Governance and the History of the Peloponnesian War

Edited by
Christian R. Thauer
& Christian Wendt

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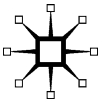

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Contents

Introduction

Christian R. Thauer and Christian Wendt

This book is the sequel of a collection of contributions that reconsider Thucydides in the twenty-first century, titled *Thucydides and Political Order: Concepts of Order and the* History of the Peloponnesian War (as well edited by Christian R. Thauer and Christian Wendt, Palgrave Macmillan 2016, to which we refer here and through the whole book as *CoO*). Twenty-five years after *Hegemonic Rivalry: From Thucydides to the Nuclear Age* (1991), edited by Ned Lebow and Barry Strauss, these two volumes constitute the renewed attempt to discuss the ancient author from an interdisciplinary perspective. As alleged founding father of both disciplines, Thucydides continues to be a main point of reference in history and political science—also after the Cold War, in the context of which Thucydides was discussed in the mentioned predecessor work by Lebow and Strauss. While of continuing importance to both, however, neither historians nor political scientists take much notice of each other's accounts and interpretations of the *History of the Peloponnesian War*.

It is in this context of continuing relevance, yet mutual neglect, that the idea for the two volumes emerged. In late 2011 we decided to organize a joint workshop involving historians and political scientists of various kinds—classicists, philologists,

International Relations scholars, political philosophers, and scholars of Intellectual History—in order to (re-)connect the disciplinary debates about the *History of the Peloponnesian War*. We invited a selection of established and younger scholars from both disciplines, involving Ryan Balot, Ernst Baltrusch, Martin Dreher, Liisi Keedus, Hans Kopp, Ned Lebow, Christine Lee, Klaus Meister, Neville Morley, Clifford Orwin, Tim Ruback, Peter Spahn, Christian Thauer, Christian Wendt, and Wolfgang Will. In April 2012, the workshop took place in Berlin; the essays in the two volumes, this very book and *CoO*, reflect the contributions to and discussions thereof during the workshop.

The volumes make three major contributions. First, they reconnect the largely separate debates about Thucydides in political science and history, and thereby provide the reader with an overview of the richness and diversity of interests in the different disciplines in relation to the ancient author. Second, it does so suggesting the topic of "political order" as a main theme for historians and political scientists alike discussing the *History of the Peloponnesian War*. Thus, the volumes do not only showcase differences in perspective between and within the disciplines, but mark out the common ground between them—namely the question of political order in relation to Thucydides. Third, thereby the volumes map out new research questions and a future interdisciplinary research agenda that evaluates the political relevance of the ancient author in the twenty-first century.

The two volumes argue that political order is relevant in four ways in contemporary work on Thucydides. First, it concerns *foreknowledge*, that is, preconceptions of political order with which we approach the Thucydidean text. For example, we take it for granted that there is a clear distinction between domestic and international politics. Or we are led by theories of International

Relations which conceptualize international politics in terms of modern ideas of sovereignty. Reflecting on such foreknowledge is what marks one strand of recent scholarly work on Thucydides. As methodological preconditions for subsequent substantive interpretative work, we decided to combine these reflections in the first part of *CoO*, titled "Thucydides and the Modern Reader: Methodological Reflections from Different Perspectives." The second part of *CoO*, "Representations of Order in Thucydides," then highlights approaches in both disciplines, history and political science, that make an informed choice about preconceptions of political order with which they then encounter the ancient text of Thucydides. These contributions thus arrive at new and complex interpretations of the *History of the Peloponnesian War*.

This book seeks to address two more aspects (i.e., aspects three and four) of "political order" in relation to Thucydides. We introduce them here in some more detail. One of them addresses the question of the "possession for all time" Thucydides explicitly wished to convey to us. It features scholarly work that asks what political order Thucydides himself envisioned, against which he might have judged the events he described. Whereas the aspects of foreknowledge and the interpretative approach of political order (treated in *CoO*) mainly concerned methodological questions, this third interest focuses on what the Thucydidean *ktēma es aiei* is in substance. Obviously, this lies at the heart of any interpretation. Accordingly, this section features essays that make suggestions in this respect. In his analysis of the reasons Thucydides mentions for the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War, *Ernst Baltrusch* concludes that Thucydides's ideal point of reference was the well-functioning prewar international order of ancient Greece. *Richard Ned Lebow* argues in the same vein, though from a different perspective. Lebow also maintains that Thucydides

disapproved of the disrespect the political elites in Athens afforded traditional customs, conventions, and norms over the course of the Peloponnesian War. However, whereas Baltrusch is convinced that Thucydides believed that the Athenians could have, and should have acted differently, Ned Lebow connects the reasons for such Athenian contempt to the structural forces of modernization. In his view, the rapid growth of Athens and the modernization this entailed, ultimately, undermined its lasting success. *Wolfgang Will* suggests in his essay that the so-called Funeral Oration of Pericles reveals Thucydides's ideal vision of democracy for Athens. Moreover, he believes that Thucydides laid out this vision in the *History* as a political statement with the distinct intent of countering the version of democracy Athens had implemented following the debacle in Sicily, that is, as a commentary on the downfall of Athenian order.

Finally, a fourth focal point featured in this volume is the role that Thucydides plays as a model theorist or representative of an ideal political order in philosophical traditions and schools of thought. Such a focus on lineage creation, for which Thucydides's work is obviously very important,[1] is interesting not only for a history of ideas. It also invites reflection on approaches that are used to interpret the *History* itself and thus inevitably lead to the question of how schools of thought incorporate texts—in particular as most readers, for better, for worse, will have associated themselves with some affiliation in this respect. The essays in the final section titled "Thucydides as a Model Historian (or Theorist) of Political Order" are especially aware of the special function that is attributed to Thucydides by intellectual schools of thought. Drawing on sources that have not been considered in this context before, *Liisi Keedus* analyzes the importance of Thucydides for Leo Strauss's thinking. She shows that to Strauss, Thucydides was a

model political theorist and a bulwark against historicism, as well as a sourcebook for the true nature of men and politics. *Christine Lee*'s chapter stands in close relation to that of Keedus. She critically discusses the widespread use of Thucydides as an ontological authority among realists, in particular Straussians. She argues that the reading of Thucydides as a model realist leads to simplifications and, consequently, misleading interpretations of the text and a neglect of its ethical dimension. *Klaus Meister* shows in his contribution to this volume that Thucydides was already used as a model for explaining a disintegration of political order in the Roman historian Sallust's writings—which in turn influenced many subsequent readings of the *History*. Finally, *Christian Wendt* discusses—in pushing Lee's criticism even further—whether Thucydides may be employed as a "manual for statesmen." In difference to the classical realist-Straussian perspective, Thucydides should be understood as suggesting an analytical approach to the study of politics in general. Wendt's reading of Thucydides as a reflection on the right parameters of political decision-making emphasizes the need for an extensive appreciation of contextual and situation-specific factors.

This volume should be understood as directly linked to its predecessor, *CoO*. Both mark the beginning of, what we hope, will turn into an intense dialogue about Thucydides across the disciplines. We hope the two volumes will inspire discussion, new thoughts, and controversies—that they will in this sense be "useful" (Thuc. 1.22.4).

Note

1. Harloe and Morley (2012).

PART I

The Nature, Endurance, Destruction, and Consequences of Political Order According to Thucydides

CHAPTER 1

"I Have Set Out First the Grievances and Disputes:" Greek International Law in Thucydides*

Ernst Baltrusch

Introduction

One of the founding fathers of modern international law, Hugo Grotius, cited Thucydides at the very beginning of his epoch-making work *De iure belli ac pacis* of 1625. Grotius drew extensively on ancient texts in order to create what is today considered the first comprehensive account of international law. However, Grotius does not cite Thucydides for additional evidence in proving the existence of international law. On the contrary, he calls upon him as a key witness against all those colleagues who deny an *ius inter populos* (this is how he described "international law"). Thucydides is quoted by Grotius as saying *regi aut civitati imperium habenti nihil iniustum quod utile* ("nothing is unjust what is useful to the King or an imperial power"). This, however, is a slightly accurate Latin translation of the corresponding Thucydidean sentence: *andri de turannōi ē polei archēn echousēi*

ouden alogon hoti xumpheron (6.85.1). Grotius thus equates *alogon* ("unreasonable") with *iniustum* ("unjust"), whereas the Thucydidean *adikon* would surely have been more suitable for his purposes.[1]

Hugo Grotius of course knew, however, that it was not Thucydides who was speaking in this sentence but Euphemus, an Athenian, who was supposed to explain his city's military presence in Sicily.[2] It is common knowledge that Athens's enterprise to conquer Sicily had failed. What is more, it ended up as a catastrophe, and for Thucydides this failure becomes the very symbol for the Athenians' general failure in their war against Sparta. A few years ago, Hans-Joachim Gehrke rightly stressed that "the negative consequences of unlimited power politics are inscribed into the whole work."[3] This is most definitely true. As the historian of the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides surely sought to explain its outbreak, course, and final outcome. And that is what he was above all: a historian.[4] The first part of the first sentence of his work leaves us with little room for interpretation in this respect: Thucydides, the Athenian *xunegrapse ton polemon* of the Peloponnesians and Athenians—literally, "he *wrote* the war *together*" (1.1.1). This is the programmatic formulation for the following account of events, which is an essentially historical one. Anyone who reads the *History of the Peloponnesian War* as a whole will confirm this. The reader must first work through lengthy accounts of events, reports on maneuvers of troops, naval maneuvers, and battles before he or she arrives at the much-discussed gems (such as Pericles's Funeral Oration or the Melian Dialogue). *Xungraphē* (literally "something written together," a *Zusammenschrift*) became a specific term for historical work in general.[5] Against this backdrop, does Thucydides offer a "reasonable theory of power" ("eine vernünftige Theorie

der Macht"), as Hans-Joachim Gehrke asserts? Is it the "perceptive reflecting *Realpolitiker*" (den "scharfsinnig reflektierenden Realpolitiker") that he has in mind as the addressee, someone who contemplates his actions by taking all, even possibly unintended, consequences into account? This is surely the case, but I believe that there is more to this work. The idea of law plays too great a role in all parts of the work, in the *erga* as well as in the *logoi*. It is the significance of law—in this case international law—that I wish to demonstrate in the following. Law plays the central role in the prehistory leading up to the war, and the extent to which Thucydides underlines this role seems to suggest that he held the constitution of an international order as indispensable for a peaceful conviviality among the Greek *poleis*, that is, the international community (I use this term with caution when applying it to the fifth century BC).

The New Legal Order of 446/5

Thucydides's most cited passage appears to be the following:

> The war was begun by the Athenians and Peloponnesians when they broke the Thirty Years Treaty which they had established after the capture of Euboea. I have set out first [i.e., in the book 1] the grievances and disputes which led to this breach, so that nobody in future will need to look for the immediate cause which brought such a great war on the Greeks. In my view the truest cause (*alēthestatē prophasis*, in Hammond: "real reason"), while unacknowledged, which forced the war was the growth of Athenian power and Spartan fear of it: but the openly proclaimed grievances (*aitiai*) on either side causing the breach of the treaty and the outbreak of the war were as follows. (1.23.5–6, here in Martin Hammond's translation, slightly adapted)

It may be that this sentence must be interpreted with greater care than the juxtaposition of "immediate" and "truest cause" leads us to assume. It confronts us with the direct nexus between the annulment of the contract of 446/5 and the beginning of the war. I now turn to a detailed consideration of this nexus, which Thucydides mentions explicitly, and not only here. My aim in this is to embed the text within its historical context rather than to interpret it in terms of its main message and meaning, its theoretical presumptions, or inner contradictions. I start with the *spondai* which, in Thucydides's words, made the war inevitable.

The Thirty Years Treaty

In the wake of the so-called first Peloponnesian War, the belligerent parties Athens and Sparta agreed on a contract that bore the name *spondai*. However, in actual fact *spondai* were usually not peace treaties. So what were these *spondai* all about?

First, they formally concluded an armistice and were thus limited in time. Yet, for want of any other instrument of international law, they were effectively used to end the war, and in this capacity were supposed to establish an order that would last for 30 years. This order protected Sparta and its allies, Athens and its allies, and, for the first time, also neutral states from all chances of war: the use of arms was prohibited in conflict (*hopla mē epipherei*). This formula is mentioned by Thucydides as the core of the contract (7.18.2). The terms of this contract applied to an area that comprised large parts of Greece, the Aegean, and the coast of Asia Minor. However, it was at the same time obvious that peace could not be preserved without further regulations and sanctions.

Second, the contract therefore included the obligatory institution of an arbitration tribunal in the case of conflict. Any points

of contention were supposed to be solved by means of arbitration (*dikas didonai*) (7.18.2; cf. 4.118.8). The peace order was thus institutionally linked to legally binding procedures, the enforcement of which was—given the absence of a higher authority in inter-poleis relations—mainly delegated to the two superpowers. Every small or large *polis* could appeal to it—and did so repeatedly in the run-up to the war. This worked just as well and as badly as attempts in the modern age when it comes to the enforcement of international law. But the "world public" was also such an authority: the Plataeans clearly point toward this often underrated forum during the trial, in which they face Sparta as both prosecutor and judge: "It takes only a brief moment to destroy our lives" they say, "but the struggle to remove the disgrace (*duskleia*) will be long and hard" (3.58.2; cf. 3.59.1).

Third, the territorial order was laid out in the Thirty Years *spondai* according to the status quo of the year 446/5. There was no possibility for the allies on either sides to change their alliance; in addition, it was prohibited to incorporate defected cities, which according to modern criteria would constitute a distinct interference with their "sovereignty"—in terms of Greek criteria, with the poleis' autonomy. Hence, there existed three juristic-geographical complexes of states in the Greek world of the time:

1. the Athenians and their allies;
2. the Peloponnesians (i.e., Spartans) and their allies; and
3. the neutral (explicitly mentioned by Thucydides as "not listed cities" (*agraphoi* poleis), thus cities not mentioned in the treaty).

Only the latter have the right to join alliances, under the condition, though, that their decision in this respect is not forced

upon them in any way through extortion or violence (1.31.1, 1.35.2, 1.40.2). Everyone had to accept this order as a condition for membership. The intrinsic aim of the treaty, the creation of a comprehensive "international" legal order, also accords to the fact that Argos, which did not want to be a part of it, is explicitly mentioned: a special clause permitted Argos to negotiate a mutual agreement with Athens (cf. Paus. 5.23.4). This demonstrates the intended all-encompassing character of the order constituted by the *spondai*.

Fourth, even though little is known about the ratification of the treaty, the proceedings regarding the oath-taking must have included all the parties concerned, that is, all confederates ratified the treaty under the roof of the customary gods associated with their city. A more effective safeguard of a treaty's stipulations did not exist in ancient societies. It was only the neutral parties who did not confirm the *spondai* by way of an oath; but these parties, too, gained recognition as they were assigned their rightful place as part of a new international order of law.

Fifth, the publication of this treaty ensured the dissemination of its contents—that is, the erection of stone or marble columns bearing the wording of the treaty—in Olympia, Delphi, and on the Isthmus (in other words, holy places where each year or every two or four years respectively, official representatives of the poleis convened), as well as in Athens, and in Amyclae close to Sparta. This is exactly what we can read in Thucydides: Every politician of the poleis taking part in it knew the treaty and its stipulations in detail, everyone was aware of the peace order, everyone knew the legal regulations and argued accordingly.

Let us draw some preliminary conclusions. In Thucydides's analysis, the Treaty of 446/5, despite its shortcomings, had produced an "international" legal order. According to Thucydides,

this order could not fulfill the hopes that had been vested in it, and it was this reason that was primarily responsible for the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War. This order was expected to be guaranteed by the superpowers through their supervision and anticipation of conflicts, with an avowal to refrain from force, the precept of mediation and the construction of a superior instance (Olympia, Delphi, and more centers) of which, again, Sparta and Athens were to be the enforcing agents (this is how the Corinthians' constant insistence in Sparta on the penalizing of the Athenians' alleged breach of law must be understood). This inevitably entailed that, just as is the case in modern international law, "national sovereignty" was restricted (which would also explain the emergence of the concept of autonomy right at this time).[6]

If this interpretation is valid, it seems absurd to conceive of the relations between the Greek poleis in terms of anarchy, as however "realist" and "neorealist" theories in International Relations often do. Christian Thauer has pointed this out quite rightly recently:

> If, possibly, Thucydides did not conceive of this passage (sc. "the truest cause" in 1.23) . . . within a neo-realist context—precisely because the preconditions of neo-realism, i.e. insecurity, anarchy, and sovereignty, were inexistent given the then existing international legal order—it follows that there would be no contradictions between this text passage and the following description of events either.[7]

This is indeed the salient point: these contradictions seem to arise only for us, the modern readers. Thucydides's text, including the "truest cause" for the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War (the *alēthestatē prophasis*), deserves to be considered from within the context of its conception. It is often—though wrongly—suggested

in this respect that the inter-poleis order was not an "international system," but rather the inner-Greek community sharing Hellenic principles. This notion needs to be rejected. The participants in this system were autonomous poleis. Moreover, this system is not that far from our modern international legal order: already George A. Sheets has finely observed that the modern international legal order is also not free of (as Sheets coins it) "a species of tribalism" and, in addition, is lead to a great extent by Western conceptions of "civilization."[8]

Why Did This Order Fail According to Thucydides?

One of the unalterable principles of international law is *pacta sunt servanda,* which is a principle that comes up in Thucydides repeatedly, as for instance when the Corinthians insist on its abidance (1.71). He refers to it time and again (4.23), so that Grotius can make reference to these Thucydidean passages when he comes to speak about contractual observance in *De iure belli ac pacis* (2.15.2). Thucydides saw his task as a historian to explain why this order came to fail after just a little more than 15 years, and his verdict was that the principle that one must honor contracts had become unhinged: "what was happening amounted to the collapse of the treaty and a reason for war" (*spondōn gar xunchusis ta gignomena ēn kai prophasis tou polemein*, 1.146).

On this basis, Thucydides also formulated the passage I cited in the beginning: (1) The treaty, that is, the international legal order has become obsolete; (2) each party—and Thucydides lets everyone have their say: Athenians, Spartians, Corinthians, the neutral Corcyreans, Plataeans, Aeginetes—has its own distinctive opinion about the "question of fault," and each party, time and again, raises this subject in their speeches; (3) but why did the

international legal order, created by the *spondai*, fail? *Hēgoumai* ("I believe") says Thucydides, that this was because the Spartans became fearful of Athens's ever growing power. This formulation expresses the extent to which each party regarded the order as binding; none of the parties defied it. While everyone blamed their respective enemies, they did so with clear reference to the order. Although it was the Spartans who in the end made the decisive declaration that "the *spondai* are annulled" (*tas spondas lelusthai*, 1.87.6), Thucydides does not blame them for the war any more than he does the Athenians or Corinthians, at least not explicitly.

Thucydides's juxtaposition of *aitiai* and *prophasis* should therefore be considered differently from the ideas of "immediate and truest cause," as it is usually done today, particularly as this juxtaposition does not come up in any other passage. For instance, Thucydides states at the end of the *Pentekontaetia*: "Not many years after this there took place the events which I have already described—the affairs of Corcyra and Potidaea, and other things that proved to be the *prophasis* of this war" (1.118.1).[9] And right at the end of the first book *prophasis* again does not attain the meaning of "truest cause" (1.146). The political scientist Richard Ned Lebow, too, has discovered this discrepancy and has proposed to translate *prophasis* as "precondition," for according to Lebow, "Thucydides was not suggesting that the rise to power of Athens was the truest cause of war, only that it was the most important precondition."[10] Moreover, the antithetic juxtaposition of immediate and truest cause vanishes upon historical analysis.[11] What led to the war were the events leading up to the "breach of the international order" (*xunchusis spondōn*). Things came to this point, according to Thucydides, as the poleis were incapable of communicating effectively about the respective gravamina

with each other. Instead, often each party would resort to diametrically opposed legal interpretations, which simply reflected their interests in the specific situation at hand. The *diaphorai*, the reported contentions, thus revealed the weaknesses of a legal order that proved to be too rigid to react to current developments in a swift and uncomplicated manner.

The conflict between Athens and Corinth concerning the island of Corcyra exemplifies this problem. Both held on to the principles of law stubbornly, in spite of a situation in which Epidamnus simply needed help (in 1.24, Thucydides explicitly contrasts the *palaios nomos,* the "ancient custom", namely the relation between mother- and daughter-city, with the then valid principles of the *spondai* of 446/5). The outcome was as follows: both talked past each other completely as everyone explicated solely their own legal position without giving any consideration to the other's standpoint. Even someone such as Cleon was able to criticize the secession of the Mytileneans by claiming they privileged "force before law" (*ischun axiōsantes tou dikaiou protheinai*, 3.39.3).[12] For Thucydides, the emphasis on the legal positions of the individual parties is of crucial importance for both the outbreak and the settlement of military conflicts. We can therefore conclude that for the Athenian historian a functioning legal order was a precondition for peaceful conviviality of political communities.

The treaty of 446/5, meanwhile, had great inherent faults. These faults had their origins, according to how Thucydides portrays it, in the fact that it was primarily focused on the avoidance of war, while neglecting other essential aspects of cross-"national" relations at the time. Below I wish to list the most important consequences of the treaty in a brief, perhaps even abbreviated form:

First, the right of self-determination of Athens's and Sparta's allies was massively restricted. There was simply no possibility

to claim it legally. The Athenians, especially, did whatever they wanted within their alliance, and they were protected in their actions by the treaty of 446/5. Cities such as Poteidaia, Mytilene, and even Aegina thus became increasingly discontented, and the same is true for the Aegean island Samos (439).[13] The Athenians interpreted the legal order, which, after all, guaranteed the spheres of influence, explicitly as a guarantee for their own hegemonic position. In the Mytilenean Debate they are accused of explaining away the idea of autonomy as an integral part of international law: If everyone was autonomous, so the Athenians, they could not dare to undertake any "innovations" (*mēden neōteriein*, 3.11.1).[14] The Athenian Diodotus, who advocated sparing the Mytileneans, put his finger in the wound regarding the weaknesses of the inter-poleis legal order in terms of autonomy when he formulates: "But the way we should treat free men is not with extreme punishment when they do rebel, but with extreme vigilance before any rebellion and a policy which prevents even the thought of it" (3.46.6).

Second, partly incompatible yet intertwined legal conceptions existed in parallel and created dangerous conflicts. These conflicts emerged on account of traditional forms of inter-poleis relations being superseded by the peace treaty of 446/5.[15] These legally connoted relations that existed in parallel among cities were the following:

(a) First of all, historically evolved ties between mother cities and daughter cities, and other forms of cross-"national" relations, were indiscriminately torn apart by this treaty, as it did not include these explicitly in the status quo stipulations. This concerned mainly Corinth, but also Megara, whose daughter cities were members of the Delian League.

Athens had the power and (in line with the treaty) also the right to push through its own interests when the daughter cities of powerful Peloponnesian mother cities were coastal cities and thus cities of the Delian League. This procedure was at the heart of the conflicts preceding the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War, namely the affairs of Corcyra, Poteidaia, and the Megarian Decree. The latter forbade Megara to entertain any contact with the cities of the Delian League. Given this background, it is difficult to understand why Darien Shanske has contended recently: "There was limited necessity for Thucydides to begin his account of the war with Epidamnos and Potidaea."[16] On the contrary, Thucydides treated these conflicts in so much detail because it is precisely in these that he could explicate the legal spheres as they were so very central to the outbreak of the war.

(b) Further, the stipulations of the treaty also affected the religious ties between the poleis,[17] which persisted beyond the alliances. Such ties safeguarded the festivals (Olympia, Delphi), ensuring protection from any interference bearing on the "rules that are valid among all people" as expressed, for instance, in the so-called Cylonian pollution (Pericles), in the Tainaron sacrilege (Helots) or in the Chalkioikos sacrilege (Pausanias). They were also vital for conserving the *hikesia* (Themistocles, 1.136). Further, aristocratic family-ties and friendships (Pericles and Archidamus, 2.13.1), which in general spanned beyond the polis, belonged to this complex, as much as the institution of the proxeny, which also transcended the alliances and contractual blocks (the family of the Athenian Alcibiades, for instance, held the proxeny of Sparta).

(c) Finally, I shall mention the tribal ties: an increasing inner-Greek differentiation manifested itself between Dorians and Ionians during the fifth century,[18] which did accord with large parts of the alliances, but was not identical with them if one thinks of Sparta and Melos or Corinth and Potidaea. Without going into more detail here, the tribal complex does play into the stipulations of the treaty of 446/5 as well.

Third, another complex of interference with the *spondai* was the customary law (which in Thucydides's text is mentioned as *agraphoi nomoi*, *para/kata to kathestēkon*, *ta pantōn tōn anthrōpōn nomima*). Both alliances, the Delian and the Peloponnesian, come into conflict with these principles, and both then resort to nit-picky legal interpretations.[19] In the Plataea-trial, for instance, these issues are raised again and again (3.52–68). Thebans and Plataeans refer to the same rules, they just interpret them differently. What comes to the fore especially in this context is that,

Fourth, the weakness with regard to the enforcement of international law has a negative impact on international relations. A superior authority, sufficiently powerful to enforce compliance with international law, is lacking. Contractually stipulated sanctions are thus important for the enforcement of international law—they are however not a precondition for its existence. In this context, it is important to note that contracts without any sanctions were also considered binding by the Greeks. The Gods in their capacity as the addressees of the oaths kept watch over compliance with them. Thus, we must agree with James L. Brierly when he says that, "the real difference in this respect between municipal and international law is not that the one is sanctioned and the other is not, but that in the one the sanctions are

organized in a systematic procedure and that in the other they are left indeterminate."[20] Sanctions are recognized in international law, and considered legitimate—Thucydides clearly makes this argument in the Mytilenean Debate: the Mytileneans, according to Diodotus, concede the sanction;[21] the Athenians have the right to punish since international law allows for it, but in this case, so Diodotus says, it would not be in their interest (3.44–5). Of course: It is difficult to get one's right in a "horizontal" legal system. There are different legal interpretations, but according to Thucydides these material differences are complemented by interpretative differences (*en tōi diallassonti tēs gnōmēs*).[22]

Accordingly, war, as Thucydides presents it, is an instrument for the execution of laws. This is, for instance, how the Athenian historian describes Corinth's declaration of war on Corcyra (1.29). In fact, the whole discussion about the evolution of the Peloponnesian War is about this very instrument. This needs to be emphasized, as Thucydides's analysis is not concerned with other interests or strategic aims, but with the preservation of the law.[23]

Just how important the legal dimension of the prewar period was for Thucydides clearly reveals itself in his analysis of the war in the following books—when he describes the war as causing the complete inversion and contortion of all values. Accordingly, this war also resulted in a certain disintegration of the international law as it were. Thucydides writes in the seventh book about the criteria according to which the Athenian allies had organized to join the attack on Syracuse: "They (i.e., the peoples) had come to share either in the conquest of the country or in its rescue, but their particular alignment was not determined by any justifying cause or kindred loyalty so much as by purely contingent factors of self-interest and compulsion" (7.57.1).

This formulation indicates: the parties constituted by legal ties were in a process of re-formation. The order was gone. We can see this in the fact that the belligerent states joined up neither (a) on grounds of contractual agreements or to execute the law, nor (b) because of family ties (i.e., Ionians with Ionians against Dorians). Instead, they did so (a) in a hit-or-miss fashion (*xuntuchia*), (b) on the grounds of utilitarian considerations (*kata to xumpheron*), or (c) coercion (*anankē*). These are clearly newly introduced criteria of social ordering. The war had caused a paradigm shift, also with regard to international law. Nicias's letter home from Sicily, in which he urgently calls for help, brings the ramifications of this paradigm shift to the fore: no one sticks to their promises anymore, everyone looks out for his own interests, and whenever they confront obstacles those who are considered allies retreat (7.13). The corrosion of the legal order thus resulted in anarchy, the explicit convergence of all states in legal terms, whereby the mighty and powerless alike considered nothing but their own advantage. Nicias holds the Athenians themselves responsible for this development: *chalepai gar hai humeterai phuseis arxai*—this is how he formulates his own inability to counteract (7.14.2). Thucydides had interpreted "the old history" (*ta palaia*) in his *Archaeology* as one of continuous progress, and not only in terms of economics and military, but also because of the world's development toward a community.

Conclusion: Thucydides as a Theorist of International Law

This leads us to the following conclusions: First, if Thucydides was opposed to war—and it is impossible to claim anything else in view of the "pathology of the war"—the conclusion drawn

from his analysis must be that a functioning international order is the prerequisite for a peaceful conviviality of the states. To make this order work is, however, also a difficult task in view of the multitude of interests it has to combine. Second, as a politician, one must, if one intends to use Thucydides as "a possession for all time," know about the "law," as Euripides stated (*ta dikaia exeidenai*).[24] Knowing the law allows the statesman to evaluate all arguments in a case of conflict. This is for instance what the Thebans explicitly say when addressing the Spartans (*hina eidēte*), and it is on these grounds that they can come to a decision (3.67.1). Knowledge of the law also allows the statesman to consider his own actions in view of their consequences, as the use of distinct terms requires a precision that in turn is based on knowledge.[25] These are the lessons to be learned from the *History of the Peloponnesian War* for true statesmen.

Notes

* The quote is 1.23.5: *tas aitias prougrapsa prōton kai tas diaphoras*.

1. Grotius does not draw on Thucydides very often, yet right at the beginning of Proleg. 3 with reference to the Melian Dialogue and Euphemus; he responds differently than the Melians, namely by stressing the security of natural law instead of showing any consideration for the potential aspect of utility.
2. Euphemus's speech can be found in 6.82–7.
3. My own translation of Gehrke (2006), p. 37: "Die negativen Folgen einer Politik machtpolitischer Schrankenlosigkeit sind . . . dem Werk als ganzem eingeschrieben."
4. This is denied by Ober (2006), pp. 131–2, among others, formulating the opposite very pointedly: "his approach amounted to nothing less than the invention of a new discipline, political and social science."
5. See Thuc. 1.97 on the historian Hellanicus.

6. On this also Baltrusch (1994), pp. 163–9.
7. My own translation of the original quote in Thauer (2011), pp. 206–7: "Wenn diese Textstelle . . . von Thukydides möglicherweise überhaupt nicht in einem neorealistischen Bedeutungszusammenhang gestellt wurde—allein weil aufgrund der damaligen völkerrechtlichen Ordnung die Grundvoraussetzungen neorealistischer Mechanismen, nämlich Unsicherheit, Anarchie und Souveränität fehlten—dann existieren auch die Widersprüche zwischen Textstelle und Darstellung nicht."
8. Sheets (1994), p. 53, n. 4: "In assessing the significance of the Hellenocentrism of Greek international law it is well to remember *that a species of tribalism underlies the jurisprudence of modern international law too*, since the latter expressly recognizes 'civilization' as a criterion for defining the source and jurisdiction of that law." The statutes of the International Tribunal state: "The Court . . . shall apply . . . the general principles of law recognized by civilized nations."
9. The translation relying on Hammond's, but modified. Instead of expanding on the matter I wish to point to Christian Wendt's *Habilitationsschrift* on "Die Ohnmacht des Stärkeren? Thukydides und die interpolitische Ordnung," which will deal with the term *prophasis* in greater detail.
10. Lebow (2003), pp. 106–8, the quotation on p. 108.
11. As a side note, the Greek text, too, points against an intended contrast since *men/de* in 1.23.6 is not related to the distinction between *aitiai* and *prophasis*, but to *alēthestatē* and *aphanestatē logōi prophasis*, thus it is made clear in a syntactic manner that the most concealed is also the truest cause.
12. In the paired speeches of Cleon and Diodotus the speakers also speak past each other, using highly idiosyncratic interpretations which differ even within their respective speeches (e.g., *dikaion* or *adikein*, see 3.47.4–5: Diodotus).
13. The conflict between Athens and Samos in the year 440/39 is found in 1.115–17; cf. in addition Diod. Sic. 12.27–8; Plut. *Per.* 24–8.

14. There are parallels in modern history; for instance, the Brezhnev Doctrine laying out the limited sovereignty of communist states, as declared by the former soviet head of state in November of 1968. The limitations on the self-determination of individual states were justified by the overriding interests of the socialist community.
15. There are also parallels in the modern age in this regard, again from the time of the Cold War. The relations between Austria and Hungary were affected by the Iron Curtain, but they nevertheless continued to exist.
16. Shanske (2012), p. 200; similar is also Price (2001), pp. 275–6.
17. Cf. for instance 2.71–4 on the oaths; Sheets (1994), p. 60.
18. Cf. Thuc. 7.5, where Gylippus as a representative of the Dorians makes disparaging remarks about the Ionians.
19. Cf. for instance Thuc. 3.30–4, where Athenians and Spartans during the Mytilenean conflict behaved illegally according to Athenian legal interpretation and justify themselves with legal subtleties.
20. James L. Brierly in his article of 1932 on sanctions, cited in Sheets (1994), p. 63.
21. Thuc. 3.9: it is "the established way of things among the Greeks" (*to men kathestos tois Hellēsi nomimon*), to "think the less of them (i.e. the defectors) for their betrayal of their former friends."
22. Cf. the Mytileneans in Olympia in 3.10.
23. See also Sheets (1994), p. 67.
24. The complete sentence in Eur. *Hel.* 922–3. Cf. the discussion in Eur. *Phoen*. 469–585 between Eteocles and Polyneices with the "mediator" Jocaste.
25. Cleon in his speech (3.40) delivers an example of the opposite; the speech is a complete confusion of legal and related terminology: *oiktos*, *eleos*, *prosēkon*, *eikos*, *epieikeia*, *orthōs*—he will not even succeed in *hēdonē logōn* because he only addresses the opposing speaker, not himself.

CHAPTER 2

Thucydides and Order

Richard Ned Lebow

Disorder resembles a lobster trap; it is easy to enter into and exceedingly difficult to leave. Competition among human beings for status and wealth can easily get out of hand and arouse fear among some actors for their well-being, if not survival. Fear can prompt precautionary measures against those seen to constitute threats. Mutual escalation can rapidly dissolve the bonds of restraint, resulting in stasis. Rebuilding order is difficult because people or political units must be given incentives to exercise restraint and then act in ways to build trust. Over time, the norms and rules that sustain orders, and habitual compliance to them, have the potential to become robust.

Like lobsters, human beings are driven into traps by their appetites. Unlike arthropods, they have the ability to reflect upon their experiences and escape from them. The European project is at its core a considered response to the two world wars that came close to destroying European civilization. So too, some scholars and foreign policy analysts contend, is China's peaceful negotiation of its rise to great power status. These are two recent examples of

attempts by political units to claw their way out of lobster traps or to feed successfully without entering into one. Positive strategies are helped by collective reflection that produces sophisticated discourses from which political actors can learn. Political skill and luck must accompany wisdom.

The first thinker to reflect on order and disorder was Thucydides. His so-called *Archaeology* describes how words and deeds reinforced each other to create Greek civilization. His account of the origins and conduct of the Peloponnesian War describes how a negative feedback loop between words and deeds unraveled domestic and regional orders and threatened civilization itself. Thucydides believed that the creation, flowering, and decline of orders was a cyclical process, and one often governed by the dynamics he described. I believe that he intended his text as a possession for all time in the sense that it can make people aware of this process and the scripts they enact to bring it about. Through reflection about the likely consequences of their actions they might perform their roles differently and reduce the likelihood of destructive civil and foreign wars.[1] He also offers thoughts on how order might be reconstructed, and it is this aspect of his writing I turn to in this chapter.

Orders collapse for many reasons, and multiple dynamics govern this process. I argue that Thucydides addresses a special case: the breakdown of order whose most fundamental underlying cause is a process of modernization that undermines traditional norms by encouraging elites to consider them nothing more than arbitrary conventions. In an earlier book I compared modernization in fifth-century Greece to that of modern Europe and Thucydides's response to the breakdown of order to those of Carl von Clausewitz and Hans J. Morgenthau.[2] My purpose was to recapture some of the wisdom of classical realism. Here, I want to integrate Thucydides

into a wider discourse about the construction and deconstruction of order and its relevance to contemporary problems.

I begin by discussing the concept of order, one of the more slippery and imprecise concepts in the political lexicon. As all definitions exist and help to instantiate particular analytical frameworks, I offer one relevant to my project. I use it to argue that order and stability are not the same thing, and that the concept of equilibrium, frequently used to define them, is inimical to both. In practice, political order cannot be separated from economic and social orders, but it is a move necessary for analytical purposes. Our efforts to explain order or its decline must nevertheless not be restricted to developments in the so-called political domain, or to one level of analysis (i.e., domestic, regional, international), as they interact in important ways.

I ask why political orders endure. All political orders are hierarchical and their hierarchies encode and justify inequalities in wealth and status. Why do the majority of people who, by definition, are relatively disadvantaged support these orders and often become their most committed defenders? Thucydides and Aristotle offer insights into this conundrum that can be used to critique realist and liberal explanations of order. Finally, I address the collapse and reconstruction or order. In the case of collapse, I draw equally on Thucydides and Aristotle as the latter's theories and understanding are implicit in the former. With regard to reconstruction, I rely on Thucydides and Aeschylus, as they appear to be making parallel, if not similar arguments.

What Is Order?

In the political world, disorder implies lawlessness and unpredictability of behavior. The two conditions need not be paired.

Hobbes's state of nature is lawless and violent, but very predictable. Sophisticated legal systems are highly ordered but their responses are often unpredictable in multiple issue areas. Peacefulness is equally problematic as a defining characteristic of political order. Warrior-based societies were highly ordered but extremely violent. Homer's *Iliad* offers us the literary examples of bronze age Greece and Troy, and the historical world those of the Vikings, Maori, Aztecs, and eighteenth-century Europe. There is nevertheless a deep-rooted assumption that the more structured a system is, the more likely it is to be peaceful and predictable, at least in its internal relations. The converse is invariably true, as the breakdown or collapse of government almost invariably leads to disorder and lawlessness.

Much of the social science literature equates order with stability. Ordered systems are in equilibrium or evolve slowly. If they changed quickly they would no longer be so ordered or predictable in structure and functions. Many theorists invoke the equilibrium as the mechanism responsible for order, as do balance of power theorists. Unlike physical systems, many of which have a natural tendency toward equilibria, there is no evidence of this phenomenon in the social world. Equilibrium is nothing more than a theoretical assumption, and in general an inappropriate one. In a recent and comprehensive study of the balance of power, Kaufman, Little, and Wohlforth draw on evidence across cultures and epochs and find balanced and unbalanced distributions of power about equal in frequency. Military expansion is "well-nigh universal behavior," but such aggrandizement is often tolerated by "myopic advantage-seeking" actors who pursue narrow short-term interests in preference to system maintenance.[3] As Hans Morgenthau understood, the effects of power in international relations largely depend on how actors conceive of and employ it. The balance of power failed

to prevent two world wars in the twentieth century and is historically alien to the international relations of East Asia. It is a cultural artifact whose importance and consequences and norms vary across cultures and epochs. The same is true of markets.

There is a more powerful objection to equilibria. New pressures and accommodations to them bring changes in how a political system functions and whom it rewards. This process brings about significant shifts in the character of the system over time. Some of the most "stable" political systems—measured in terms of their longevity and absence of major violence—are those that have changed significantly over the years, so much so that comparisons between these systems at time T and T plus 100 years reveal radically different systems. Compare Georgian England to late Victorian Britain, or Victorian Britain to the contemporary United Kingdom. The institutions governing the country are more or less unchanged, but the nature of the political culture, the contemporary distribution of power across classes, the demography of the country, and many of its key social and political values would be unrecognizable to Georgians and Victorians. There has been a gradual transformation in the way in which institutions function and the roles they perform for society. This phenomenon generates the paradox that stable systems are those that evolve the most. By contrast, the Soviet Union no longer exists, in large part due to its inability to evolve in response to changing economic and political circumstances. North Korea, arguably the longest-lived and most inflexible regime, is regarded as among the most unstable.

We must disaggregate stability and change. The most stable orders are those that evolve gradually in response to changing circumstances and demands of diverse constituencies. They might be compared to geological fault lines. Those subject to repeated small tremors allow adjacent plates to move gradually, relative to

each other, and decrease the likelihood of powerful earthquakes caused by more dramatic and abrupt plate movements.

The second problem is distinguishing the political from other forms of order. Developments or changes in one order (e.g., political, economic, social, religious) often have serious implications for others. Consider, for example, dramatic swings in stock markets. They are often attributable to noneconomic events such as terrorism and political decisions. Economic and social changes in turn affect politics. The 2012 US presidential election was influenced by levels of unemployment and dissatisfaction by more conservative Americans with the rapid pace of social change, especially that concerning the rights of women and homosexuals. The best we can do is to identify a set of activities that are central to each of these, as markets are for economics. They are the activities most influenced by other conditions and developments in their domain, but also by those outside. The relative proportion shifts more in the direction of outside developments as we move from central to peripheral activities in any of these domains.

All political and economic orders are embedded in societies and do not exist independently of them.[4] It is a conceptual and empirical mistake to believe, as structural theorists of all kinds do, that political orders can be extracted from these societies of and analyzed on the basis of some abstract set of universal rules. The character, robustness, values, and practices of orders at any level of aggregation are influenced by, and generally reflect, those of the societies in which they are embedded. For this reason, there is significant variation across orders and great difficulty in trying to create national, regional, or international orders that bridge different societies.

Despite the open-ended nature of the world, we can focus on political orders. This is, of course, easier said than done because

there are no unambiguous markers between political and other orders. In traditional societies, political, economic, and social orders are largely coterminous, as they were in the *oikos* of Bronze Age Greece and still are in certain societies in the Amazon and New Guinea. With modernity and development, these domains have become more distinct, allowing one for the first time to distinguish among social, political, and economic orders. The emergence of the academic disciplines of anthropology, economics, sociology, and political science, indeed, rests on, the conceit that these domains can be studied independently. Distinctions among them, while useful, are nevertheless conceptually and empirically artificial, as these "orders" are intimately connected and can never be isolated from one another in their interactions.[5]

Why Do Orders Endure?

In the social world, order also refers to some kind of arrangement or rank, among people, groups, or institutions.[6] Some actors are consistently treated better than others because of their social standing, wealth, connections, or willingness to push themselves to the head of the line. Inequalities are usually self-reinforcing. Wealth allows better educational opportunities, which lead to better connections, better jobs, and higher status. Inequalities are also self-sustaining when the advantages they confer can be passed on to one's progeny. Given the inequalities of all social orders, and the exclusion, restrictions, and compulsions they entail, it is nothing short of the remarkable fact that most people in most societies adhere to stipulated practices and rules.

I believe they do so for substantive and emotional reasons. Most people believe they are more secure and better-off in existing orders than they would be without them, even though they

recognize that they are worse-off relative to other members of their society with respect to influence, wealth, and status. Integration in an order also confers identity, enhances self-worth, and enables social relationships and intimacy. Elites are generally astute enough to propagate discourses designed to legitimize orders from which they benefit. These discourses make use of carrots and sticks, the former by raising the prospect of chaos or loss to some external foe if order is not maintained, and the latter by emphasizing the positive material and psychological benefits of belonging. To the extent that these discourses find traction, they reinforce practices, which become habitual, even when, like military service, they entail the possibility of great loss.

Most orders survive because they deliver at least in part what they promise, or convince people that they do. They also benefit from widespread fear of uncertainty and change. "Better the devil we know than the one we don't" is a time-honored and nearly universal expression that captures the inherent conservatism of the human race. Discourses that stoke this fear and cater to at least some of the psychological needs of people or collective actors like corporations and states allow a wider gap between theory and practice. When orders fail to meet human needs, people, or the collective units to which they belong, will become increasingly disenchanted with the status quo and more willing to support moderate, even radical, change. We know little about why and when this happens.

One reason for uncertainty is the psychological and subjective nature of dissatisfaction. In an abstract way we can evaluate common conceptions of justice with regard to the distribution of material goods. In the dollar auction game, A and B are given the task of dividing a unit of currency between them. A can offer B any percentage of the money on offer and B can accept or reject it.

No bargaining is allowed, and the players only receive the money if B accepts A's offer. Across cultures, researchers find that the curve of rejection rises sharply when A attempts to keep 65 percent or more of the sum in question. Some economists do not understand why anyone would reject free money, but this is not a mystery for the rest of us. People have a strong sense of justice and self-esteem and do not want to be ripped off or taken for chumps.

It is difficult, if not hazardous, to generalize from games and experiments to the infinitely more complex social world. The same reasons that lead B to reject one-sided offers should prompt American workers and members of the middle class more generally to reject Mitt Romney and his political party. Republican tax, Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security policies would penalize the middle class and the poor and reward the rich. Yet, almost half of the Americans who voted in the 2012 presidential election cast their ballots for Romney and the Republicans. Clearly, other factors were at play; public opinion polls indicate that many of these voters fear social change, dislike big government, immigrants, and President Obama and want to make America stronger and more respected abroad. These concerns apparently trumped material considerations and indicate the success of conservative, neoliberal, and evangelical discourses and the media that propagate them. More fundamentally, voting, in contrast to the dollar auction, takes places in a historical, political, and social context.

Philosophers and social scientists have come up with four generic explanations for compliance: fear, interest, honor, and habit. The power of fear has been self-evident from the beginning of civilization, if not before, and is probably a component of most social orders. Tyrannies are the regimes most dependent on fear; Thucydides, Plato, and Aristotle thought they would survive only as long as they had the power and will to cow their subjects, or

the wisdom and commitment to transform themselves into more consensual kinds of regimes.[7]

Aristotle defines fear "as a pain or disturbance due to imagining some destructive or painful evil in the future." It is caused "by whatever we feel has great power of destroying us, or of harming us in ways that tend to cause us great pain." It is the opposite of confidence and is associated with danger, which is the approach of something terrible. It is aroused by the expectation, rather than the reality, of such an event and encourages a deliberative response. It is often provoked by another actor's abuse of its power and is threatening to the social order, not just to individuals.[8]

The interest explanation is associated with Hobbes and is absolutely central to modern social science. It assumes that people are willing to accept relatively inferior positions and benefits in return for the greater absolute rewards they receive by belonging to a society in which their physical security and material possessions are protected.[9] Material well-being is assumed to be such a dominant goal for modern people that, as we have seen, social scientists confess bafflement when people appear to prefer other goals. When they do so, they are often described as irrational.

Honor refers to the seemingly universal desire to stand out among one's peers, which is often achieved by selfless, sometimes even sacrificial, adherence to social norms. Homer might be considered the first theorist of honor, and his account in the *Iliad* is unrivalled in its understanding of this motive and its consequences, beneficial and destructive, for societies that make it a central value. In modern times, the need for status and esteem is described as "vanity" by Hobbes and Smith, and for Rousseau it is at the core of *amour propre*.

The importance of habits was understood at least as far back as Aristotle who observed that children mimic adult behavior

and are taught how to act and toward what ends by their mentors. They are socialized into behaving in certain ways and may ultimately do so without prior reflection.[10] Habit can ultimately be traced back to one or more of the other three explanations. Children emulate adults because they fear the consequences of not doing so or in expectation of affection, approval, or material rewards. Habits are encouraged and enforced by informal regimes that generate rules and norms that rely on shaming, a form of loss of honor. Montesquieu and Durkheim, and more recently, Erving Goffman, offer insight into these informal mechanisms of social control.[11]

Like Thucydides, I start from the premise that the intellectual and social context in which social and political orders operate is a key determinant of their stability. This relationship works at two reinforcing levels. It determines how easy or difficult it is to construct stable orders, and also the kinds of orders that are most likely to be stable. The former will obviously be more difficult in deeply divided and violent societies where order has broken down or is local and fragmented. Corcyra is the example cited by Thucydides. Somalia and the northern borders of Mexico and Myanmar offer contemporary examples. There is a large and growing literature on the problem of reconstructing order in the aftermath of destructive conflicts. Regional integration is another variant of order construction, and here too there is a large literature. However, it is a different kind of problem because successful regional orders are built on highly stable political units.

Much less thought and research has been directed to the ways in which ideology and culture create expectations about what is acceptable and unacceptable and expected to flourish or fail. As these beliefs condition behavior, they can shape the parameters in terms of which order must be constructed or maintained. The

United States offers a striking contemporary example. According to the Congressional Budget Office, between 1979 and 2007, incomes of the top 1 percent of Americans grew by an average of 275 percent. During the same time period, the 60 percent of Americans in the middle of the income scale saw their income rise by 40 percent. Since 1979, the average pretax income for the bottom 90 percent of households has decreased by $900, while that of the top 1 percent increased by over $700,000, as federal taxation became less progressive. From 1992–2007, the top 400 income earners in the United States saw their income increase 392 percent and their average tax rate reduced by 37 percent.[12] The differences have become more pronounced since the recession. In the 2012 presidential campaign the Republican nominee and Republican majority in the House of Representatives called for tax cuts for corporations and the wealthy and corresponding cuts in programs that benefitted the poor. They were widely supported by nonunion members of the White working class, among the groups most disadvantaged economically by such legislation. The wealthy have fostered or supported a variety of discourses to justify their advantages. These include neoliberalism, hatred of government as the enemy of the people, the belief that tax cuts for the rich and corporations generate jobs, and that the wealthy have earned their money by virtue of their intelligence and hard work. These discourses have largely succeeded in reconciling a large percentage of the population to growing inequality and to the visible flaunting of their wealth by the privileged minority.

In the ancient world, where fairness was the accepted principle of justice, these discourses vaunted the intelligence, character, and bravery of the aristocracy versus the common man and of men versus women. Theodicies explained and justified the suffering of all humanity, but most notably that of ordinary people.

The Garden of Eden myth of *Genesis* 2–3 and Hesiod's *Works and Days* are the most prominent examples.

In the ancient world, democracy was regarded as highly unstable because it was seen as a vehicle for the *dēmos* to steal the wealth of the rich. This expectation was readily made self-fulfilling, and fifth-century Greece witnessed numerous conflicts between aristocrats and the *dēmos* because the latter were unwilling to make concessions to the former. In the modern world, democratic systems are considered the most stable, but only in developed societies. Once again, discourses are inseparable from effects of different kinds of constitutions. And discourses are not independent of more general features of context.

These relationships are equally apparent at the international level. The eighteenth century was the high point of the balance of power because it had emerged as a discourse and was used by European leaders to maintain the stability of the state system. It failed when confronted with leaders and states committed to upholding or gaining honor through war and territorial aggrandizement. Regional stability was restored after 1945, as Europe was under the thumb of the two superpowers. Interstate war has become increasingly unthinkable in post–Cold War Europe for reasons that have nothing to do with the balance of power. Foreign policy is almost invariably a reflection of the societies in which political units interact. For this reason, structural theories like those of Waltz and Mearsheimer, which assume that polarity of the international system has universal implications for order are accordingly simplistic.

The same is true of structural theories in economics. Liberals insist that markets are a determining structure that compels firms and states to behave in certain ways if they are to survive and prosper. This effect is brought about by a combination of

selection and adaption. Waltz makes a similar claim in his theory of international politics, but it has been decisively demonstrated that selection does not work in international relations. Inefficient—even failed—states survive, and the number of state actors has increased, not diminished. The same is true of markets. Inefficient firms survive if they are large enough and have political clout or governments fear the economic and political consequences of their decline. In many parts of the world, China, for example, large, inefficient firms survive because governments own all or part of them. Practices also vary widely. In real estate markets, some countries have universal listings, and some monopolies with individual agents, or a mix of the two, as in London. Numerous other examples might be cited in support of the claim that the ways in which markets are structured and operate are as much a product of political and social culture as they are of so-called economic logic.

Realists and liberals tell an appealing but unconvincing story about order. Markets and the balance of power arise from the behavior of firms and states; they are emergent properties. Once formed, they shape the behavior of firms and states by means of selection and adaptation. The order thus created is sustained by mechanisms of equilibrium. As we have seen, every step of these narratives is questionable.

These realist and liberal narratives also verge on the tautological as efficiency is economics and international relations is often defined in relation to existing practices. Liberals assert that laissez-faire capitalism is the most efficient modern economic system and the US government, World Bank, and International Monetary Fund provide incentives and they frequently coerce governments to move in this direction. The primacy of liberal Anglo-American capitalism as opposed to a more authoritarian

and corporate variant might simply be a quirk of history and the result of an allied victory in World War I. If the Central Powers had emerged triumphant, Germany and Japan would have offered an alternative model of capitalism for others to emulate.[13]

Why Do Orders Break Down?

Orders that function must contain enough reason to constrain appetite and spirit and direct them into productive channels. They must restrain actors, especially powerful ones, by some combination of reason, interest, fear, and habit. Self-restraint is always difficult because it involves deprivation, something that is noticeably out of fashion in the modern world where instant gratification and self-indulgence have increasingly become the norm. Experimental evidence indicates that about one-third of Americans put their personal material interests above shared norms when there are no constraints on them other than conscience. This behavior can only effectively be constrained by high levels of normative consensus, resource dependence on other actors, and dense links to these actors and a broader community.[14]

Spirit and appetite-based worlds are inherently unstable. They are intensely competitive, which encourages actors to violate the rules by which honor or wealth is attained. When enough actors do this, those who continue to obey the rules are likely to be seriously handicapped. This provides a strong incentive for all but the most committed actors to defect from the rules. This dilemma is most acute in spirit-based worlds because of the relational nature of honor and standing, which makes it a zero-sum game unless there are multiple hierarchies of honor and standing. Appetite-based worlds need not be this way but actors often frame the acquisition of wealth as a winner-take-all competition and

behave competitively even when cooperation would be mutually beneficial. Here too, lack of self-restraint encourages others to follow suit in their pursuit of wealth. Disregard for rules accordingly takes two forms: nonperformance of duties (including self-restraint) by high-status actors, and disregard of their status and associated privileges by actors of lesser standing. The two forms of noncompliance are likely to be self-reinforcing and have the effect of weakening hierarchies and the orders they instantiate.

Following Aristotle, I contend that the principal cause of the breakdown of orders is the unrestricted pursuit by actors—individuals, factions, or political units—of their parochial goals. Their behavior leads other actors to fear for their ability to satisfy their spirit and or appetites, and perhaps for their survival. Fearful actors are likely to consider and implement precautions that can run the gamut from bolting their doors at night to acquiring allies and more and better arms. Escalation of this kind is invariably paralleled by shifts in threat assessment. Actors who were initially regarded as friends, colleagues, or allies and evoked images rich in nuance and detail give way to simpler and more superficial stereotypes of adversaries or, worse still, of enemies. This shift, and the corresponding decline in cognitive complexity, undermine trust and encourage worst-case analyses of their motives, behavior, and future initiatives. Mutually reinforcing changes in behavior and framing can start gradually but at some point can accelerate and bring about a phase transition. When they do, actors enter into fear-based worlds.

Thucydides, Plato, and Aristotle attributed civil disorder to lack of self-restraint, especially on the part of high-status actors, and considered it a consequence of psychological imbalance.[15] For Plato, oligarchic people and regimes are ruled by spirit, and democratic people and regimes by appetite. The difficulty of appeasing

the spirit or appetite, or of effectively discriminating among competing appetites, sooner or later propels both kinds of people and regimes down the road to tyranny.[16] Tyranny is initially attractive because a tyrant is unconstrained by laws. In reality, the tyrant is a true slave (*tōi onti doulos*) because he is ruled by his passions and not in any way his own master.[17] Thucydides tells a similar story about the two leading protagonists of the Peloponnesian War. In Sparta, reason loses control to the spirit, and in Athens, to both spirit and appetite.

Building on their understandings, we can formulate propositions about why and how psychological balance and imbalance and the dynamics lead to order and disorder. My starting point is the different principles of justice and hierarchies associated with spirit- and interest-based worlds. Traditional spirit-based worlds, I noted earlier, are based on the principle of fairness, and their hierarchies are clientelist. Every status in their hierarchies, the bottom rungs aside, has responsibilities for those who occupy lower statuses and has the right to look to those above them for support. In return for the benefits they receive from those of higher rank, people honor and serve them. The rule packages associated with different statuses require different kinds of self-restraint, and the closer one moves toward the apex of the hierarchy, the more extensive these constraints become. Honor is not only a function of rank, but also of how well actors of high status and office perform their respective roles. Clientelist hierarchies are designed to restrain selfishness and its consequences by embedding actors with resources in a social order that requires them to protect and support those who are less advantaged and feel shame if they do not meet their responsibilities. When clientelist orders are robust, they satisfy the spirit of those of high status and the security and appetites of those of low status. In appetite-based worlds,

hierarchies arise from the different degree of success actors have in accumulating wealth. When society in appetite worlds is robust, rewards are roughly proportional to merit because each actor has a relatively equal opportunity to compete.

In both kinds of orders the most common and destructive kind of imbalance is at the elite level. When high-status actors, whether individuals or political units, no longer restrain their spirit or appetite, they subvert the principles of justice associated with their respective hierarchies. Unconstrained spirit, which intensifies the competition for honor, is likely to generate acute and disruptive conflict *within* the dominant elite. It has wider consequences for the society because it intensifies conflict, frequently leads to violence and reduces, if not altogether negates, the material and security benefits clientelist hierarchies are expected to provide for nonelite members of society. Unconstrained appetite also undermines an elite's legitimacy and arouses resentment and envy on part of other actors. It can encourage a more diffuse imbalance in the overall society when other actors emulate elite self-indulgence and disregard the norms restraining the pursuit of wealth at the expense of others. Loss of control to the spirit was a persistent threat to order in the ancient world and early modern Europe where it was a major cause of civil and interstate wars. Loss of control to the appetite was not unknown in Greece, where it was initially associated with tyrants and oligarchies. In our world, it is endemic to all kinds of regimes and their elites, and has made rapacity a principle source of conflict at every level of order.

Spirit-based societies are vulnerable to other kinds of imbalance. For much of history, spirit-based societies have also been warrior societies where competition, and the aggression associated with it, is deflected outward in warfare against communal adversaries. Skill in battle and defense of the homeland in turn

provide a justification for a warrior elite's claim to honor, standing, and political authority.[18] The elite's standing and authority can be threatened when changes in the conduct of warfare require the participation and skills of lower status groups. In Athens, the development and growing importance of the navy, staffed largely by less-wealthy citizens paved for wider democratization of the society.[19] If external threats recede, warrior classes have an interest in generating new conflicts to sustain their authority and to avoid destructive, inward deflection of competition and aggression. The combination of external peace and internal lack of elite restraint will generate strong pressures to limit its authority. Warrior societies accordingly have incentives to have frequent wars, but to limit and regulate such conflicts so they do not disrupt society or demand extraordinary resources. They can also devise alternative forms of competition. The original Olympic games may have been intended to serve this end, and their modern counterpart was envisaged, at least in part, as a substitute for war. It was no accident that competition in the modern Olympics was initially limited to so-called gentlemen athletes.

For Thucydides, Plato, and Aristotle, elite imbalance results in the same behavior pathology: high-status actors to violate the principles on which their elite status is based. They fail to exercise the prudence and self-restraint of their predecessors. Thucydides and Plato believe that intellectuals accelerate this process of decay by undermining the values that encourage public service, sacrifice, and self-restraint by the elite. They problematize social orders that were previously accepted and reproduced as natural practice. Politicians skilled in the art of rhetoric are another source of corruption. In Athens, Thucydides observes that they used "fair phrases to arrive at guilty ends" (3.82). They twisted and deconstructed the language, giving words meanings that were

often the opposite of their traditional ones, and use them to justify behavior at odds with conventional practices and values. By the late fifth century, the code of "ancient simplicity" (*euēthes*), so admired by Thucydides and Plato, had not merely declined, Thucydides reports, it had been "laughed down and disappeared" (3.83). Aristotle notes that elite corruption stimulates the appetites of poorer people, making them want a greater share of the wealth and more supportive politicians who promise it to them. The process Thucydides identifies appears to be underway in the United States where elite greed and display is increasingly fueled by ever increasing gaps between the compensation of employees and CEOs and increases in all forms of tax evasion by the wealthy. This dynamic is not limited to affluent societies; Mao Zedong made a parallel argument about revolutionary bureaucracies and how quickly they become corrupted.[20] Recent scandals involving some of China's leaders and their phenomenal wealth, most of it accumulated illegally, give evidence of Mao's fears.

Thucydides's account of Athenian politics during the Peloponnesian War indicates that intra-elite competition stimulates wider imbalance in the societies where it occurs. Members of the elite, intent on advancing their political standing, mobilize support among nonelite actors. Demagogues appealed to the masses in language that encouraged them to put their self-interests above those of the community. E. E. Schattschneider describes a similar process in American politics: individuals or groups who lose a political struggle in one arena seek to expand the struggle into new arenas of contestation if they expect it to improve their chances of success.[21]

For Thucydides and Aristotle, the defining moment of civic breakdown is when actors or factions capture the institutions of state for partisan purposes. The assembly and courts no longer

serve to regulate and constrain competition for wealth and honor, but intensify it by enabling one faction to advance its standing or enrich itself at the expense of others. Those in power may use these institutions to expel, punish, or kill opponents. At the international level this kind of behavior often takes the form of attempting to improve one's strategic position so as to make challenge all but impossible. Aristotle observes that when conflict becomes sufficiently acute, a leader, faction, or state can feel the need to act preemptively; they prepare to strike out before they are victimized. Once a cycle of violence and retribution begins, it becomes difficult to stop. Thucydides provides a chilling description of how runaway civic tensions escalated into an utterly destructive civil war (*stasis*) in Corcyra (3.69–85). Aristotle offers Rhodes, Thebes, Megara, and Syracuse as examples (*Pol.* 1302b22–34).

Thucydides describes an important cognitive–linguistic component of this process. One of the most famous passages of the *History* (3.82) describes a feedback loop between words (*logoi*) and deeds (*erga*). As language is stretched, words not only lost their meaning, but also took on new ones that justify, even encourage behavior at odds with traditional *nomos*. His thoughtful analysis of the relationship between words and deeds might be utilized to track empirically the transition to and from fear-based worlds.

For Lenin and some academic students of revolution, civic unrest and revolution is most likely to occur when a sharp economic downturn follows a period of sustained economic growth.[22] The Greeks are also sensitive to class conflict, but believe it will be most acute when the discourses that reconcile diverse classes through a widely shared and overarching commitment to the community as a whole lose their authority. In this situation, the wealthy and highborn become more rapacious and the *dēmos* less accepting of their subordinate economic and political

status. Thucydides and Plato understood that learning to live with affluence is just as difficult as accommodating to poverty. Plato described both extremes as destabilizing because wealth makes for luxury and idleness, and poverty for mean-mindedness and bad work (*Resp.* 421e4–422a3). Their observations suggest the proposition that neither wealth nor poverty per se produce instability and revolution, but lack of empathy and self-restraint. Hegel makes a similar argument.[23]

To summarize, breakdown is the result of imbalance. Reason loses control of spirit or appetite. The most damaging kind of imbalance is that of an elite. When reason loses control of the spirit among an elite, it provokes destructive conflicts within the elite. When reason loses control to appetite, elite overindulgence arouses envy, resentment, and emulation by the rest of the population. Elite imbalance in the direction of the spirit encourages subversion of institutions for parochial ends and encourages counterresponses, or even preemption, by those who are threatened. Elite imbalance in the direction of the appetite also leads to violation of *nomos*, which is aggravated by a process of elite appeals for support to other actors on the basis of mutual self-aggrandizement. In extreme circumstances, the competition in "outbidding," not only threatens other members of the elite, but it also exacerbates relations between the elite and the *dēmos* and encourages preemption by threatened actors. External forces enter into the picture when they create or contribute to imbalance by exposure to different societies with different practices and levels of affluence; or by removing the basis, or changing the character, of outwardly directed elite competition for honor and standing.

These forms of imbalance can occur at the individual, domestic, regional, and international levels. Their consequences are more or less the same, as are the dynamics that undermine order once we

move beyond the individual level. As we see, there is also a considerable contamination effect in which imbalance at any level threatens balance at neighboring levels. Balance can also encourage balance at other levels, but has a weaker effect. This is another reason why orders are more likely to unravel than be sustained and strengthened. The Greek understanding of order offers a critical perspective on current practices and the discourse of maximization so central to them. Western theories of economics sanction the pursuit of maximal objectives, and not only in economics. These theories rest on a broader, modern valuation of appetite more generally that looks favorably, even encourages, actors to pursue their satisfaction to the limit. The only self-restraint that is considered worthwhile is tactical. Greek conceptions of balance, by contrast, emphasize deeper reasons for self-restraint as it often makes it possible for others to achieve their goals. By doing so it helps sustain the community that is essential to the satisfaction of appetite and spirit alike.

A final, complicating caveat must be entered. If order depends on robust hierarchies, the maintenance of those hierarchies by elites can contribute to disorder when entry into the elite is restrictive and increasingly challenged. It will also have this effect when the distribution of motives in a society has changed, undermining the legitimacy of the principle on which the hierarchy is based. So, depending on the circumstances, efforts to defend a hierarchy and its associated values, can have differential consequences for order.

How Are Orders Reconstituted?

An enduring problem of politics is the reconstitution of order in the aftermath of its breakdown. When reason loses control to

spirit or appetite among elite actors it makes others concerned about their ability to satisfy these needs or their physical security. Protective behavior and the responses it generates can bring about a phase transition to a fear-based system. Historically, it has been the fate of all orders to decline, and at least some to approach Hobbes's state of nature.

Orders are in general reconstituted, at least initially, through the application of force. Powerful agents succeed, in the short- or long-term in asserting authority over a territory and its people. Threats of punishment have the ability to compel. Order is nevertheless difficult to maintain on this basis as even people who initially welcomed the application of the iron fist will turn against it unless they are somehow rewarded or effectively cowed. The latter is almost impossible to do in the long-term; the most successful instance may be the Mongol use of terror to subdue and extract tribute from the Russians for several hundred years. In modern times, this task verges on the impossible. Even the Nazis, willing to use any means to suppress opposition, almost everywhere aroused resistance movements.

Governance that is primarily force-based requires rules and the ability to enforce them, and the latter requires a high degree of conformity for it to become feasible. Enforcement in turn depends on intelligence about lawbreakers, or would-be lawbreakers, and widespread understanding about what is and what is not allowed. The former depends on citizens who support the regime and the laws in question. For these reasons, Karl Deutsch estimated that successful law enforcement in democratic societies requires over 90 percent voluntary compliance.[24] The difficulty to near impossibility of enforcing prohibition and the proscription of marijuana in the United States offer evidence, as neither set of laws, but especially prohibition, had anything approaching

the full support of the populace. Informal enforcement of norms and rules—Durkheimian social control—functions to best effect, especially in any large society, when there is a legal order and the threat of enforcement in the background. The two forms of control are reinforcing in robust orders, and at odds in highly conflicted ones.

In tyrannical or authoritarian societies, coercion may be more feasible because authorities can employ mass arrests and other forms of collective punishment and terror. Even so, they must ultimately create some basis of willing support if they are to endure. For this reason, the problem of reconstituting order resembles that of fear-based regimes striving for at least a modicum of legitimacy. If the goal is reconstruction, the first step is the restitution of superficial order, usually through the application of force.

There are a smaller number of instances where this has come about by reason of a truce or settlement between or among the warring parties. Athens is the first political unit known to have attempted to restore democracy by means of a reconciliation pact; its citizens agreed that nobody would be prosecuted for the crimes they had committed during the tyranny and opposition to it that followed defeat in the Peloponnesian War. Reconciliation was remarkably successful as democracy endured down to the Battle of Chaeronea in 338 and conquest by Macedon. Recent history offers us numerous examples of attempts at reconstruction process, some through the processes of reconciliation. Some were successful and others not.

At the outset of the chapter, I argued that Thucydides wrote about a special case: the restoration of order in a situation where the fundamental underlying cause of breakdown was a process of modernization. In the late eighth century, the polis replaced

the *oikos* as the unit of political and economic life. Thucydides attributes this shift to conquest, but it must also have been a response to the perceived economic and security benefits of the amalgamation of small communities into larger units. Not surprisingly, the political structure of the early polis copied the *oikos*; it was hierarchical and centered on the king, his retainers, servants, and slaves. By 700 BCE, most kingdoms had given way to aristocratic rule. This was a major transformation because the ruling class, although small, was conceived of as a group of equals. Henceforth, expanding political rights to more, or even all citizens, as in the case in Athens, became a change in degree, not of kind.

The individual gradually replaced the extended family of *oikos* as the basic economic unit, and the goal of production and exchange increasingly became the pursuit of wealth. The economy was detached from the *oikos* and put on a contractual basis. Economic exchanges were more likely to be evaluated independently of past exchanges and the relationships they had established or maintained. This change in thinking was facilitated by the use of coinage, thought to have appeared in the third quarter of the seventh century. The money economy hastened the decline of traditional social relations and the values on which they rested.[25] Before the introduction of money, gifts often had no precise equivalent, creating the expectation of future exchanges and ongoing relationships. Money equalized exchange and allowed for onetime transactions.[26] In the traditional economy, giver and recipient had also been linked by the stories attached to their objects of exchange. In the modern economy, objects were inanimate goods.[27] The "individual" gradually emerged as an identity, acquisition became his end, and profit (*kerdos*) the means to this end.

If money became the currency of economic exchange, Thucydides leads us to understand that power now became the currency of politics. Affective bonds and the commitment to the good of community they encouraged gave way to the goal of individual self-advancement. Politicians used any available means to attain power, just as unscrupulous individuals did to obtain wealth. For Aristophanes (and maybe for Thucydides), the economic and political realm come together in the figure of Cleon, son of a leather factory owner, who spread his wealth lavishly and openly to buy votes in the assembly.

Thucydides's language encourages readers to draw an analogy between individual pursuit of wealth and Athenian pursuit of power. The empire is based on the power of money (*chrēmatōn dunamis*). It generated revenue (*chrēmatōn prosodoi*) to build and maintain the largest navy in Greece. Athens was so powerful relative to other *poleis* that it could dominate them (*allōn archē*) by force. Like tyrants, Athens no longer needed to legitimize its rule or provide the kind of benefits that normally held alliances or poleis together. Wealth encouraged the "orientalization" of Athens, a perspective common to Herodotus and Thucydides. It led to a deep shift in Athenian values, superficially manifested in an increasing reliance on force. This pattern of behavior was a reflection of changing goals; the goal of honor (*timē*) increasingly gave way to that of acquisition. *Hēgemonia* in turn became *archē*.

Thucydides's response to modernity is harder to adduce than that of Plato and most of the playwrights. He produced no texts like the *Republic* or the *Laws*. Unlike Plato, Thucydides was not interested in some theoretical ideal, but what might be attainable in practice. His model, to the extent that he had one, may have been Aeschylus. Their diagnoses and responses appear quite similar.

The *Oresteia* is about justice, and how it restrains the passions that would otherwise tear apart families and cities. Justice traditionally took the form of revenge, carried out by family members or their friends. Young Orestes is encouraged by Apollo to avenge the death of his father, Agamemnon, who had been murdered by his mother, Clytemnestra. Orestes has an additional motive for the slaying Clytemnestra and her consort: reclaiming his citizenship, membership in a phratry, and his father's throne and estates. All three confer identity, without which he leads a meaningless life in exile. To reclaim his identity, he must transgress the laws of man and god and carry the curse of the House of Atreus into the next generation. In the *Eumenides*, the last play of the trilogy, Orestes is pursued by the Furies, or Erinyes, the goddesses of vengeance. They are among the oldest of the Greek gods, and intended to embody humanity's most primal instincts. Athena intervenes to end the cycle of murder and revenge by means of a trial in the Areopagus, a court of citizens that she creates. The jurors are deadlocked, and Athena casts her decisive ballot in favor of Orestes, who is now free to return to Argos without further harassment. The furies are only reconciled to the judgment when Athena arranges for them to have a respected place in the city. In a solemn procession, citizens escort the now renamed "Eumenides," or "well wishers," to their new home, a chamber beneath the *polis*. There they remain, forever a reminder of the destructive nature of human impulses not repressed or appropriately channeled by a civic culture. The *Oresteia* shows how the new and innovative—that is, the *polis* and its institutions—must be built on the old and the inherited. By dramatizing the disruptive consequences of primal urges, Aeschylus encourages respect for the ancient traditions and the new civic arrangements that can tame the reckless lust,

aggression, and the pride of mortals, even harness them to promote equality and justice.

Like Aeschylus, Thucydides wanted his readers to recognize the need for a synthetic order that would combine the best of the old and the new, and avoid, as far as possible, their respective pitfalls. The best of the new was its spirit of equality (*isonomia*), and the opportunity it offered to all citizens to serve their polis. The best of the old was its emphasis on excellence and virtue (*aretē*), which encouraged members of the elite to suppress their appetite for wealth and power, and even their instinct for survival, in pursuit of valor, good judgment, and public service. Thucydides offers an idealized view of Periclean Athens as an example of the kind of synthesis he envisages. It is the very model of a mixed government (*xunkrasis*) that allowed the capable to rule and the masses to participate in government in meaningful ways. It successfully muted tensions between the rich and the poor and the wellborn and men of talent, and stood in sharp contrast to the acute class tensions and near stasis of *fin de siècle* Athens.

Thucydides may have hoped that intercity relations could be reconstituted on similar foundations. The same kinds of inequalities prevailed between poleis as within them. If the power of tyrants could give way to aristocracy and mixed democracy, and the drive for power and wealth be constrained by the restoration of community, the same might be done for inter-polis relations. Powerful states might once again see it in their interest to wield influence on the basis of *hēgemonia*. Power imbalances could be "equalized" through the principle of proportionality (*to analogon*); the more powerful states receiving honor (*timē*) in degree to the advantages they provided for less powerful poleis. Aeschylus points toward a solution along these lines in his *Promethia*. The "tyrant" Zeus is strong and nasty enough to contemplate

annihilation of human beings and punishment of their benefactor, Prometheus. Their conflict is resolved by Zeus's realization that he can only hold on to power by exchanging favors (*charis*) with Prometheus. This outcome leads to justice for humankind. I believe that Thucydides favored a similar balance, or isonomy. His history was intended to educate the wealthy and powerful to the baneful consequences of acting like tyrants, on the individual or state level, and the practical benefits, indeed the necessity, of maintaining the appearance, if not the substance, of the older forms of reciprocity in the political arena.

Thucydides is a stern skeptic and rationalist, but one who supports religion because he considered it to be a principal pillar of morality and conventions. In his view, the radical sophists had done a disservice to Athens by arguing that *nomos* is arbitrary and a justification for various forms of inequality. Thucydides wrote for an intellectual elite unlikely to accept *nomos* as gods given. He appeals to them with a more sophisticated defense of *nomos* that does not require rooting it in *phusis*. By demonstrating the destructive consequences of the breakdown of *nomos* and the conventions it upheld, he makes the case for its necessity and the wisdom of those in authority to act *as if* they believed it derived from nature. For Thucydides, language and conventions are arbitrary but essential. His history, like a tragedy, provides an "outside perspective" for elites to generate a commitment to work "inside" to restore what is useful, if not essential, to justice and order.

The extension of Thucydides's domestic project to foreign policy would be in keeping with Greek practice. Relations between *poleis*, and before that, between households, were traditionally regarded as extensions of domestic relations. There was a strong sense of "Pan-Hellenic" community going back at least as far as the seventh-century poetry of Archilochus. A century later, Herodotus

tells us, the Athenians resisted the Persians in the name of "our common brotherhood with the Greeks: our common language, the altars and sacrifices of which we all partake, the common character which we bear" (8.144). In the aftermath of the Peloponnesian War, this sentiment was still very much alive.[28] Plato described the "natural relationship" between Greeks as a form of kinship (*Resp.* 469b–471c).

Greek political theory was rich in expectations and poor in results. Statesmen were supposed to conform to high standards, but rarely did so. The war and death of Pericles revealed the fragile nature of this commitment and how much it was the expression of the *aretē* of a single, talented leader. Was it really possible to resurrect a strong sense of community in a world dominated by market economy in which the concept of self-interestedness had emerged so forcefully? Of all the historical figures in the text, Hermocrates may come the closest to speaking for Thucydides, and his speech at Gela suggests that he was cautiously optimistic (4.59–64). His Syracuse offers a nice parallel to Athens in that it was a large, bustling democracy in which, judging from Hermocrates, many traditional values had been preserved. But Syracuse would have to learn to live with success, and might yet follow in the footsteps of Persia and Athens and repeat the cycle of *hubris*, *atē*, *hamartia*, and *nemesis*.

Thucydides could find good reasons to be more hopeful about the future of Syracuse. Along with Plato, he recognized that the "ancient simplicity" they both admired could no longer be reproduced through everyday practice. The old ways were no longer natural once alternatives had emerged. Grammatical acquisition illustrates this point, and is an appropriate analogy given both men's fascination with words. Children learn to speak unself-consciously through imitation and repetition, but adults must

make conscious efforts to learn new languages, and often find it helpful or necessary to start with the conceptual framework offered by a grammar. Thucydides offered his account of the Peloponnesian War as a grammar to aid in the reconstruction of the language of politics.

Conclusion

Most well-publicized discourses tend to support existing orders and justify their inequalities. The dominant Western discourses of liberalism and realism do this in almost all their diverse formulations. They convince many less wealthy citizens to accept the status quo in the belief that those who are richer deserve their wealth and that through skill and luck they too might become wealthy. These discourses also affect elites, although that is not their primary intention. They legitimize greed and unwittingly encourage the kind of elite violation of norms that Thucydides and Aristotle understand as the principal internal cause of the breakdown of order. The United States and the United Kingdom, the Western countries in which these discourses are most prominent, give the most evidence of disparity of wealth among the rich and poor. They are also the countries in which a percentage of the population owns the highest share of the wealth.

The legitimacy of these sustaining discourses is in turn being undermined by persistent and visible violation of the "rules of the game" by elites. Almost daily, the US and the UK media, and to a lesser extent those of other Western countries, expose the most flagrant forms of corruption and tax evasion by the wealthy and powerful. Exposure to stories of this kind, Thucydides and Aristotle would have us believe, brings about disenchantment with the existing order and copycat behavior by others. When enough

people violate norms, they become unenforceable. Recognition of this situation brings about more noncompliance, even by those who are firmly committed to the norms in question. If enough people cheat, and you do not, you are at a serious disadvantage and are likely to be regarded as a chump by others. The reinforcing incentives of fear and self-interest in this situation have the potential to set in motion a vicious cycle leading to a phase transition. It could herald, if not the breakdown of order, the emergence of a more lawless, cruel, unpleasant culture in which wealth and security for almost everyone would be more difficult to achieve or maintain.

One of the greatest ironies of the current age is the unwitting complicity of Western academics and journalists in this process. The very liberal and realist discourses that encourage greed and autarky are being used by them to analyze such questions as cooperation and order. There is little to no recognition by those who deploy these concepts that they are a contributing cause of the problem, not means for finding a solution. In effect, we need to step back from our preconceptions about the world and how it works, and one way to do this is turning to other cultures, like the Greeks, to understand the problems we face in a different context.

Notes

1. Lebow (2003).
2. Ibid.
3. Kaufman, Little, and Wohlforth (2007), pp. 229–30.
4. Lebow (2008).
5. Lebow (2014), chs 3–4.
6. Weber (1994), p. 311.
7. Pl. *Resp.* 571c8–9 and 579d9–10; Arist. *Pol.* 1315b11; Thuc. *passim*, but especially the Melian Dialogue.

8. Arist. *Rh.* 1382a21–33, 1382b28–35. Konstan (2006), pp. 129–55.
9. Hobbes (1996), I.11.9.
10. Arist. *Pol.* 1336a–1338b8.
11. Montesquieu (1989); Durkheim (1984), (2001); Goffman (1959).
12. Gilson and Perot (2011), reporting on studies by the US Congressional Budget Office.
13. Lebow (2010), ch. 1.
14. Berger and Zelditch (1998); Johnson, Dowd, and Ridgeway (2006); Tyler (2006).
15. Arist. *Pol.* 1302b34–1303a-21, adds demographic balance among classes as a cause of disorder.
16. Ibid. and Pl. *Resp.* 439d1–2, 553d4–7.
17. Pl. *Resp.* 571c8–9, 579d9–10.
18. Schumpeter (1951).
19. Arist. *Pol.* 1297b16ff., 1305a18; Raaflaub (1996).
20. Young (1986).
21. Schattschneider (1960).
22. Lenin (1917).
23. Hegel (1991), §§ 195, 239, 244, 253, 266, 271–2.
24. Graduate seminar, September 1963, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.
25. Howgego (1995).
26. Herman (1987).
27. Mauss (1990); Sahlins (1972), pp. 204–10.
28. Isoc. 4.3, 15–17; Ar. *Lys.*; Eur. *IA* all express Pan-Hellenic sentiments and the value of sacrifice on behalf of Greece.

CHAPTER 3

Democracy without an Alternative: Thucydides, Sparta, and Athens

Wolfgang Will

Thucydides's work has remained fragmentary. As early as Chapter 2.65 he offers a summing up of his opinion about the war. We may take that as his final word, without however having to believe that all outstanding questions are thus resolved.[1] The pertinent analytical questions have long ago been solved, and the text that we now have is accepted by most people as valid. Anyone who wishes to do so may take this "unitarian" position. And yet the fact remains that the text that has come down to us does not always mirror what our historian thought he had understood by the end of the war, or indeed what he wanted to communicate to his contemporaries and to later generations. The incomplete nature of the most consulted books, that is, the fifth and the eighth is open to all to see.[2]

Thus it is not at all easy to establish Thucydides's own opinions. Many of them are—by end of the war—not at all the same as those he had held at the beginning. This can lead to inconsistencies in the text. Thus the speeches he composed are often controversial

because in the speeches he composed later Thucydides did not necessarily feel bound by what he had postulated in the earlier ones (1.22.1).[3] And of course he does his best to conceal from us his own actual opinions in for example, the Melian Dialogue. Only in a very small number of places does he give us what he himself thinks.[4] What is said in the speeches is by no means his own authorized opinion, and in the narrative there is no accompanying commentary on events except in a few places.

We must first of all insist on the fact that Thucydides's political thought and his views on his contemporaries' politics changed in the course of the decades of war. Yes, he increasingly made judgements on the quality of this or that state-form and their effectiveness in this war. Even Herodotus was compelled to situate his discussion of constitutional forms in sixth-century Persia in order to be able to explain the concept of the sole ruler (3.80–3).[5] Tyranny appears in Thucydides (e.g., in the *Archaeology*) only as a historical phenomenon (6.54–9);[6] tyranny as a system in which the ruling dynasties concentrated solely on their own absolute power[7] was by now a thing of the past, and had been destroyed or annihilated. In the usage of a Pericles or a Cleon, when they speak of tyranny and the origins of Athens, its sole meaning is absolute power (2.63.2 and 3.37.2). *Monarchos* is used only as a variant of *turannos*; in fact, in its negative quality the two words are seen to be synonyms (1.122.3). For Thucydides only two forms of constitution count, those of the two major states in this war, which can indeed be seen as a kind of war of the two systems, that is, democracy and oligarchy.[8]

As a public servant in Athens, Thucydides was also personally involved in the ideological struggle between the two systems. Thus we can legitimately infer his political thinking from his personal biography. Of course this is a difficult area, given that there

are so few sources. What we know about Thucydides we know mainly from his own account. The name and office with which he introduces himself at 4.104.4, together with the only worthwhile independent account, that of Polemon Periegetes, give us at least the outlines of a portrait.[9]

The name of his father Olorus is of Thracian origin, but hellenized. In our sources we find only one other Olorus, a king of a tribe that had settled in Thrace, father-in-law of Miltiades, and grandfather of Cimon. Thucydides's burial near *Kimōnia mnēmata*,[10] which we know of from independent sources, his mining rights in Thrace that he must have inherited, his political influence there, all suggest that he belonged to the Philiades family; we cannot exclude the possibility of a blood-relationship with Melesias's son of the same name.

So Thucydides belonged to the conservative aristocratic class in Athens, and his support for the democrat Pericles reveals him as a political convert, no longer classifiable as a model of classical oligarchy. His election to the Athenian office of *stratēgos* during the Archidamian War excludes any kind of closeness to Sparta, yet some modern research would even put him in the Lacedaemonian camp.[11] There are indeed certain indications that would suggest this. In his early "archaeological" passages, we find praise for Sparta as the first society to achieve law and order and which had always been free of tyranny (1.18.1). Certainly, this is a one-off statement; but Thucydides also wrote positively about Spartan ambassadors, especially Archidamus and Brasidas. The former is described as *xunetos . . . kai sōphrōn* (1.79.2), a reasonable and well-balanced man.[12] This characterization, plus the three speeches attributed to him, makes him almost an equal opponent for Pericles. But Brasidas too has an equal opponent, and that is Thucydides the *stratēgos*. And Thucydides the historian, if he

wishes to remain credible, thus has *a priori* to avoid evaluating Brasidas negatively. In fact he pays tribute to the diplomacy and military skill of his opponent, going well beyond the necessary minimum praise. Brasidas is given an encomium such as normally only Themistocles or Pericles would receive. He is believed in foreign lands to have the reputation of being a perfect gentleman (4.81). In the one collective speech that Thucydides gives the Spartans, they are said—after the events at Sphacteria—to have shown measured judgement and reason (4.17–20).[13] This is the positive side. And yet there is also the reverse side.

Thucydides's praise of certain constants in the Spartan constitution (in the *Archaeology*) does have a corollary. This, our historian continues, gives their city-state the stability that then inclines them to interfere in the affairs of other city-states, or to put it concretely, to install oligarchic systems. In the second part of the encomium, Brasidas is seen as a beautiful front behind which a Lysander and the Spartan military governors conceal themselves; thus at the end of the laudatory work written after 404 Thucydides adds his laconic sentence: "And thus he left behind the fair hope that also the others were such" (4.81.3). But they were not, and there is no need for Thucydides to mention it.

And yet Thucydides is not just writing about individuals but about the Spartan system which—in its secrecy and its expulsion of strangers—is sharply contrasted with the open society to be found in Athens (2.39.1; cf. 1.44.2). This difference is emphasized above all through the *epitaphios*, Pericles's Funeral Oration.[14] Thucydides gives us then yet another example of Spartan perfidy that it would be hard to beat. The Spartans promise the helots (who believe that they have played an exemplary role in the Spartans' battles) their freedom, and then murder them secretly (4.80.3–4). Thucydides deciphers the Spartan way

with truth: their easy promises of freedom are empty, liberation from the position of being Athenian *summachoi* will not allow the Greeks to become *eleutheroi* with *autonomia*, but will rather bring the Spartan harmosts. Behind the closed system of the Spartan world are hidden lies and doublespeak.

No one in the antique world ever spoke as negatively about Sparta as Thucydides did. In the Melian Dialogue he puts his harsh judgement into the mouths of the Athenians. But because of his own identification with Pericles's hard anti-Spartan policy, there is little doubt that it is also his own judgement. In the Dialogue he criticizes the Melians' hopes for help from Sparta as children's superstition: "As for your expectations about the Spartans—your faith that they will come to your aid from some sense of honour—we congratulate you on your innocence but do not envy you your folly" (5.105.3–4). But this is only the beginning. Thucydides then continues: "The Spartans do indeed display the greatest virtue where they themselves or their native institutions are concerned; but in their relations with others, to put it briefly, they are in our experience most conspicuous in regarding what is pleasing as honourable and what is expedient as just."[15] For Thucydides, a principal factor in Spartan politics is its secrecy. This cannot have been an acceptable model for him,[16] since he criticizes it twice, in one passage directly (5.68), and indirectly in the *epitaphios*.

In his work Thucydides makes many statements about democracy. How it functions is a primary question for him in his account of events, and especially in the speeches he defines its possibilities. He seldom writes about the actual institution of democracy since its mechanisms were so clear to the Athenians—for whom, after all, he was writing—that he did not have to spell them out.

In the speeches we hear his praises of democracy, soon to be counterposed to his description of the reality of the war. The

epitaphios, supposedly given by Pericles in the winter of the first year war in 431/30 but actually composed by Thucydides, is the first great document about democracy and still a valid defense of it (2.35–46).[17] The democratic constitution according to which they lived, explained Pericles, is like no other foreign constitution, is without any predecessor, and is not limited to a few citizens but concerns the majority. In private matters, everybody has the same rights. In the public sphere, each citizen can achieve fame by his talent and actions. Unlike in Sparta, poverty is no hindrance, and prevents no one from achieving what he can in his service to the state. Its citizens live in peace with each other within the state, the individual can develop himself as much as is possible.[18] Thucydides contrasts this freedom in the public and private realm with the submission he finds in the Spartan state; here selfless assistance for others as against there a cold calculation of one's own advantage, here the decision of the demos after general debate, there the isolated decision-making of the Ephors.

To his praise of democracy Thucydides adds a sober evaluation of its advantages (6.39); however this fully positive judgement is not without its poison. Yes, here speaks a *prostatēs tou dēmou*, Athenagoras of Syracuse: but the historian adds his own epithet *pithanōtatos*, an adjective that he normally uses only for Cleon, a populist and Thersites (6.35.2; cf. 3.36.6). However we note two things: both speeches, that of Pericles and that of Athenagoras, stand alone—there are no opposing speeches that would balance out their judgement.

There are no comparable positive utterances about the oligarchic system. On the contrary, where the enemies of Athens appear and where we might then expect an attack on the Athenian system, we find nothing. The Corinthians who are urging war against the

Athenians criticize their ally, Sparta, and hold up the Athenians before them as a mirror: the Lacedaemonians are always concerned with conserving the status quo and are unable to conceive of anything new; they do not trust any reasonable considerations that might give them security against pressure; cowering at home, they do not really do all they could out of fear of losing what they already have.[19]

On the other side are the Athenians who because of their political system (as Pericles emphasizes in the *epitaphios*) are reformers, ready to make new plans with passion and, once convinced of something, prepared to go beyond their strength to ensure it, ready to face down danger, yet resolute when threatened, prepared for distant expeditions and then, when victorious, pressing on further, or, when defeated, hardly backing down.[20]

His critique of the Athenian demos is treated more indirectly; apart from 2.65, it is limited to narrating the bare facts. And of course in this respect Thucydides runs the risk of being stamped as an enemy of the democratic system. Already in his treatment of a wholly unforeseen event he shows us the instability of the people. In 430 plague broke out, and straight away the Athenians showed their weariness of the war that they had begun in so united a fashion. Their anger seeks an outlet, and the demos, here of course including the *dunatoi*, the powerful, drive Pericles out of office (2.65.3).

Following his own principle of treating the historical facts as exemplary, Thucydides shows us in the case of the Mytilenean Debate the problem of mob rule that prevents reasonable decisions, since they lack the necessary *euboulia* and *gnōmē*. The episode is well-known: in a highly emotional meeting the citizenry decides to kill all men from Mytilene and to enslave their women and children as a punishment for their faithlessness (3.36–49).

Once again it is their proverbially irrational anger, their *hupo orgēs*, which takes over the mob and motivates it toward such cruel (and ultimately self-destructive) measures (3.36.2).[21] Of course our historian has his excuses ready: the Athenians are enraged at Mytilene's long-prepared plotting with Sparta; and their resolution will be cancelled next day at their very next assembly (even if the majority's margin is a slim one).[22]

None of this softens the two decisions of winter 416 and spring 415 that are more than just temporally connected with each other—not that Thucydides says this. During a period of phony peace the Assembly (*ekklēsia*) decided to invade the island of Melos and kill all Melians as punishment for their refusal to surrender.[23] The successful conquest of the island then encouraged the Assembly to undertake its next invasion, that of the island of Sicily. For Thukydides this *psēphisma* (decree) was worse than a crime; it was a political mistake or better still, as Werner Jaeger expressed it, the beginning of a long chain of political failures.[24]

Thucydides dedicated three speeches to this development, which may be regarded as among his best.[25] Nicias in two speeches represents Periclean prudence: in times of crisis it is best to remain calm, not to seek new conquests but preserve what has been won and take no risks (6.9.3, 6.10.5). Alcibiades represents *neotēs kai anoia*, youth and lack of reasonableness (6.17.1). However the real subject of these passages is the demos, emotionally unstable, uninformed and entertaining silly hopes, enacting decisions the consequences of which it cannot possibly oversee:

> Everyone alike had fallen in love with the voyage: the older men believing that either they would overwhelm the places they sailed against or that so great a force could at least suffer no disaster; the young men of military age yearning to see these far-off sights and

> spectacles, full of good hope for their safe return; and the mass of common soldiery, seeing an opportunity to earn some money in the short-term and to acquire a power that would be an endless source of earnings in the future. (6.6.1)

The *ekklēsia* became a mob, and whoever recommended reason was silenced: "anyone who felt otherwise was afraid of seeming disloyal if he voted against and therefore held his peace" (6.24.4). As fear was added to the war hysteria, as the mutilation of the Herms and alleged profanation of the Mysteries led to hysteria and conspiracy theory, the demos—swiftly changing its mind and again driven by the same mad anger, *orgizomenos*, as Thucydides calls it, that had led them to expel Pericles, sabotaged all its own war plans, forcing the freshly appointed *stratēgos autokratōr* Alcibiades to resign and then condemning him in absentia to death. One could continue to give a long list of all the decisions that were decided in fury. But Thucydides ends with the summer of 410. He experienced but did not write about the trial of the generals after the battle of Arginusae.

We come now to Thucydides's direct statements. In the context of the transition of power from the Four Hundred to the Five Thousand in the summer 410, he seems, quite without warning, to be giving his own evaluation, in Chapter 97 of the unfinished Book 8: *kai ouch hēkista dē ton prōton chronon epi ge emou Athēnaioi phainontai eu politeusantes*: "And for the first time, in my life at any rate, the Athenians appear to have enjoyed good government" (8.97.1). And because he here describes a compromise between the *oligoi* and the *polloi*, the few and the many, his preference for a mixed constitutional form has often been postulated.

This opinion may by now be somewhat dated, especially because the above quote presents the same problem as the entire

speech does. In fact he is only saying that political affairs are being managed best (at least during the lifetime of the historian) at the beginning (*prōton*) of the reign of the Five Thousand, since—at this critical time—the Oligarchs and the Democrats did find a way to compromise. This is at least the conclusion to be found in Andrewes's commentary after a rigorous analysis.[26] Thucydides is here speaking of compromise in civil strife, and not of any mixed form of constitution—as is also repeated in Leppin's book on Thucydides.[27]

This chapter, 8.97, belongs to that part of the author's work that was not included in the major revision undertaken after 404. This however was carried out under the new Periclean democracy conceived after the defeat and thus, despite all the efforts of the unitarian scholars,[28] is not harmonizable with the idea of a mixed constitution.

Thucydides's whole thrust after 404 was to research the reasons for the Athenians' defeat, not those that led to the Spartans' victory. He remained the truly Athenian citizen whom he had described at the very beginning of his work. Thus this was for him a double defeat, both a personal one and that of his very own city-state.

When he began to write, he was convinced of Athens's victory. His portrait of Pericles leaves us in no doubt of this.[29] When exactly he came to see that Athens would lose we cannot say. Presumably it was first at the battle of Aegospotamoi in 405. This is why what he says about it in his final revision is so important. We need to analyze the late speeches; and overall we need to analyze his own words when, in 2.65.7–12 and 6.15.3–4, he is writing about the defeat of the Athenian *archē*. It is here we find in concentrated form his evaluation of the Athenians and their political system. There is a continuous political failure, the failure

of the leaders (he does not call them "demagogues" but *tou dēmou prostatai*—which is not necessarily a negative term) and that of the people. The elite is possessed with personal ambition (2.65.7) and a mad desire to gain possessions, and the demos is driven by passion, fury, or fear; mood swings dominate its decisions. When the two groups meet there are fatal consequences, and the result is disagreement and paralysis.

For Thucydides, the real mistake was not the decision taken to invade Sicily, but its insufficient realization; he meant not so much the secondary matter of a lack of proper support from the homeland but the primary matter of Alcibiades's recall. It was the oligarchs, especially a son of Cimon, who in 415 started the story of a conspiracy against The People and thus set in motion Alcibiades's trial and impeachment (Plut. *Alc.* 19, 22).

In fact, as I have stated, Thucydides often finds an excuse for important mistakes made by the people, but he does not ignore the systematic failure that lies behind them. Of course he also sees that all this happens in a war situation. And of course Thucydides also knows what the Old Oligarch specifically says in his *Athēnaion Politeia*, that the rise of Athens after the Persian wars was a result of its democracy (2).[30]

In 2.65.5. Thucydides wrote that Athens was great also in times of peace. There he is referring to Pericles's influence. But his praise of yet another *prostatēs tou dēmou* ([Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 23.3)—he means Themistocles—shows that Thucydides knew that the reasons for the rise of Athens lay deeper. The democratic system had worked well in peacetime, but war—Thucydides in his overview of the phenomenon of *stasis* calls war "a violent master," which "usually generates passions to match our circumstances" (3.82.2)—showed up its weaknesses. Yet what system could ever have had all the attributes offered by the democratic

system—he elucidates these in the *epitaphios* and the speech of the Corinthians—and at the same time could suit the needs of the great war? Nowhere does he so much as mention the possibility that it might have been their oligarchic system that helped the Spartans to victory. On the contrary, it was to the suggestions of an Athenian, Alcibiades, that they owed their victory.[31]

Thucydides described the Rule of The Four Hundred—presumably while he was still in exile—as a terror regime, even though he finds praise for a few oligarchs (cf. 8.69–70). The bloody terror of the Thirty was nearing its end when he returned to his fatherland. Democracy, now somewhat changed, had returned, and would remain stable till the end of Alexander's kingdom. Oligarchy as a state model was in such disrepute in Athens that in numerous surviving speeches of Athenian citizens the word appears only when it was necessary to insult a political opponent. It was not Sparta that had brought the Greeks their so often promised freedom.

It was they who had installed in so many cities regimes of military governors that Thucydides could only have despised. Neither their rise nor their development was any recommendation for oligarchy as a model state-form.

The question of a mixed form of constitution remains. In 8.97, as we saw, he praised the compromise between the interests of the oligarchs and those of the democrats that the short-lived rule of the Five Thousand made possible. It only lasted a short time, and Thucydides's praise of it is also short-lived. How could a rule of the Five Thousand have endured for any length of time? Yes, use of a strict census of ages might have helped—it is interesting that in the Sicilian debate he denies that especially youth possesses political maturity. Yet the only realistic way to reduce the number of voting citizens would have been to exclude the Thetes from

the political process. Nowhere in Thucydides do we find such a suggestion. He had returned to a city where democracy was soon firmly established once more and where, in spite of all the vented radicalism, the practice of *homonoia* and *amnestia* would prevail. The opposition of the aristocracy was broken—democracy ruled. In contrast to the way that changes to laws were often too hastily agreed during the War, there was now a new system to separate law from decree. No longer did the full assembly legislate, but just the Nomothetes.[32] We can presume this change was greeted positively by Thucydides.

What made democracy a model without any alternative was the importance of the Thetes in Athens, a city that—in peace and in war—relied on its fleet for its power. With the exception of Alcibiades, Thucydides avenges himself just on *hoi husteron*, the successors of Pericles; the demos had sent him into exile, and yet he seems to have forgiven it for that. He saw not only its political mistakes, but also its military triumphs and accompanying sufferings. He emphatically highlights the Athenians' will to victory over numerically superior enemies. At the beginning he conceals his own pride in Athens's power of opposition within what he presents as the astonishment of the whole Greek world:

> But what put most pressure on the Athenians was that they were conducting two wars at the same time, and they brought to them a competitive spirit that had to be seen to be believed. It was incredible that when they were themselves under siege from a Peloponnesian fort in their own country they should not even then withdraw from Sicily but should in turn be besieging the Syracusans in just the same way, inhabitants of a city which was itself as big as that of Athenians; incredible too that in their display of power and daring they could so confound the Greeks—who at the start of the war had some of them thought the Athenians

> would survive one year, some two, but none more than three years, if the Peloponnesians invaded their country; and now, against all reasonable expectation, in the seventeenth year after the first such invasion, and already war-torn in every way, they should go to Sicily and undertake another war on the same scale as the one they already had with the Peloponnese. (7.28.3)[33]

We may add the final lines Thucydides wrote; they contain criticism, yes, but also admiration:

> Despite their failure in Sicily, involving most of their fleet as well as other forces, and the arrival of civil disorder in Athens, they nonetheless held out for eight years longer against their original enemies, who were joined now by the Sicilians and by the majority of the allies in revolt. They were also joined later on by Cyrus son of the King of Persia, who provided the Peloponnesians with money for their fleet. And they only finally capitulated when they fell on each other in their private disputes and brought about their own ruin. (2.65.12)

The fleet's fighting soldiers were the most dedicated of all supporters of the democracy. A system of government that left them out or was opposed to their interests would have been impossible; Thucydides himself shows this in his treatment of the events at Samos in the summer of 411 (8.86).

There are many reasons why in Athens there was no alternative to a democracy. It was under this system that Thucydides himself had lived since 403, and it was principally for the supporters of this system that he was writing. His hymn of praise for this state-form in the later sections of his writing was not accidental. It is an ideal, of course, and it does not mean Thucydides had given up all his criticisms of democracy. Elsewhere he presents

his own preferred state-form. This is well concealed even though it is right in front of us: it is nothing other than Periclean democracy, itself described in compressed form in chapter 2.65. In fact this is not really a description of democracy and its first statesman in prewar Athens;[34] the contradictions with the narrative of Thucydides and with other sources, especially comedy, are evident. Thucydides's famous sentence about the power of the first man in the democratic state loses all its contradictory nature if read in the subjunctive mode.[35]

The accusation that Thucydides is an opponent of the Athenians and their democracy reaches back to antiquity. Modern publications have repeated it, and one still finds it in some of the latest scientific publications. One reason for this is his critique of various decisions taken by the demos in Athens; another is his apparently pro-Lacedaemonian position. But our historian's recognition of Sparta is almost always poisoned. The tribute paid to Brasidas includes his criticism of his successors. The past of the Spartan *politeia* is only praised in order to show up its present. Sparta's behavior is, indirectly, continuously denounced, and in the Melian Dialogue we find the heftiest denunciation of Sparta in the whole of antiquity. Behind Thucydides's occasional praise of the Spartans is a dislike that runs deep.

Thucydides's life reveals him as a political convert from an oligarchic family who became a democratic general. He paints democracy as the successful model in three speeches (1.68–71, 2.35–46, 6.39). We find no comparable oration in praise of the oligarchic system. The historian's works reveal democracy's weaknesses in time of war. The demos, with emotions running high, unstable in its high enthusiasm and in its fury, for example, before and during the Sicilian campaign, ends up making wrong decisions. In his later work Thucydides reinforces his condemnation

of Pericles's successors, and he gives due praise to the military success of the nation.

Thucydides knew that the rise of Athens in peacetime was connected from the beginning to the democracy. He saw no alternative to this in either oligarchy or in any mixed form of political system. Therefore he sketched his own ideal. His work is only secondarily involved with the Athenian–Spartan war; its primary target is the fall of Athens. However in his portrait of Pericles we find a mixture of the indicative and the subjunctive mode. What he is writing is both historical reporting and political corrective.

The Periclean democracy in Thucydides's account actually had no historical foundation. It is his ideal that arose while he carried out his final revisions; it was meant to show how defeat could have been avoided. The state-model that he imagines as the best, at least in times of war—he presents it in his final chapter 2.65—is a democracy with an enlightened statesman at its head.[36]

Notes

1. Gomme, Andrewes, and Dover (1945–81), vol. I, pp. 178–99; Hornblower (1991–2008), vol. I, pp. 340–9; Will (2003), pp. 213–22; Spahn (2005).
2. On the "Thucydidean question" see also Ullrich (1846), pp. 1ff.; Schwartz (1919), pp. 1ff.; Patzer (1937), pp. 3ff.
3. On this, see recently Vössing (2005); cf. also Schubert (2009), pp. 392–3; Wiemer (2008), pp. 68–9.
4. E.g., 2.65, 3.82, 6.15.
5. Meister (1997), pp. 220–33.
6. On tyranny in Thucydides, see the contribution by Martin Dreher in *CoO*.
7. Cf. Thuc. 1.17.

8. On the often discussed problem of Thucydides' evaluation of the different political systems, see recently Raaflaub (2006).
9. Self-referential statements by Thucydides: 1.1, 1.21–2, 2.47.2–48.3. 4.102–8, 5.25–6.
10. Marcellin. *Life of Thucydides* 17. For additional biographical sources see Will (2003), pp. 223–7.
11. Cf. Ollier (1933–43).
12. See Wassermann (1953); Bloedow (1981); (1983).
13. On Brasidas and the Spartans see Westlake (1968), pp. 122–34, 148–65, 277–89; Cartledge and Debnar (2006); see also Gribble (2006).
14. See especially Kakridis (1961), pp. 23, 28, 31, 35, 38ff., 45, 53, 57–8.
15. I agree with Baltrusch (2011) that Thucydides did not wish to give "his own" picture of Sparta; yet despite that there are clear signs of his dislike of Sparta in the work. This dislike seems to have grown in the course of the war as these signs are to be found especially in the later sections.
16. See Will (2009).
17. See, very convincingly, Kakridis (1961), pp. 5–6; cf. Pouncey (1969), pp. 1ff. Turasiewicz (1995), pp. 34–5 holds it as a minimum consensus "that the oration rather reflects Thucydides' views at the end of the war than it reproduces Pericles' words at the beginning." An attempt at "rescuing" the speech as a document of genuinely Periclean views is Lehmann (2008), pp. 234ff.
18. See Thuc. 1.37.
19. Cf. Thuc. 1.70.2–4.
20. Cf. Thuc. 1.70.1–8.
21. On the motif of anger see Mann (2007), pp. 88–90.
22. On the debate see Andrewes (1962); Kagan (1975); Wassermann (1956); Ebener (1955/6).
23. See for this, including the references, Will (2006), pp. 25ff. See also Meister (2011).
24. Cf. W. Jaeger (1934), p. 505.
25. Kohl (1977).

26. Andrewes in Gomme, Andrewes, and Dover (1945–81), vol. V, pp. 331–9.
27. Leppin (1999), pp. 180–3.
28. Ibid.
29. See Will (2003), pp. 159–241; cf. now Meier (2006).
30. On this, see Weber (2010), pp. 70–1.
31. Baltrusch (2011), pp. 143–5.
32. See Leppin (1999), pp. 197–8.
33. See Will (2006).
34. On the idolization of Pericles, see Stein-Hölkeskamp (2000), pp. 79–80 and Sonnabend (2004), pp. 74–6.
35. On this sentence and its interpretation, see Peter Spahn in *CoO*.
36. I wish to thank the other presenters at the conference as well as Uwe Walter, Bielefeld, for criticism and advice. I thank Ernst Baltrusch, Christian Thauer, and Christian Wendt for their kind invitation and the hospitality they extended to me in Berlin.

PART II

Thucydides as a Model Historian (or Theorist) of Political Order

CHAPTER 4

Leo Strauss's Thucydides and the Meaning of Politics

Liisi Keedus

Among Thucydides's many modern admirers, there have probably been only few as fierce critics of the historical approach in political thought as was Leo Strauss (1899–1973). A German Jew, Strauss studied philosophy after World War I with Paul Natorp and Ernst Cassirer, two of Germany's most outstanding Neokantians at the time. Yet like many young philosophers of the interwar period, Strauss acclaimed the decline of Neokantianism on the one hand, and the rising influence of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, on the other. He embraced some of the key elements of Heidegger's philosophical critique of modernity, especially its rejection of Cartesian rationality and its outspokenly antihistoricist return to thinkers of antiquity. When the young Strauss became increasingly oriented toward political philosophy in the early 1930s, he had to leave Nazi Germany. Continuing his work first in Paris and London, he eventually settled down in the United States where in 1949, at the age of 50, he was for the first time offered a permanent

academic position. Having published well-received books on Spinoza, Hobbes, Maimonides, and Xenophon, Strauss became a professor of political philosophy at the University of Chicago. He continued to teach there until his retirement, mostly focusing on Western classical thinkers and the reconstruction of the debate between the "moderns" and the "ancients" in which he provocatively sided with the latter.

Known as a reviver of political philosophy as a field in its own right, Strauss presented it to stand or fall by the truthfulness of the historicist tenet that "the fundamental distinction between philosophic and historical questions cannot in the last analysis be maintained."[1] Political philosophy, Strauss insisted, is the quest for "universally valid standards" wherein the human thought seeks to distance itself and question a particular order and its underlying principles. It seeks to shed its attachment to a specific historical situation. Historicism, by contrast, denies that one can perceive the "invisible walls" erected by a concrete historical situation, much less subdue them.[2] For one of its most fundamental tenets, held true by all of versions of historicism, is the belief that all human values and ideas are conditional on their historical context and subject to change.[3]

It is thus hardly surprising that Strauss should have taken an intense interest in Thucydides, the historian, as one of the most outstanding political thinkers of all times. For—as Strauss maintained in his essays on the ancient historian that are by today part of the interpretational canon[4]—Thucydides was the very opposite of the modern historian. More than that, Strauss's Thucydides challenged the core principles of modern history writing, as well as historicism as a broader philosophical paradigm. *The History of the Peloponnesian War* was meant to be, if true, more than a meticulous chronicle of a war, no matter

how great and consequential, and more even than an exhaustive account of its causes. Above all it was meant to be—and this was the measure of whether it had lived up to its utmost task—in Thucydides's own phrasing, "a possession for all time" (1.22.4). In contrast to the purportedly value-free and apolitical modern history writing, Thucydides sought to teach those who were both willing and capable, the truth about men, politics, and war. Unlike the modern relativists, Thucydides judged and claimed that the truth of his judgement would not fade in the passing of time. Not less importantly, quite unlike the modern historians "sitting at the feet of great politicians,"[5] Thucydides placed himself above them, with statesmen sitting at his feet. For Thucydides believed he was "a better judge of political matters than for instance Pericles. When Thucydides writes the Periclean speech, it is a better speech than the speaker's own."[6] This also meant that his idea of history went against the concept of objectivity of modern historiography: Thucydides's reconstructions of speeches were always supposed to be truer and more illuminative than had been a presentation of the exact words and sentences of the speaker.

I begin by inquiring into some of Strauss's historiographical reflections insofar as they clarify his interpretation of the problem of politics in Thucydides. I mostly rely on Strauss's lectures on Thucydides (1972/3), rather than his written pieces, and do so mainly for two reasons. First, these lectures have become only recently available for the wider public and will hopefully receive—since they contain unorthodox explorations into Thucydides's ultimate political-philosophical intention—more attention both among Strauss's and Thucydides's readers. Second, they reveal a great deal about why Strauss was an advocate of *political* philosophy rather than philosophy simply, and about why he believed

that Thucydides's historical insight complemented in an essential way the philosophical approach to politics. Although Strauss went out of his way to show that Thucydides was not *only* a historian, he still considered the *History of the Peloponnesian War* the most comprehensive account of the political as an irreducible realm of human life.

History and the "Art of Writing"

Strauss's reading and teaching of Thucydides, like his other interpretations, were never simply ahistorical or anachronistically revivalist, but consciously antihistoricist, thus revealing his intellectual debt to German hermeneutic traditions. For Strauss, engaging in an interpretation of past texts, let alone premodern texts, required the taking of a hermeneutic position regarding the historical gap between the reader and the source.[7] When describing his method of interpretation, Strauss appealed—albeit polemically—to the famous Rankean dictum: "The goal of the historian of thought is to understand the thought of the past 'as it has really been.'"[8] In his contemporary context this meant for Strauss above all to underline that we should not believe or even hope that we can understand the sources better than their authors did, but that one should strive to understand them "as exactly as possible as it was actually understood by its authors." The aim is to understand the "nonhistoricist thought of the past . . . in its own terms, and not in the way in which it presents itself within the horizon of historicism."[9]

Strauss's historicism, on the contrary, "approaches the thought of the past on the basis of the historicist assumption which was wholly alien to the thought of the past."[10] There are at least two reasons for this error. First, every "historicism" is bound to believe

in the progress of thought, and in such a way that it assumes the superiority of its own perspective over that of its object of study. For the historicist reader, the lack of historical perspective in the past makes it inferior to the modern thought in terms of "reflexivity." According to the historicist, premodern thinkers lacked the most important insight about truth, namely the insight that thought is an expression of subjectivity. Hence, by the virtue of his claims that are meant to express a universal truth, the historicist reader is compelled to attempt to understand the thought of the past "better than it understood itself." It is paradoxical, however, that the truth of a historicist interpretation or rather its capacity to be of a reasonable position depends on an implicit rejection of historicism as an absolute position—that at the end, there is indeed no position closer to the truth than some other one, because there is no such thing as timeless truth. Second, Strauss insisted that there is a hermeneutic gap between the contemporary conviction that such a thing as truth for all times does not exist, and the certainty of past authors throughout previous ages that such truth, *the* truth, has to be sought for. Genuine historical understanding can take place for Strauss only on the condition that the reader—following the authors studied—ceases to be a historicist to the end, that is, still believes in the absolute superiority of his own reading over everyone else's.[11]

All too familiar with the grave theoretical difficulties that any ahistorical interpretation is bound to entail, Strauss admitted that all past texts are indeed embedded in their contexts. In *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (1952), a collection of essays that explicitly address the problem of methodology, Strauss argued, however, that the key problem in interpretation is: *which* contextual conditions are relevant and in which ways for shaping the argumentation of texts? Historians might indeed believe that

they have shown the conditionality of philosophical thought on the contemporary situation and sometimes their historical findings are correct, he conceded. Yet, Strauss continued to argue, thereby we have touched upon merely one relevant context in the writing and reading of philosophical works. What we today miss is the fact that philosophers of the past were likely to have placed themselves in danger had they explicitly presented their core teachings, especially as these in most cases went against the social, political, and importantly, religious conventions of the time. Therefore Strauss's philosophers, from ancient to early modern, from Plato to Spinoza, distinguished between a variety of audiences and messages that they wanted to convey to different readers. Hence, their texts had accordingly a number of different layers. Most importantly, each text had an exoteric layer, oriented to the wider audience, and an esoteric layer where the author addressed only other philosophers. Positing this distinction allowed Strauss to concede that while indeed past texts are historically conditioned, this fact is relevant only for understanding the exoteric form and intention of the text. Accordingly, he could both admit to the historical points of historically minded readers, as well as maintain that the text is not thereby understood fully and that the esoteric and philosophical layer has escaped the historicist reader.[12] The philosopher might have shaped the form and content of his argumentation according to the situational demands of the time, Strauss conceded, yet always retained also the purely philosophical perspective—a timeless perspective, if one prefers.

Strauss's reading of *The History of the Peloponnesian War* applied the same method of unveiling what Strauss called "the art of writing," arguing that (1) Thucydides wrote his opus in view of multiple audiences, including the most philosophic minds;

(2) accordingly, like in the case of philosophers, there is nothing (or close to nothing) accidental in the work, but every chapter, paragraph, event, speech, character, every line, and sometimes even a single word is part of a carefully structured whole, conveying his wisdom in several layers and to multiple audiences; (3) the philosophic layer of the text, where Thucydides imparts timeless wisdom, is not to be identified and thereby confused with the historical layer, while the former says something in addition—and of greater importance—than the latter.[13]

Applying these hermeneutic principles meant that Strauss sought to pay particularly close attention to the *structure* and *style* of the philosophical text, as a key to its content. For instance, instead of dismissing argumentations containing apparent contradictions as human errors, he insisted that philosophically minded authors had inserted these in their texts intentionally, with a particular purpose and conveying a particular message, and it was thus the reader's task to decipher these. In the case of the *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Strauss similarly emphasised the role of apparent contradictions, ambiguities, and tensions, contending that these were the key to Thucydides's teaching. More than that, Strauss's Thucydides structured his political teaching as a history of antagonisms and did so in order to show that politics can be only comprehended, grasped, and defined through conflicts, ambiguities, tensions, contradictions. Also, Thucydides believed—and by his appreciative emphasis on this, Strauss does not seem to disagree—that politics can be captured in the theoretical language not by the means of philosophical categories, but by the use of narrative and speeches as the political medium *par excellence*, that is, through presenting historical examples of antagonisms and oppositions, that then unveil the political truth indirectly.

Athens and Sparta

One of the first illustrations that Strauss gave for his thesis was his interpretation of the very first speeches of the *History of the Peloponnesian War*: the speeches by the Corcyreans and the Corinthians in Epidamnus. Strauss argued that Thucydides's guide to both how to read these speeches as well as what they conveyed about the realm of politics as such were the first words of each speech. The speech by the Corcyreans, Strauss pointed out to his audience, begins with the word "just" (*dikaion*), while the speech by the Corinthians had "necessity" (*anagkaion*) as its first word. "What is the relation between justice and necessity? Of right and compulsion? . . . The complicated theme of justice and necessity is a theme that holds the whole work together," contended Strauss in the first seminar. Politics is a realm where one is guided by considerations of justice, while simultaneously also constrained by necessity—and in most cases these do not coexist in harmony but one has to either balance them or even choose between them. The latter in turn means that politics abounds with circumstances and predicaments where the decision and action must go—with little avail to the decency of intention and with no universal answers—either against the demands of justice or those of necessity.[14]

On the one hand, Strauss's Thucydides was not a moralist: he had witnessed great misfortunes happening to very just men, with Nicias's ignominious defeat and death in the disastrous Sicilian expedition being only the most obvious example. Justice is no warrantor of victory or even honour. Also, preferring considerations of justice to those of necessity in politics may easily have very grave consequences both in peace and war. When Athenians decided to recall Alcibiades from the Sicilian mission, they did so mainly

because he had been impious, not because they had doubts about his abilities as a commander. Yet thereby the Athenians had failed to give sufficient weight to considerations of necessity, to the question, whether Alcibiades's recall might cost them this mission. On the other hand, Thucydides was not a cold-blooded "realist" either, in the sense that considerations of humanity and morals were for him irrelevant—as Strauss emphasized by giving several examples of the compassion with which he recounted some of the most brutal killings of the war, among them the massacre of children at Mycalessus. Thucydides's first speeches were meant—or so Strauss argued—to give the readers a clue about how to partake in the wisdom Thucydides is just about to share with them.[15]

Similarly, the central conflict of Thucydides's narrative—the conflict between Athens and Sparta—is itself no mere historical occurrence, Strauss insisted, but an allegory of causes of war in political history, a pattern repeating itself perpetually. This becomes evident in Thucydides's distinction between, in Strauss's words, the "openly proclaimed causes" of the war and its "deeper pre-history."[16] Here, unsurprisingly, Strauss did not have in mind "causes" as used in the terminology of modern historiography, but as ways of political life that can be properly understood only in the course of a comprehensive, one could even say, philosophically guided reflection:

> the most important causes are for [Thucydides] such things as the character of Sparta on the one hand and of Athens on the other, and . . . this kind of cause is understood by him less as the product of conditions . . . than as the specification of the most comprehensive "causes," i.e. motion and rest . . . For Thucydides the course of the war is the self-revelation of Sparta and Athens rather than the outcome of a strategy.[17]

The dichotomy of "motion" and "rest" represented for Strauss's Thucydides not only antagonistic principles, but principles in a dialectic relation. On the one hand, motion, the very principle of Athens, as opposed to rest, the very principle of Sparta, represents progress in a similar way that rest represents decline. Yet even if progress itself is motion, progress (in the Greek sense, not in the modern sense) is possible mainly at the time of rest, that is, during peace. The most formidable achievements of Athens are possible because of rest and are themselves the highest form of rest. Because in the earlier times Athens was a relatively infertile area, no one sought to invade them. Athenians also were the "first that laid by their armour, and growing civil, passed into a more tender kind of life" (1.6). The further achievements of Athens however were made possible by its daring and versatility as an expanding imperial power. Hence, it was a specific interplay between motion and rest that created its wealth, power, and its civil achievements.[18] At the same time, this interplay has what Strauss characterized as a "tragic" character, by which he meant that Thucydides made it extremely doubtful whether Athens could have remained at rest, that is, could have survived without expanding her empire. Once an empire is established, it is difficult for it to preserve itself without further expansion, and it was precisely this inability to limit the drive to expansion that proved so fatal for Athens, driving it into self-destructive military operations.[19]

Thucydides's Athens and Sparta represent two radically distinct approaches to politics, or even, two radically distinct, as well as antagonistic, amalgams of political virtues and weaknesses. "These two cities are distinguished from one another not only by their political and military arrangements but also by their state of mind, their spirit," Strauss explained. "Therefore, they must be understood not merely in terms of the cleverness and the

stupidity of their policies but must also consider their form, their character, their ideals."[20] Thucydides phrased the dichotomy in more specific terms already in the first book, in the speech of the Corinthians at Sparta where they famously juxtapose their view of the Spartans with their view of the Athenians (1.68–9). The Athenians are innovative, quick, courageous, enterprising, but at the same time covetous. They are always active, always in motion, unable to rest, their life is a constant turmoil—"they think the further they go, the more they get"[21]—and when they succeed, they see it only as a step to their next achievement. The Spartans by contrast are "keeping things as they are."[22] They are passive, at least until provoked, conservative by temperament, slow and cautious in acting, often out of mistrust of their own judgment. The Athenian daring and adventurous character at times borders madness, while Sparta is an example of political moderation, at times debilitating moderation.

Thucydides's ultimate aim in presenting the various facets of the Athens–Sparta dichotomy had been—or so Strauss argued—to demonstrate that both Athens and Sparta in their extreme are politically unviable. Therefore he remained in fact ambiguous about his preference for either Athens or Sparta. Despite what seems like Thucydides's praise for Athens as the peak of civilization, one should not be too hasty to believe that Athens represented for him also the ideal of political virtue. Again, structural clues should be followed. For instance, Pericles's Funeral Speech, the ultimate laudation of Athenian democracy, was followed by the plague. The dialogue with the Melians—and thus Strauss's conviction that it does not express Thucydides's own views—is followed by the disaster in Sicily.[23] Thucydides appreciated and did not underestimate the fact that Sparta embodied republican virtue, and piety, and had enjoyed order and freedom for

400 years, and that unlike Athens it was moderate also in prosperity. Not less importantly and not just by chance—as Strauss argued—the Spartans won the war.[24]

The question, whether for Thucydides it was the Athenian or the Spartan way of life that was politically more viable, takes a turn to further ambiguity once the reader recognises that the cities, or the "spirit" that they represent, are in turn embodied in concrete individuals. Strauss told his students that it is essential for Thucydides's readers to find out what exactly is his judgement of his characters, and Strauss himself dwelled at length on what he argued was Thucydides's carefully carved out representation and judgement of two antagonistic protagonists: Nicias and Alcibiades.

Nicias, the commander of Athenian forces during the Sicilian disaster, a man for whom Thucydides expresses both great respect and sympathy, represented—or so Strauss argued—the "Spartan" virtues. He was a cautious man, content with the glory, status, and wealth he currently possessed, and tried to convince the Athenians to forgo the Sicilian expedition since it was too risky. He was willing to make peace with Sparta rather than continue the war. Most importantly perhaps, Nicias was a pious, just, and moderate man. Yet, while moderation leads to wise policy, Strauss's Thucydides also pointed at its limitations.[25]

At no point did Thucydides criticise Nicias explicitly, Strauss admitted, but his reluctance to acclaim Nicias as a man of true excellence is evident in a number of instances. First of all, by showing that in trying to convince the Athenians to forego the Sicilian expedition, Nicias achieved precisely the opposite—his fellow citizens became more enthusiastic about it—Thucydides suggested the limitations of Nicias's judgement. Second, Nicias was partly reluctant to undertake the expedition and desired to

end it shortly for concerns for the huge costs of war, also affecting him as a wealthy citizen—and Strauss's Thucydides by contrast never prioritised such considerations nor approved of it. Third, the defeat of the Athenians had been so devastating under Nicias's command in large part because he had refused to retreat, and he did so out of concern not for his warriors or for his city, but for his own reputation and safety in Athens were he to return there under such unfavourable circumstances. Fourth, Nicias commanded his army to remain under Syracuse despite their increasingly desperate situation because he was "fooled by his hope" that the fortune would turn. Not only were his earthly hope as well as hope for divine help in vain, but his piety in this particular situation has an adverse effect. Just as Athenians were debating the retreat, a solar eclipse took place, which made immediate departure impossible for reasons of piety—and led to the eventual disaster. Hence, Nicias was a decent man, Strauss argued, but not outstanding. All his virtues notwithstanding, Athens suffered under his command a horrible loss, and Nicias himself was executed by the victorious enemy. More than that, according to Strauss's Thucydides, the Athenians suffered such a devastating defeat precisely because of Nicias's piety and lack of daring.[26]

Alcibiades, to the contrary, was a traitor, impious, hasty, and immoderate—to name just a few of his vices. Yet he was politically extraordinarily talented: outstandingly articulate, dynamic, a great strategist, both in war and domestic politics—representing the "Athenian" type of political virtues. From the moral point of view, Thucydides was far from recommending Alcibiades, yet he neither despised him nor even condemned him. Instead, from the political point of view, Strauss argued, Alcibiades as a character as well as his role in the decline of Athens allow for considerable ambiguity. The Athenians put him in charge of the Sicilian expedition alongside

Nicias precisely to combine the opposite virtues of the two men. Yet then they lost their trust in Alcibiades—and through limited fault of his own. Instead, his impious manners are invoked in the context of internal power struggles back in Athens. In Strauss's view, once recalled, Alcibiades's treason became almost inevitable. What reasons did he have to return to Athens where he would have to answer a myriad of allegations? Taken his self-importance, his arrogance, awareness of his talents and ambition to achieve great things, he defected to Sparta. Yet did the traitor suffer a worse fate than the just man? To the contrary—the traitor remained unpunished. More than that: Strauss's Thucydides suggests that only Alcibiades, had he remained in charge of the Athenian army, could have saved it. It would have changed the outcome of the Sicilian expedition—hence the leading Athenians who refused to listen to Alcibiades, were likely to have done more harm to Athens than Alcibiades by his treason.[27]

Conclusion: Strauss's Reading of Thucydides

Strauss's readings of Thucydides contain many more noteworthy suggestions and observations than I have mentioned above. But I based my selection above all on what I believe were the elements of Strauss's reading of Thucydides that were most telling about how to interpret, or at least how not to misinterpret Strauss himself.

First and foremost, Strauss's engagement with Thucydides was—or at least in parallel—an engagement with the problems of his own time. Strauss's philosophical interpretations and his "return to the ancients" were never ahistorical as his followers or critics have made them to be, but polemically antihistoricist.[28] Here Strauss's intellectual maturation in the context of anti-historicism in interwar Germany is of key importance and like

numerous antihistoricists of his generation, he could not simply shed the legacy of historicism, but tried to devise a novel hermeneutic to overcome it.[29] This was never a simple return to the past or the tradition, as is shown by Strauss's method that acknowledges the context-bound character of the texts, but adds to them another, philosophical–esoteric layer. In this context, Thucydides became for Strauss the perfect weapon in this polemical battle: Strauss's Thucydides recounted the particulars, but he did not deny the universal—alas, he taught about the universal. More than that, Thucydides's *History* represented the antithesis of historicism. While Strauss's historicism recognised only particulars and maintained that history engulfs philosophy, Thucydides held that the universal becomes visible precisely through the particular. The first historian did not fail to recognise philosophy.

Second, in contrast to many other critics of modernity, Strauss made the question of politics—rather than religion, technology, ethics, or culture—the central crux by which to grapple with the predicaments of our times. Yet Strauss believed that the problem of politics was being systematically misconstrued in contemporary theoretical approaches. At the same time, because modern politics itself was both more ideological than ever before, and after World War II also disposed to look to science for formula of solutions, the theoretical predicaments had acquired much greater political significance than in earlier times. Hence the urgency of gaining a more adequate theoretical perspective on politics—something that again Strauss believed he had found in Thucydides's careful balance of the particular and universal, of factual and normative, of *praxis* and *theoria*.

Many of Strauss's colleagues in the American political science departments at the time were instead set, by the means of new

analytical–quantitative methods, to discover the mechanics of the human mind and the social world in the same way as the secrets of nature had been unveiled. As political knowledge had become more "rigorous," claiming the discovery of necessary causal relations in the moral and political realm and disclaiming the situational, there was no reason why this knowledge should not be able to give universal maxims for future politics. Accordingly, within this framework the role of political action itself—both statesmanship and the civic conduct of the citizens—became superfluous. When the theorist discovers the universally valid and *practicable* maxims, there is no real reason why the citizen or the statesman should not follow these maxims. Political judgement from the part of the statesman or citizen is no longer needed and their prudence fades in the face of the precise and comprehensive knowledge of the theorist. The man of politics only has to follow the universally valid maxims set out by the theorist. Accordingly, all criticism against practical philosophy that would come from *praxis* becomes redundant and unnecessary.[30] For who is the citizen to contest the scientifically devised model of the "future perfect State?"[31] Who is the citizen to stand in the way of the grand attempt of science to "remov[e] the physical and technical barriers to perfection."[32]

Strauss by contrast denied the possibility of a "technical" solution to the problem of politics. Not less importantly, not only did he refuse to advocate, but he also questioned the immediate efficacy of philosophical ideas within politics and society at large—and indeed questioned the desirability of such interaction. Reading Thucydides hence helped Strauss to forcefully present his conviction that "while the thinker can fully understand political life, he cannot guide political life."[33] There are no universally applicable solutions and "political wisdom" can only be articulated through the narration and presentation of the partial,

incomplete, antagonistic, and unpredictable character of politics. Like his interpretations of Plato's *Republic*, Strauss's commentaries and seminars on Thucydides are a critique of political idealism. Plato's *Republic* in Strauss's reading is one of the most forceful anti-utopias in Western intellectual history. Similarly, Strauss's Thucydides captures the specificity of politics as a realm in its own right, a realm of both human excellence and misery, of both sheer chance and human action, of authority and anarchy. For Strauss, like for Thucydides, the realm of politics can neither be reduced to any other categories nor eliminated—as for instance Strauss believed his contemporary political outlooks, such as liberalism or communism, or theoretical approaches such as behavioralism were attempting to do.

In his critique of contemporary political thought, Strauss turned, characteristically of the antihistoricist currents having their intellectual roots in interwar debates, to the past itself, its very "sources." While the conventional historical scholarship that had sought to familiarize its subject matter through the presumption of continuity and interpret the past through the prism of the present, Strauss emphasized the unfamiliarity of the past as a potential to open up entirely new perspectives, as well as used the past as a measure for the present. And in contrast to Strauss's contemporary historians, his Thucydides knew and showed us that the past is never merely past.

Notes

1. Strauss (1959), p. 57.
2. Ibid.
3. Strauss discussed historicism in many places in his written work, including Strauss (1936), pp. 79–107; (1946a); (1956); (1978); (1952), pp. 158–60.

4. These essays are Strauss (1964), (1989), and (1974).
5. L. Strauss, lecture I, "Thucydides," audiofile, 1972/3, St. John's College, Annapolis, 1 h, 12ff min, available: http://leostrausscenter.uchicago.edu/course/thucydides-1972-73-st-john%E2%80%99s-college-annapolis, viewed 16.02.2013.
6. Ibid.
7. See esp. Strauss (1946a); (1959), pp. 57, 63–8, 70–7. For Strauss's criticism of anachronistic and revivalist readings, see his reviews: Strauss (1946b), p. 122; (1941), p. 391; (1950).
8. Strauss (1949), p. 25.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid. Cf. (1952), pp. 156–60.
11. A good example for this is Strauss's review on Collingwood's Philosophy of History (Strauss (1951/2), esp. pp. 580–1). Cf. (1946a), pp. 330–331, and (1952), pp. 155–7.
12. Strauss (1952), esp. pp. 158–62. Cf. (1959).
13. See esp. lecture III.
14. On justice and necessity in politics, see esp. lecture I and XIV.
15. Strauss gives these examples in lecture I and XIV. Cf. (1964), p. 145.
16. Lecture I, min. 4ff.
17. Strauss (1964), p. 218.
18. Ibid., p. 160.
19. Lecture XIV.
20. Lecture V.
21. Lecture II, 20ff min.
22. Lecture II, 20ff min.
23. Strauss (1964), p. 146.
24. Ibid.
25. Strauss discussed Thucydides's judgement on Nicias and his role in the Sicilian expedition at length in lecture XII, 35ff min, and lecture XVII, 25ff min.
26. Ibid.
27. Esp. lecture XIV.

28. For charges of anachronism and revivalism, see Pippin (1997), p. 141. For an opposing understanding of Strauss's relation to the problem of history, see Tarcov (1983). Tarcov rightly points out that Strauss's own reading of the history of tradition would not have been possible without the insight that all knowledge and thought always presupposes a horizon—the insight formulated by radical historicism that Strauss often deplored (p. 8).
29. This is particularly evident in Strauss's correspondence with his former fellow students, see esp. his correspondence with Hans-Georg Gadamer from 1961, published as Gadamer and Strauss (1978).
30. Strauss (1936), pp. 101–2, 34. Cf. (1965), pp. 226–9.
31. See esp. Strauss (1936), p. 106 and ch. 8.
32. Gunnell (1993), p. 143.
33. Strauss (1989), p. 99.

CHAPTER 5

The Power and Politics of Ontology

Christine Lee

Introduction

Readers of Thucydides come to the *History* with a variety of preoccupations and purposes. Notwithstanding their differences, modern readers converge in the belief that Thucydides offers crucial ontological insights. These universally valid truths about human nature and the nature of politics constitute one reason why the text is a possession for all time. That these permanent Thucydidean truths have consequences for contemporary judgments about the good, the right, and the useful explains why the text is a possession for *our* time.

It is certainly the case that Thucydides, as he is typically translated, issues no objection to being so used. Indeed, the *History* is littered with observations on human nature and tendencies, not to mention Thucydides's assured confidence that the past is fated to recur precisely because of what humans are.[1] So it is no wonder that readers, regardless of their disciplinary origins and temporal context, commonly invoke Thucydides as an

ontological authority. Nevertheless, I want to suggest that doing so poses serious problems, not only because it leads to flawed readings of the *History,* but also more importantly because it militates against the political and ethical conclusions it is meant to uphold. If Thucydides is complicit in his own appropriation as a purveyor of transhistorical and invariable truths, then he has laid a trap for unsuspecting readers.

In this chapter, I attempt to illustrate why this is so by examining a few paradigmatic readings from contemporary political and international relations theory. Within this broad range of work, I examine realist and Straussian engagements with Thucydides. My central argument is twofold. To begin with, these readings either explicitly or implicitly interpret Thucydides as making ontological assertions about the nature of human existence and of politics as such. In other words, Thucydides gives us presumptive truths, foundational givens upon which to construct principles for ordering and governing political life. Despite the self-evident quality of these Thucydidean truths, the internal tensions evident in these readings suggest that using the *History* to develop and reason on the basis of ontological claims holds underappreciated risks. I proceed by way of addressing two sets of questions. First, what are the ontological theses that realist and Straussian readings extrapolate from Thucydides? What functions do these ontological suppositions serve in their respective traditions of reading? What inferences do they make possible and compelling, and what problems do they solve? Second, what are some of the intellectual, political, and ethical problems with reading the *History* in terms of its putative ontological arguments?

Before I begin, I want to say a few words about what I mean by ontological and how I am conceptualizing these traditions of political thought. My use of the term ontology and its derivatives

largely accords with Stephen White's notion of "strong ontologies," which "claim to show us 'the way the world is,' or how God's being stands to human being, or what human nature is."[2] Most of the authors I examine do not use the term ontological, although they regularly use a related term, nature. I consider their statements about nature ontological rather than empirical by virtue of their claim to be transhistorical and transcultural, in short, constitutive of the permanent and essential features of human and political life. Such descriptions act as theoretical premises rather than hypotheses subject to systematic empirical adjudication.[3] To be clear, my contention is that all the readers I examine extract and make use of ontological claims from the *History*, *not* that they are sincere adherents of them. One can invoke nature and make ontological assertions for rhetorical or political purposes without actually believing in their truth-value.

As for the two groups of thinkers featured in this chapter, I focus on a few readings of Thucydides representative of each. My aim is not to explicate the readings in all their complexity, but rather to consider their congruencies in order to draw out some salient implications for the way we read Thucydides in particular and texts and politics more generally. For this purpose, I differentiate the readings on the basis of their dominant themes and political commitments, that is, whether they are primarily interested in expounding a doctrine of political realism or negotiating the dynamic tension between justice and compulsion. While realist and Straussian readings of the *History* can be differentiated on the basis of their substantive claims and interpretive strategies, the line between them is also permeable and contestable. And as this chapter argues, Straussian readings can be seen as offering a more sophisticated, albeit equally problematic, understanding of realism.

Realism's Ideal of Rational Prudence

Thucydides has long been considered an expositor—and the father—of realism. He is, in the words of Gregory Crane, "the first 'realist' thinker in international relations." Modern realists continue to privilege the *History* as "the first serious text on international relations and the founding document of" classical realism.[4] According to realists, Thucydides discloses two things. First, he reveals the basic truth of human behavior, namely the pursuit of self-interest, typically defined in terms of security and power. Robert Gilpin, who sees Thucydides as espousing a universal view of human nature, is paradigmatic of this kind of ontological reading. Gilpin's main claim is that Thucydides is the first to articulate a theory of hegemonic war, which locates the cause of conflict in the "uneven growth of power among states." Despite Gilpin's structural focus, he finds Thucydides's theory of hegemonic war to be rooted in an unchanging conception of human nature, driven by the "three fundamental passions—interest, pride, and above all else, fear" invoked by the Athenian envoys at Sparta. These inexorable human passions cause history to repeat itself and, in large part, underwrite the universal dynamics and "unalterable nature" of interstate political relations.[5]

Human passions are able to exert such power because of the permissive condition of anarchy, which is the second important truth disclosed by Thucydides. The *History,* realists argue, demonstrates the consequences of an anarchic world, which lacks any centralized authority to ameliorate the natural state of war between egoistic actors. Michael Doyle, who sees realists as "united in a set of views about reality," identifies anarchy as a core realist premise. Realist insights about politics thus stem from two ontological contentions: the constancy of human nature and the

continuity of anarchy. Doyle, who pays homage to Thucydides's "complex realism," nevertheless attributes to him realism's foundational premises about human and political nature. He writes: "Thucydides belongs to the Realists. They belong to him."[6]

As the first and decisive codification of realist insights, Thucydides's *History* holds crucial lessons for modern realists. The move from Thucydides's ontological truths to moral and political conclusions is swift; for the alleged facts of anarchy and self-interested human nature decidedly shape political expectations and normative judgments. By diminishing prospects for peace and cooperation, these ontological truths render a politics guided by robust values and virtues naively utopian, if not suicidal. Realist ontology thus constrains political and ethical possibilities. Although Doyle insists that Thucydides's realism does not preclude morality, he contends that anarchy entails the weakness of moral norms and the dangers of principled behavior. Assuming state survival is a value, anarchy issues an imperative to rational strategic action. Realists such as Doyle see Thucydides as outlining a political ethic: states ought to make judgments on the basis of material power rather than moral aspiration. The guiding thread of sustainable statecraft is clear-eyed prudence, not a commitment to justice. Thucydides demonstrates that "rational unitary action was a goal and key to survival in an anarchic world," and given the constancy of anarchy and human nature, this is an enduring lesson for statesmen everywhere.[7]

The conventional realist reading of Thucydides attempts to build a science or ethic of statecraft upon claims about anarchy and the nature of humans or anthropomorphic states. Yet this kind of ontological realism quickly runs aground. Without offering an exhaustive account of everything that is wrong with realism, let me simply survey the primary flaws and inconsistencies

that threaten its essential intelligibility. These inconsistencies also reveal realism to be a failed normative project.

Of course, if we rely solely on Gilpin's account of Thucydides, we would never claim that realism explains anything, at least not in a way that would meet strict scientific standards for causal explanation. If Thucydides offers a realist understanding of war, Gilpin acknowledges that it is profoundly limited in terms of the kind of phenomena it can accommodate and the specific predictions it can make. More problematic is the fact that Thucydidean realism is necessarily post hoc and unfalsifiable. Put simply, it is always a story told after the fact and can never be disproven. Gilpin, however, still refers to Thucydides's realism as a theory, one that aids understanding.[8] Doyle, although also conceding the limits of realism's rigor, goes further. He insists that realists from Thucydides to contemporary IR scholars, despite their differences, do aspire to a law-like explanation, even if it does not meet the standards of science. He speaks of realists as seeking "generalization" and having "scientific goals."[9] In that spirit Thucydides offers "empirical lessons."[10] That realists generally speak in similar ways suggests that Doyle is more representative than Gilpin on the nature, parameters, and intentions of realist explanation. Lest realists' own admissions about their scientific limits encourage laxity and complacency on the part of their appraisers, we should note that realists still claim to explain the essential features of political life.

So how does this proto-scientific realism hold up? Doyle rightly emphasizes that realism is not monolithic, but in trying to give a unified account of realism across its myriad manifestations, he inadvertently betrays three crucial problems. First is the sin of conceptual looseness. Realists—in their own accounts and in Doyle's meta-account—regularly fudge the distinction between

premises and conclusions, ontological and empirical statements, empirical and normative inferences, and so on. The analytical slippage is so severe that often one can no longer tell what's meant to be a theoretical presupposition, a descriptive inference, an empirical proposition, or a normative judgment. Second is realism's shifting explanandum or, in layman's terms, what realism seeks to explain. Insofar as different kinds of realism seek to explain different outcomes, Doyle's shifts simply register that fact. Nevertheless, this instability with regard to the dependent variable is manifest even *within* Doyle's account of Thucydides's realism. We can actually distil three explananda: (Y1) why war persists or why international relations is necessarily a state of war characterized by "mutual mistrust and a concern with the balance of power"; (Y2) why a particular war takes place, for example, the Peloponnesian War; and (Y3) why a state behaves in a certain way or why a specific outcome occurs, for example, why Athens lost.[11] If what realism accounts for is a moving target, then what does the accounting is a free for all. For the third problem that Doyle makes obvious is that in complex realism, everything counts as a potential explanans. Contra Gilpin, he sees Thucydides's realism as open-ended and inclusive of explanantia at all levels of analysis: human nature, domestic politics, and international structure.[12] What makes a particular independent, that is, explanatory, variable realist Doyle does not say.

Realist imprecision and confusion should command our attention, and not for trivial reasons or because of excessive fastidiousness. At stake is realism's basic coherence and meaning. Doyle's meta-narrative and his account of Thucydides's complex realism unwittingly demonstrate that "realist explanation" is only dubiously either. However, rather than immediately forsaking or fixing realism, we ought to ask what such fundamental flaws signify.

Does realism fail in ways that tell us something important? I want to argue that it does. Realism's imprecision and inconsistencies betray meaningful patterns that reveal its essential normativity. That is to say, realism is at its root a reformative political ethic and educative project, though grounded in ontological truths that ultimately cannot sustain that project. This normative orientation is best disclosed by examining the role and significance of rationality in Doyle's Thucydidean realism.

Doyle isolates two different positions in his reading of Thucydides. The first is that states act in their rational strategic interest: "with the striking exception of Alcibiades, individual leaders throughout the Peloponnesian War acted in the name of the public interest and through their control over state resources."[13] The second is that states (read: statesmen) act irrationally and imprudently much of the time, as evidenced in post-Periclean Athens. So according to Doyle, Thucydides's realism explains why states are strategically rational most of the time as well as why they are irrational some of the time. Using our earlier terminology, Thucydides's realism accounts for Y1 and Y3.[14]

But if we take a closer look, it becomes clear that Doyle only offers a realist explanation for Y1, which he implicitly construes as normatively optimal rational behavior. To explicate Athenian imprudence and eventual defeat (Y3), he turns to *nonrealist* explanations. And he must do this because of the normative limits of realist ontology, for the Thucydidean realism that Doyle outlines can at most explain the pervasiveness of calculative strategic action. Realism's ontological presumptions about human nature and anarchy explain why states are preoccupied with relative power and often find it reasonable to opt for warfare. Strictly speaking, ontological realism is agnostic on outcomes; it merely issues forth an expectation that human nature and anarchy

cocreate an environment productive of a wide range of behavior, from defensive cautiousness to imperial aggrandizement. Violent conflagration is an ever-present possibility, but whether a particular policy, action, or war is optimally rational or not is neither here nor there.

But this is not Doyle's story, and neither is it the conventional realist one. Doyle's understanding of Athens's defeat, it turns out, is not at all realist. It is certainly possible to offer one on the basis of Thucydides, assuming one has no investment in whether realism is an ethic. One might well claim that the mix of fear, honor, and profit in an anarchic milieu explains Athenian success as much as her failure. This is undoubtedly too vague to be helpful, but it has the virtue of consistency and coherence. Notwithstanding the term "complex realism," Doyle actually offers a host of nonrealist reasons for Athens's defeat, most of them related to democratic politics. And he has to make this move precisely because he conflates rational with optimal. This implicit normative judgment accounts for a typical pattern discernible in realist readings of political life and canonical texts. Realist explanations are offered to account for good outcomes, in which states acted as if they were strategic and prudential units, and nonrealist explanations are offered to explain pathological deviations from rational strategic calculation. For realists, rationality is as much normative as descriptive. And the need to revert to nonrealist explanations for irrational behavior indicates the extent to which realist explanations are in service of normative ends.

What realists do not realize is that their ontological presuppositions cannot sustain a normative commitment to rationality. This problem manifests clearly in realist readings of Thucydides. According to Gilpin, Thucydides sees human irrationality as intransigent. Human nature is "unchanging" and driven by

insatiable passions: humans "always seek to increase their wealth and power until other humans, driven by like passions, try to stop them." Knowledge cannot "change the fundamental nature of human behaviour or of international relations."[15] Doyle too concedes irrationality, which raises the question: on what basis can realists expect the kind of rational behaviour they counsel? If Thucydides's characters illustrate the grip of destructive human passions, then surely the *History* casts doubt upon the psychological resources necessary for political prudence. A realism built upon the ontological premises of Thucydides can neither uphold a descriptive inference about rational behavior nor sustain a normative politics of rationality.

Realists may want to erect an ethic of moderation, yet they underestimate the extent to which their ontological arguments undermine this objective. As Peter Ahrensdorf argues, the assertion of anarchy—in effect a "state of nature" in which states can appeal to no higher authority—is not simply a *contingent* observation about the state of politics, that *as of yet* there is no "effective world government." It is a "far-reaching theoretical claim about the human condition and indeed about the nature of the world." It is, Ahrensdorf continues, "tantamount to asserting that there are no moral laws with teeth in them . . . no gods or God who enforce moral laws and who thereby rule over human beings."[16] To slightly rephrase Ahrensdorf, the presumption of anarchy entails a significant ontological commitment. The assertion that reality is constituted by anarchy is implicated in a metaphysics that denies the existence of moral and divine authority. Built into realist ontology is a denial of the power of morality over human volition and action.

In a similar vein, Steven Forde questions contemporary realism's belief that its ontological premises accommodate rather than

vitiate an ethic of moderation. From Forde we can infer that arguments about nature are always complicit in exoneration, and that the category of necessity—which derives its force from ontological claims about the human and political—threatens the very possibility of ethical judgment. The classical realism of Thucydides and Machiavelli, Forde argues, underscores the degree to which the appeal to compulsion and necessity subverts moral restraint. Forde's exposition of classical realism not only serves as a reminder that human nature mediates the effect, significance, and response to anarchy (and therefore calls our attention to implicit presumptions about human nature). It also intimates that human nature partly constitutes our values and substantive judgments about what goods to pursue, including the content of national interest, and hence "prospects for stable peace or order."[17] Forde provocatively suggests that, in some respects: "If human beings are simply beasts, there is no reason why they should not live by the law of the jungle."[18] In so doing, he enunciates a common Straussian argument about the full implications of invoking natural compulsion, namely that the fact of compulsion—whether arising from anarchy, human nature, or a combination of the two—exonerates. "Justification or exoneration," Forde maintains in the midst of his account of Euphemus at Camarina, "is a principal purpose of realist argument."[19]

Doyle is not completely blind to the rhetorical dimensions of realism. In his narration of Thucydides, he emphasizes that Spartan fear was a product not only of Athenian power, but also of Sthenalaidas's rhetorical strategy and his evocation of a sense of honor.[20] Yet Doyle appears to miss the upshot of this observation, namely its suggestion that things such as fear, interest, and honor are mediated by politics and that strategic necessity is always embedded in a rhetorical and political contest. Thucydides's

speeches, which illume such contests with great poignancy, puncture the self-evident and brute quality of nature and necessity. In sidestepping the rhetorical, conjectural, and political, Doyle seems unaware of how these essentially subjective and intersubjective aspects of necessity might destabilize his own moral judgments about Sicily and Melos. At first, Doyle seems to shy away from moral judgment altogether, warning us not to infer from the outcome of the Sicilian Expedition its moral status; we cannot say it "was morally wrong because it was strategically counterproductive" or make judgments about Melos because it is followed by the Sicilian disaster in Thucydides's narrative. Bracketing the fact that such judgments are, as argued above, embedded in the very architecture of explanatory realism, Doyle immediately proceeds to make the very judgments he enjoins his reader against. He does so by invoking necessity. Contra Pericles's moderate strategy of attrition, "the Sicilian expedition was a simple waste of resources, a looting expedition chosen by a divided, contentious, self-interested Assembly." Likewise, Athens's brutal slaughter of the Melians "was not clearly necessary . . . For Thucydides, necessary violence in a strategically valuable conquest was excusable, but Sicily and Melos were neither." Doyle reads Thucydides as showing how "[a]uthentic security excuse[s] moral blame," as if authentic security and strategic necessity were objective facts rather than contestable political and ethical judgments.[21] Forde reminds us that every rhetorical and political deployment of necessity—rooted in arguments about nature—is simultaneously an assertion of moral justification. Every invocation, no matter how meritorious, risks eroding the foundations of moral judgment altogether. Rather than sustaining moderation, realist ontology poses a radical challenge to ethics.

It proves no less problematic for democracy. Although realists typically focus on interstate relations at the expense of domestic

politics, their judgments about the former have implications for the latter. Doyle's realism presumes that one can reason from ontological truths to judgments about right action. Knowledge about nature is thus essential to political knowledge, for prudential action hinges on insights into the factors that motivate human behavior and the conditions of political life. To the extent that this sort of knowledge is hard-earned and only acquired through difficult study, detached observation, and practical experience, it is only available to elite statespersons or the exceptional philosopher-cum-political thinker.

The notion that rational political action ought to be deduced from the ontological truths of realism, accessible only to the discerning minds of great statesmen, is profoundly in tension with democratic principles and politics. Doyle's claim that the *History* teaches statespersons to preserve security suggests that his Thucydidean ideal of rational unitary action is achievable only under a Pericles. In other words, good political judgment and action are attainable only under the rule of the first man, in a nominal democracy (2.65). Indeed, Doyle admits that "[s]tates are not reliably conditioned by the international system to behave rationally and nationally," and that this sort of corporate will necessitates "outstanding leadership" and the "unusual national unity" characteristic of Athens under Pericles or Syracuse under Hermocrates.[22] Far from indicating a moment of democratic consensus, the unified state in realist discourse is a metonym for the very kind of political leadership that can override the characteristic divisions of democracy.

In realist accounts, strong political leadership is what sustains optimally rational state behavior. On the flip side, democracy is the source of every single threat to rational prudence. In particular, it fuels the factionalism and expansionary tendencies that

subvert unified action on behalf of state security and integrity. Consider the judgments about democracy in Doyle's appraisal of Athenian politics. Democracy, Doyle observes, is an obvious source of state power. Nevertheless, democracy's shifting majorities shape and reshape "public goals and visions," producing myriad imperial impulses geared toward the pursuit of glory, adventure, commercial expansion, and cultural domination. In this sense, Sicily is paradigmatic of "democratic tragedy," not because it demonstrates the perversion of healthy democracy, but because it suggests that the very process of democracy as institutionalized instability is antithetical to prudential action.[23] Insofar as realism's normative ideal of "rational, national, strategic calculation" is contingent upon "both domestic and international circumstances," Doyle's reading of Thucydides emphasizes that these circumstances are ones that contain and constrain democracy's intrinsic vices, ones implicitly fated by the permanent reality of self-aggrandizement.[24] In short, realism presupposes that democracy is a source of trouble; its practices and procedures are only ever a hindrance to, never constitutive of, good political judgment and prudential action.

The realist use of Thucydides to ground ontological claims about human nature and anarchy, it turns out, runs up against crucial limitations. Aside from the sin of ambiguity and imprecision, the realist turn to nonrealist explanations of pathological behaviour go beyond what realism's ontological premises can bear. That this move is required intimates a twofold truth. Realism's ontological premises cannot support its ethical–political project. And realism's ethical–political project is to inculcate the rational action it variously and inconsistently insists is compelled by nature *or* overridden by stronger passions. The contradictions and surrounding context of these ontological claims suggest that ostensible

facts about nature are not offered as disinterested explanations of what the world is like, since a strict account of human passions, as Straussians argue, would actually foreclose the possibility of rational politics. Instead, ontological arguments are meant to help define the parameters of political life and the content of appropriate behaviour, including what constitutes rational prudence. In other words, ontological statements provide a solution to the problem of distributing authority and ordering politics.[25] The mistake of political realists is the failure to perceive the full implication of these ontological arguments, not least their corrosive effect on ethical and political moderation.

Transgressions, Compulsions, and the Straussian Cure

Theoretical premises about the essential nature of human and political life are just as central to Straussian readings of Thucydides, which can be seen as a revision rather than rejection of realist insights. The category of nature features prominently in Leo Strauss's seminal reading of Thucydides in *The City and Man*. He sees the singularity of the Peloponnesian War as a source of universal wisdom about "the nature of all human things," the "limits of all human things."[26] This Thucydidean wisdom is the reason for the *History's* unending timeliness.[27] There is no expiration date for Thucydidean insight because the character of human life remains the same. And it does so because truths about nature, including the nature of man, are eternal. "Thucydides," Strauss writes, "sees human nature as the stable ground of all its effects—of war and peace, barbarism and Greekness, civic concord and discord, sea-power and land-power, the few and the many."[28] Put differently, human nature grounds the contours of social life, generating the phenomena and categories constitutive of politics.

If Strauss's reading of the *History* foregrounds nature and the political limits imposed by it, later readings influenced by Strauss concur with the judgment that nature defines the purview and tasks of politics. Clifford Orwin, for instance, notes that for Thucydides,

> the gravest problems of politics . . . attest to the power of *nature* in human life, opposing and overwhelming that of convention. It is the natural frailty of the human body and the natural ambition and vindictiveness of the human soul which combine to nourish stasis; this explains why it remains a permanent possibility . . . The political task accordingly remains the suppression of nature (in part through the enlisting of its power).[29]

Orwin's argument exemplifies the central place of nature in Straussian readings of Thucydides.[30] Nature is the master drive that determines the character and purpose of politics. Accordingly, one of the *History's* primary insights is how nature as rule of the stronger limits what is ethically and politically possible within interstate relations. This uncomfortable fact of nature also constitutes a perennial problem for cohesion within civic communities. While the first contention sounds like realism, the second indicates a point of departure. As Ahrensdorf puts it, Thucydides accepts theoretical realism—that is, the conventional account of anarchy and self-regarding human nature, but rejects political realism—a politics rooted in the rational pursuit of self-interest.[31]

Straussian readings of Thucydides reveal two reasons for this. First, the *History* gives an account of human nature in which the pursuit of power and self-interest is only one aspect. Thucydides may show politics as the rule of the stronger and reveal the weakness of justice, but he also shows how, paradoxically, human nature resists this truth and struggles irrationally against natural

limits. In the pages of the *History*, the power of moral and religious passion and the recalcitrance of human nature are undeniable.[32] Thucydides illuminates the human longing for transcendence or, in negative terms, the general law of transgression rooted in the natural impulse to move beyond established boundaries. For all its veracity, the most narrowly reductionist realism hews to a truncated view of human motivation, blind to the pious hopes and noble strivings rippling beneath the surface of even the most resolute and calculated will to power. The push and pull of irrational terrors and hopeful longings kindle a politics of overreaching and self-destruction. By underestimating the sway of such pregnant hopes, this sort of realism profoundly underestimates the irrationality of human nature.

Although Straussians see Thucydides as problematizing realism's oft-curtailed understanding of human motivation, they do not challenge the truth of natural aggrandizement. Nevertheless, they see Thucydides as revealing the limits of political realism by narrating the pathological consequences of that truth. The realist understanding of nature and compulsion, which exonerates the rule of the strong, undermines the common good. The Athenian thesis, as expressed at 1.76, threatens the integrity of both diplomacy and domestic politics.[33] Political realism, which would harness the truth of nature, knows not until too late that it unleashes forces destructive of justice, citizenship, the common good, and the conventions that make political community sustainable. In short, political realism subverts its own ideal of the unitary state. The pathological consequences of the truth of natural aggrandizement, in tandem with a more encompassing vision of human nature that recognizes the intransigence of irrational compulsions, lead Straussians to see Thucydides as counseling a politics of piety rather than a frank politics of rational realism.

Insofar as Straussians adopt the position that Thucydides is a theoretical realist who accepts the essential facts of anarchy and human compulsion as decisive, they are subject to Forde's critique that their ontological commitments are antithetical to ethics. Indeed, the recognition that the appeal to necessity and compulsion has justificatory power is precisely why Straussians are so troubled by the Athenian thesis—or at least its proclamation. It is why Straussians reject political realism. The Athenian thesis gives birth to overweening, self-destructive ambitions; claims about compulsion ground both Athenian imperialism and Alcibiades's will to power. Straussian readings suggest that one cannot accept the Athenian thesis and its claims about natural compulsion without coming to terms with the permanence of imperial and tyrannical politics.

Nevertheless, Straussians are more optimistic in their political hopes. They see an account of human transgression as compatible with a politics of moderation and gentleness.[34] Consider this analogous to the tension between realists' account of the human passions and a commitment to a politics of rational prudence. This position appears plausible enough since the *History* shows us that ontological arguments undergird a variety of sensibilities and substantive political positions. Claims about what humans and states are like are marshalled on behalf of both an imperial politics of transgression and self-restraint. The shrewd Diodotus and Hermocrates strike a gentler chord than the excessively frank Athenian envoys at Sparta or Melos. Their differences suggest that the fact of compulsion is, in practice, ethically and politically indeterminate. Indeed, for Straussians Diodotus shows how the truth of human compulsion, including the irrational longings of the ever hopeful, lends itself to something like benevolence. Diodotus's speech is a rhetorical minefield, but it is clear

that his invocation of human compulsion—which Straussians see as reflective of Thucydides's views—is meant to secure a more humane and moderate policy toward Mytilene.

Yet Diodotus only succeeds at the cost of violating his own claims about the intransigence of human passions and the invariable law of transgression. In so doing, he calls attention to the rhetoric and politics of his account of human nature. Diodotus inadvertently illustrates the fact that an account of human nature in which compulsion is definitive can only buttress a politics of restraint by surreptitiously appealing to the rationality it denies or severely marginalizes. Gerald Mara points out the performative contradiction at play in Diodotus's speech, the tension between his substantive account of an irrationally compulsive human nature and his performative practice that presupposes the opposite. For Diodotus arguably enacts a rational and reflective politics.[35]

Building on Mara's observation, we can argue that Diodotus's ontological strategy is intended to work partly through logical inference. And the reasoning goes something like this: X (transgression) is universal nature; ergo Y (compassion) is the appropriate passion to feel, and Z (restraint) is the appropriate action. Diodotus thus calls upon the inevitability of human transgression to justify a political ethic of moderation and to delegitimize a politics of retribution. What he is doing cuts against the intransigence of irrationality.[36] We can read Diodotus in one of two ways. We could say that he contradicts his own substantive ontological claims, which would be unsurprising since he tells his audience to expect deception. Or we can read him as adhering to a dialectical view of nature, for he implicitly presumes that rational reflection on nature can ameliorate the passions.[37] Thinking about what human nature is like can change human nature. Ontological claims are self-negating rather than self-fulfilling prophecies.

Either way, an account of human nature in which compulsion and transgression are central cannot support a politics of prudence and moderation without nullifying itself.

Straussians might admit this to be true but only temporarily so. Diodotus pulls the tendrils of passion carefully apart, allowing a small ray of reason to flit through. As soon as the vote is over, the tendrils snap back into place. The window of opportunity for reason to override passion is again closed, and Diodotus's victory short-lived. The fact of human compulsion reasserts itself, as nature invariably does.[38] Yet the role of reason and judgment loom larger than this story admits. For if we attend to Diodotus's argument, it is unclear why either compassion or indignation is the proper response to the fact of compulsion. Why does the reality of transgression necessitate moral accommodation? Diodotus's politics may be construed as emotional manipulation, but there is also a rational, normatively robust undercurrent running through his rhetorical acrobatics. That is, even if one reduces Diodotean politics to a manipulation of his listeners' irrational inclinations, one is still left with the fact that the Straussian account of the basis of his politics is completely rational and presumptive of certain goods.

We might say that Straussian politics takes Diodotean and Thucydidean wisdom to illuminate a path to moderation, one that would make use of natural piety to quell natural transgression. But what is crucial to note is not that Diodotus acts to oppose one master passion against another, but that he seems to represent the rule of reason aiming to assuage certain problematic passions for good.[39] Diodotean wisdom intends more than the temporary suspension of these passions; it is meant to inoculate us against their toxic hold, to mitigate their pathological effects. Orwin characterizes Diodotus's speech as a cure for the hypocritical

indignation that others would be so contemptuous of our good to pursue their own. Likewise, by showing the city as vulnerable to the convulsions of tempestuous passions, Diodotus strips the city of its allure. Contra Pericles's eroticization of democratic Athens, "[t]he city as Diodotus presents it ceases to command our reverence."[40] The effect of Diodotus's speech is to temper the hopeful longings that blind political actors to the reality of power, to mollify the moral rage that so frequently fuels vengeful, destructive justice. The Straussian predilection for Diodotus thus turns out to involve a politics with its own hopeful longings. For Diodotus's speech-act is meant to weaken the compulsive tendencies he claims to be natural and intransigent.[41]

We should focus on two aspects of the Straussian preoccupation with Diodotus. First is the fact that his speech shows how the general law of transgression cannot ground a moderate politics without calling itself into question. Second is the normative significance of this fact, namely that assertions about unavoidable transgression are deployed as part of a rational and prudential politics intending to lessen transgression. The Straussian account of Diodotus is deeply rooted in a normative ideal of rationality. Diodotus's speech is meant to be curative of the political passions it depicts as invariable. It is prescriptive in the most profound sense.

Like realists, Straussians are also engaged in a pedagogical project of tempering political passions, which explains their shared attempts to distinguish between rational and true compulsions and necessities on the one hand, and irrational and pseudo-necessities on the other. Strauss is the first to recognize why the distinction is required. His awareness that the truth of compulsion, as articulated by the Athenian envoys, justifies infinite expansion is immediately followed by the insistence that "there are different kinds of compulsion."[42] Orwin, who sees how problematic most

formulations of the Athenian thesis are, attempts to delineate these differences. In so doing, he differentiates between clear and putative compulsions, "rational necessities and superfluities."[43] Forde makes a similar distinction, noting how Athens ultimately failed to meet the "true standard of realist rationality." He goes on to say that, for Thucydides, "true realist prudence would bow to those realist necessities of international politics that are genuinely unavoidable."[44]

Yet the demarcation between genuine versus pseudo-necessities is arbitrary unless we presuppose a normative hierarchy between rationality and passionate impulses as well as something about the value of political community, which is ultimately rooted in an account of human needs and human goods. That is to say, the invocation of "true" rationality and necessity implicitly relies upon a host of metaphysical commitments beyond the simple formidable fact of human compulsion and transgression. Take Forde's concern to safeguard the "genuine moral achievement represented by the domestic politics of civilized communities" against realist pressures.[45] One can agree with Forde, while recognizing that he begs the question. He gives no account of why we should value political community and on what basis we can label something a genuine moral achievement or a true necessity. Forde astutely observes that realism, taken to its logical conclusion, not only excuses immorality, but also sees "no reason even to deplore this state of affairs."[46] This impeccable logic is equally pertinent to Straussian politics. It leads us to ask about the external commitments—which would enlist piety in its service—that would motivate and justify our hopeful resistance against the political manifestations of the natural law of transgression.

Realists and Straussians appear to suffer from the same faults. Both are committed to normative ideals that cannot be sustained

by their explicitly stated ontological premises. These ontological contentions are governed primarily by normative rather than explanatory commitments. Nevertheless, realist and Straussian accounts of human nature and politics are corrosive of the ideals of moral restraint and political moderation they are meant to sustain. The subtle reversion to rational necessity, though part of an ethical pedagogical project, takes for granted undefended, contestable judgments about human and political goods. As a consequence, any invocation of rationality smacks of arbitrariness.

In addition to obfuscating the grounds for critical ethical judgments, realists and Straussians give an account of human nature and politics that demands political elitism and the attenuation of democracy. Orwin argues that safeguarding real necessity and erecting bulwarks against pseudonecessity requires "a sound regime" such as Sparta or Chios, Periclean "stewardship," or Diodotean politics. The second is, according to Thucydides, a nominal democracy, and the third, to the extent that it relies primarily upon deception, undermines any prospect for rational deliberative democracy. As in the realist account, the Straussian idolization of Diodotus and Hermocrates carries with it judgments about the rarity of rational prudence and the almost superhuman restraint characteristic of those few elites capable of deciphering true necessity and reigning in democratic impulses.

Once again, the passions are associated with the regime of democracy. While this association operates at a metaphorical level, Straussian readings of the Mytilene Debate also suggest a more precise relationship. Here Thucydides offers a portrait of human nature that suggests the impossibility of rational deliberation and the need for antidemocratic deception. Both Mara and Saxonhouse direct our attention to how egoistic passions pose a problem for deliberative politics. Mara concludes from Diodotus's

speech that the passions undermine thoughtful rationality and judgment. On this reading, Diodotus sees "psychological" forces as "the greatest impediments to healthy deliberative institutions." Though his practice presumes otherwise, his understanding of the passions militates against any notion of educability.[47] Mara's Diodotus sees two threats to deliberative rationality, and both implicate human nature. The first is the human passions, and the second are the "political and cultural practices that foster competitions and jealousies poisonous to collective deliberation." The assembly, as a practice, exacerbates the natural passions so antithetical to judgment.[48]

Saxonhouse's analysis of democratic politics in Thucydides gives equal pride of place to human nature. She observes that the characteristic uncertainty of political deliberation is a problem because it must rely upon unreliable, biased, and even deceptive speech. Yet this conclusion about the dangers of democratic speech actually hinges on ontological claims about human nature. It is self-regarding, impassioned human nature, perhaps ineluctably driven by the will to power, that makes communal political action so problematic. Successful deliberation, Saxonhouse notes, "requires an awareness of human nature," specifically "sensitivity to [its] faults." Although Saxonhouse foregrounds the uncertainty of *logoi* as the crucial political problem, the defects of speech are derivative from the fact of "prejudiced and self-interested individuals."[49] Thucydides's "awareness of human nature" is concomitant with an awareness that speakers, "motivated by self-interest," "do not always aim at the truth."[50] Like Mara, Saxonhouse suggests that self-regarding irrational passions threaten political rationality and democratic prospects. The realist-Straussian account of human nature, it seems, disables democratic politics.[51]

That the ontological claims of realists and Straussians pose such essential ethical and political challenges, including the subversion of their own normative ends, calls us to recognize an important truth: ontological statements are practical fictions; nature is not self-fulfilling. Of course, this is something that Straussians acknowledge on a number of occasions. Their readings betray how natural compulsion is mediated by the exercise of political power through speech. No one puts it more cogently than Strauss when he says:

> No political speech ever serves the purpose of revealing the truth as such; every political speech serves a particular political purpose, and it attempts to achieve it by exhorting or dehorting, by accusing or exculpating, by praising or blaming, by importing or refusing.[52]

And he could have added, by appealing to ontological truths. Straussian accounts of the *History's* speeches reveal, wittingly or not, that the appeal to compulsion serves political purposes. Clifford Orwin's critique of a thorough-going realism underscores the elusive and political quality of compulsion. He notes: "What cities face are almost never compulsions strictly speaking."[53] This truth is captured in the locution Orwin uses to narrate the strange activity of Thucydidean characters attempting to compel their audiences to submit to nature. Pericles "exhorts the Athenians to bow to the exigencies of their situation."[54] Diodotus and Hermocrates, too, are characterized as "preaching acquiescence in necessity."[55] Diodotus's extended account of compulsion may be more tenable than the envoys', but it is no less interested.

If claims about nature are irrevocably political and normative, their invocation typically conceals that fact. They elide their own politics and preclude contestation and critique. Thucydides's

narrative illustrates the dangers of ontological politics and their inordinate human costs in at least three instances: in the case of the Athenian envoys, Hermocrates, and Diodotus. Mara's critical account of the Athenian envoys at Melos reveals how their claims about nature rest upon a cultural and political substratum.[56] He encourages us to see that ontological claims constitute a deployment of power that must be subject to, even as it resists by definition, critical scrutiny. Hermocrates and Diodotus, likewise, alert us to the ideological dimensions and dangers of ontological invocations. Hermocrates, whose ontological strategies are most transparent, showcases how the passions are mediated by politics. He alleges that allowing fear to work on the imagination constitutes rationality in one instance (4.62–3) and that surrendering to the impulse of glory is appropriate in a later instance (7.21). By exhorting the Sicilians to let fear act upon them and by reminding them of the natural imperative to resist their attackers, he gives the lie to human nature in any strict sense. Hermocrates demonstrates how the passions are mediated by exhortation, reflection, and deliberation. Diodotus, who engages in similar deceptions, suggests the perils of appealing to necessity and nature. He is barely successful at preventing the wholesale slaughter of the Mytileneans, and his rhetorical politics contain ammunition for both the evisceration of democracy and the future annihilation of putative enemies.[57]

What is true of Thucydidean characters who appeal to ontological facts is also true of readers who use the *History* to undergird those selfsame verities. Forde maintains that the upshot of Athenian arguments at Sparta, Melos, and Camarina is that "a social science that discovers 'laws' of behavior [is] a potent political weapon," one that he argues cuts against ethics. By the same token, ontological readings of Thucydides, including Forde's

own reading of Thucydides as conceding "that the Athenian thesis . . . represents a genuine discovery about international politics," are also potent political weapons.[58] For the appeal to permanent truths about humans and politics constitutes a technology of power that distorts its own ethics and politics as well as the grounds for judgment and action. That the wise and unwise, prudent and imprudent alike can appeal to ontology raises the stakes on a politics of piety that undercuts the critical, rational, and reflective practices needed to hold power accountable.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to demonstrate how claims about human nature and the nature of politics are central to realist and Straussian appropriations of Thucydides's *History*. These ontological arguments undergird their prescriptive politics, but also undercut them in various ways. In turn, their political projects often subvert the ontological premises meant to buttress them. Indeed this subversion is intentional insofar as realist and Straussian readings of Thucydides are part of an educative project meant to cultivate rationality and judgment while tempering dangerous political passions.

The central but neglected role of ontological claims in political inquiry and the interpretation of texts calls for further consideration. Readings of Thucydides by contemporary political thinkers show that ontology functions in a few essential ways. First, it performs a lot of justificatory work. Thucydidean ontology is typically read as imposing constraints on moral behavior, at the extreme exonerating all imperial or preemptive politics. Yet, it also accommodates a Diodotean politics that chips away at the grounds for a politics of retribution, though at the intended

expense of negating its account of compulsion and transgression. Crucially, the *History* shows that the turn to nature both provides and removes grounds for justification.

Second, ontology conditions the borders of the possible and probable, including judgments about appropriate political aspiration. It defines the purview and tasks of politics. For realists and Straussians, Thucydides's account of human nature and anarchy limits prospects for deliberative democracy and legitimates elite politics that privilege order and stability. Ontological arguments, even those that seem far removed from domestic politics, therefore have serious implications for the inner workings of a political community. Insofar as we value democracy and take the task of educating judgment seriously, we should be concerned that exploiting ontological truths for the sake of political persuasion constitutes bad democratic and pedagogical practice. There is certainly no shortage of examples in Thucydides of the hazards of rhetorical politics, including those that suggest that ontological strategies are a poor substitute for cultivating judgment and explicit reflection and deliberation over the good.

Finally, the occasions for ontological appeals presuppose the limits of power and nature. Attentiveness to context suggests that ontological claims operate as part of an exercise of power, one that attempts to construct order and authority rather than reveal it. In the *History*, reality, rationality, and interest are ambiguous; material power is not decisive; the grounds of authority are unclear; no obvious criteria of order emerge uncontested from nature. And this, paradoxically, is the occasion for resorting to claims about the obvious nature of reality. One vital function of ontology, it seems, is to provide a normative map of the world. That this map is needed indicates something of the problem ontological arguments are meant to solve. Straussian readings of the

Athenian envoys at Sparta take note of the fact that their speech is used to convey Athenian power.[59] The need to resort to speech attests to the indeterminate quality of materiality. In stressing the envoys' paradoxical invocation of their inability to resist universal compulsion as a demonstration of power, Straussians stumble upon a truth that realists overlook, namely that power is mostly elusive, immaterial, and mediated by human subjectivity and argument. If material power and human nature were decisive, we would never need to appeal to them in speech. Most of the *History's* appeals to ontological truths belie the fiction of any unmediated power or self-fulfilling nature.[60] Thucydides's readers, mimicking his characters, summon nature in order to compel the very affects, ways of thinking, and behaviors that are ostensibly natural.

In the art of reading or in the art of life, it is no doubt impossible and undesirable to bypass metaphysical and ontological commitments altogether. That said, one should be reflective about their provisionality and their politics, as well as the hazards of reification. If the ontological strategies of the *History's* characters show themselves to be dangerous and destructive of an ethical politics, readings of Thucydides that affirm and make political inferences on the basis of these ontological insights take on the same risks. The *History* shows that ontological claims are inextricably political and rhetorical, always articulated in a particular context on behalf of certain interests and conceptions of the good. Ontological strategies help produce the political landscape and subjectivities that act within it. If every way of seeing is a way of not seeing, then every ontological claim is a misdescription of the world, one that risks self-fulfilling prophecy or counterproductive and self-defeating policies. To the extent that ontological claims mask their own constitutive politics and ethics, they destroy

grounds for critical reflection and intentional politics. They thus suggest something of the dangers of treating the *History* as a text that tells us permanent and incontrovertible truths about what human nature and the world are like.

Notes

1. A few places where Thucydides speaks in his own voice might lend itself to a universally valid account of human nature: 1.22, 1.76, 3.82–4, 4.41, 4.108, 7.57. For a critical and incisive account of Thucydides's complex understanding of human nature, see Reeve (1999).
2. White (2000), p. 6.
3. When readers make claims in which all contradictory evidence can be reformulated as affirmative proof, they are—perhaps unwittingly—resorting to ontology. An example would be the statement that all human behavior is self-regarding, in which discordant phenomena like altruism can simply be reformulated as a less obvious assertion of self-interest. I take this sort of infinitely malleable capacity for redescription as reflective of an ontological commitment rather than a provisional commitment to an empirical proposition.
4. Crane (1998), p. 23.
5. Gilpin (1988), pp. 15, 17.
6. Doyle (1997), pp. 43, 53, 81, 91. Realists and their detractors affirm Thucydides's realist credentials and the fact that his realist insights are fundamentally ontological. If Gilpin and Doyle find in Thucydides a commendable realism, Crane (1998) finds in Thucydides a realism that betrays its own limits. Crane's characterization of realism adheres to what I have described above. Political realists, he maintains, emphasize "the constants of human nature [and] society" (p. 295), and Thucydides embodies realism's assumptions about the universal rules governing politics and human behavior. According to Crane, "the belief in a stable and even transcendent human nature runs throughout the *History*" (p. 297), and "Thucydides describes human beings as

products of hard, material forces" that compel them to pursue their advantage (pp. 145–6). This "essential human nature" (p. 13) is what constitutes Thucydides's text as a possession for all time (p. 300).

7. Doyle (1997), pp. 51, 75, 92.
8. See Gilpin (1988), p. 29: "the theory of hegemonic war is a limited and incomplete theory. It cannot easily handle perceptions that affect behaviour and predict who will initiate a hegemonic war. Nor can it forecast when a hegemonic war will occur and what the consequences will be. As in the case of the theory of biological evolution, it helps one understand and explain what has happened; but neither theory can make predictions that can be tested and thereby meet rigorous scientific standard of falsifiability."
9. Doyle (1997), p. 43.
10. Ibid., p. 50.
11. Ibid., p. 81.
12. Ibid., pp. 43, 45, 48, 52–3.
13. Ibid., p. 66.
14. As framed by realists, Y1 and Y3 contradict each other. Y1 includes why states have a strategic preoccupation with the balance of power, and Y3 includes why a particular state fails to attend to strategic considerations about the balance of power. Cf. Doyle (1997), pp. 48, 81. Either the claim is a contestable proposition to be adjudicated empirically or it is a veritable phenomena to be explained. It cannot simultaneously be a contested claim and a confirmed phenomenon in need of explanation.
15. Gilpin (1988), pp. 17–18.
16. Ahrensdorf (1997), p. 238, italics mine.
17. Forde (1995), p. 148.
18. Ibid., p. 146.
19. Ibid., p. 149.
20. Doyle (1997), p. 73.
21. Ibid., pp. 88–90.
22. Ibid., p. 92. See also pp. 64, 75.

23. Ibid., pp. 78–80.
24. Ibid., p. 75.
25. We might argue that contemporary invocations of Thucydidean ontology take their cue from Hobbes's implicit pedagogical project. Like Hobbes, contemporary realists wish to inflame the fear of violent death and release the hold of hope and honor over the human imagination. This single-minded attempt to guarantee civil amity and political order has profound consequences, one of which is to dismiss certain questions, including political philosophy's central question of the best regime. See Ahrensdorf's comparative analysis of Hobbes and Thucydides, which contains a particularly thoughtful treatment of Hobbes's educative project: (2000), pp. 581, 583, 586.
26. Strauss (1964), p. 157.
27. Ibid., p. 159. Strauss maintains that Thucydides's "possession for all time" concerns those things "which are at all times," that is, those things that are permanent features of human life.
28. Strauss (1964), p. 159. Later in the text, Strauss repeats this claim: "For Thucydides bases his claim on behalf of his work on the fact that it brings to light the sempiternal and universal nature of man as the ground of the deeds, the speeches, and the thoughts which it records" (p. 228).
29. Orwin (1994), p. 177, n. 10, italics in original.
30. Cf. Straussian statements on human nature and its relationship to politics. In the *City and Man*, Strauss sees Thucydides as presenting an unchanging human nature that "sets limits to what the city can reasonably attempt": (1964), pp. 228–9. Orwin (1994), p. 5 claims that the paradigmatic quality of the Peloponnesian War and its display of "the limits of political life" depend on the accuracy of Thucydides account of "a permanent human nature." Michael Palmer (1992) similarly writes: "it is important to recognize Thucydides's resignation before the limits of political life imposed by the limits of human nature" (p. 116).

31. Ahrensdorf (1997), p. 233: "Thucydides does agree with two of the basic tenets of both traditional realism and neorealism: namely, the self-interested character of states and the anarchic structure of international politics." Cf. Orwin (1994), p. 195. Nearly two decades earlier, Saxonhouse (1978) offers a reading of Thucydides informed by Strauss's. She claims that Thucydides accepted the sophistic view of human nature, and the condition of anarchy between cities, but was sensitive to the need for *nomoi* rooted in natural and divine authority to ground political communities. That is, Thucydides accepts the truth of realism's ontological premises but sees it as poor politics.
32. Ahrensdorf (1997), pp. 262, 265. Technically, this is a revision rather than rejection of realism because it does not deny the primacy of self-interest. It affirms that cities (and individuals) pursue their own good, but denies their capacity to do so rationally and skilfully.
33. Strauss registers the self-defeating effect of political realism on diplomacy in his critical account of Hermocrates, who fails to see how the appeal to natural aggrandizement justifies Sicilian distrust of Syracusan intentions. See Strauss (1964), pp. 167–8. Likewise, the worrisome effects of political realism on domestic trust is a persistent Straussian refrain. Orwin (1994), pp. 132–3 offers up Alcibiades and Euphemus as pointed and poignant signs of the viral spread of the Athenian thesis. Both characters symptomize the ravages inflicted upon the body politic by the brutal logic of natural aggrandizement. Forde (1995) similarly argues, as does Michael Palmer (1992), p. 154, that "the frank pursuit of self-interest and of power at the expense of other cities . . . came eventually to infect, and then to undermine, the community of the city within." Both read Alcibiades as the logical culmination of the Athenian thesis.
34. Bruell (1974), p. 16 is paradigmatic: "The Athenian thesis is indeed compatible with, and to some extent conducive to, a remarkable gentleness."
35. See Mara (2009), p. 118; (2008), pp. 19, 100.

36. Consider the logical reasoning implied in Orwin's reading: Diodotus "bids us reflect on the consequences" of transgression "as the fundamental human fact" (Orwin (1994), p. 156).
37. For a strong statement of this position, see Riley (2000), p. 147. Riley contends: "The outcome of Diodotus's speech demonstrates that these passions can be contained by reason."
38. Coby (1991), p. 84 seems to offer this sort of reading of Diodotus: "People's lives are generally ruled by emotion, but from time to time the emotions are balanced and the voice of reason is audible." Coby sees Diodotus as countering master passion (pity) against master passion (anger) to "produce an emotion favourable to reason."
39. Consider Coby's suggestion that Diodotus offers a noble lie to inculcate in the Athenians an ethos of egalitarianism to make them better realists: "Now certain it is that when the strong, the weak and equals each know who they are, the relations among states are predictable and little the cause of war. But times are dangerous when the strong grow tired and the weak grow bold, or when an equal aspires to superiority": (1991), p. 89. Coby surmises that Diodotus's deception—which hinges on an account of universal transgression—is meant to do more than educate the Athenians into knowing their place for the sake of political exigency. A shrewd and clear-sighted politics attentive to shifts in power and the kind of subjectivity and regime that make that possible are also the political equivalents of Plato's just soul. Balanced power, constitutional government, and the well-ordered psyche are all characterized by the rule of reason, and Coby sees Diodotus as hewing to this Platonic ideal.
40. Orwin (1994), pp. 157, 204.
41. Ibid., p. 205, Orwin suggests that perhaps Thucydides's work will help cure that "noble political fever" in at least a few like-minded suffers. Leo Strauss also uses the language of medicine to describe the salutary function of political philosophy in Strauss (2007). He talks of its ability to make us "immune to the dreams of the visionary" (p. 527), and claims that the "medicine administered by political philosophy" (p. 521) ought to inoculate us against utopian thought by "reminding

us of the limits set to all human hopes and wishes" (p. 520). This position itself seems wishful, symptomatic of—even as it opposes—the alleged intransigence of hope.

42. Strauss (1964), p. 210.
43. Orwin (1994), p. 200.
44. Forde (1995), pp. 154–5.
45. Ibid., p. 155.
46. Ibid., p. 158.
47. Mara (2008), p. 101.
48. Ibid., p. 116
49. Saxonhouse (2004), pp. 59–61.
50. Ibid., p. 60; Saxonhouse (2006), p. 150.
51. Though Saxonhouse also suggests why this problematic account of human nature might actually render deliberative democracy necessary. If the very point of deliberative practice is to sift through misleading speech to get closer to actionable political knowledge, then democracy can be a solution to impassioned, self-interested human nature. Thus we might conclude that human nature mediates the effect of uncertainty in ways that endanger but also necessitate democratic politics. See Saxonhouse (1996) and (2004).
52. Strauss (1964), p. 166.
53. Orwin (1994), p. 202.
54. Ibid., p. 198.
55. Ibid., p. 200.
56. Mara (2009), p. 112.
57. Critical accounts of Diodotus include Euben (1990); Ober (1998); White (1985); Lane (2005). Connections between various speeches and events throughout the *History* call us to attend to unanticipated long-term consequences of rhetorical politics. Two other notable examples relevant to this chapter's focus on realism include the rhetorical tactics of Pericles and Nicias. Both appeal to a materialist conception of power to enflame and dampen collective ardor, respectively. Both arguably condition destructive overconfidence.

58. Forde (1995), pp. 152, 155.
59. Strauss (1964), p. 172; Orwin (1994), p. 50.
60. Gregory Crane makes precisely this point in his provocative reading of the Melian Dialogue. The Athenian appeal to natural law is an exercise of ideological power, for this "calculus of power is not, in fact, natural but proceeds only insofar as participants accept it as natural" (p. 289). The Melians, who do not, thus give evidence of its fictitious character and must be killed for it. See Crane (1998), pp. 289–92.

CHAPTER 6

The Fall of the Roman Republic: Sallust's Reading of Thucydides

Klaus Meister

This chapter focuses on one aspect of the main topic of these volumes—Thucydides and political order—as it discusses the Roman historian Sallust (86–35 BC) and his reading of Thucydides in his three historical works *bellum Iugurthinum*, the *coniuratio Catilinae*, and the *Historiae*.[1] Sallust's writings analyze primarily the internal dissolution of states. Thucydides illustrates such dissolution when he describes the turmoil in Corcyra 427–4 BC and the subsequent spread of civil wars all over Greece. Sallust, inspired by Thucydides, applies a similar model to the demise of the Roman Republic after the destruction of Carthage in 146 BC.

A few words about Sallust's imitation of Thucydides: in antiquity, Velleius Paterculus (2.36.2) characterized Sallust as an *aemulus Thucydidis*, an "imitator of Thucydides." In modern times, Thucydides is considered by Harald Patzer as "Sallust's classical paragon."[2] Kurt Latte calls him the "Roman Thucydides."[3]

These comments describe not only the stylistic aspect of Sallust's work, as Andreas Mehl remarks, but also above all his reliance on his contents.[4] Stylistically, Sallust's Latin is teeming with Thucydides's linguistic and syntactic idiosyncrasies—in its audacious use only comparable to Tacitus, who, in turn, had emulated Sallust. Sallust's numerous Graecisms echo Thucydides: the phrase (*alia) quae ira fieri amat* ("which anger tends to produce," *Iug.* 34.1), for instance, is a literal translation of Thucydides (8.80.3 and 8.1.4: *alla hoia orgēi gignesthai philei*).[5] Ancient stylistic criticism makes mention of Sallust's concise diction as modelled on Cato the Elder and Thucydides. Seneca the Elder makes the following comparison:

> Thucydides' primary virtue is brevity, but Sallust has beaten him at it and defeated him on his own ground. The Greek epigram is certainly short, but there are words one can remove without harm to the sense . . . But from Sallust's epigram nothing can be removed without spoiling the sense. (*Controv.* 9.1.13)[6]

The antithetical sentence structure is also Thucydidean, and so is its disjuncture with *variatio* as well as a tendency to use nominal expressions.

Regarding the content of Sallust's writings and its expression of his allegiance to Thucydides, I first focus on individual aspects of Sallust's presentation and then turn to his adoption of entire thought-configurations and argumentative structures. Concerning the individual aspects of his presentation, in *Iugurtha* (60.4) Sallust remarks that the spectators of a battle, like those of a modern sporting event, would move their bodies so as to reflect the current state of affairs in the battle. This passage is based on Thucydides (7.71.3). The following detail reveals

Sallust's reliance on Thucydides further. It concerns a passage from *Catilina* intended as a speech of encouragement by the legate Marcus Petreius prior to the last battle against Catilina:

> He himself, riding about on his horse, calling each man by name, addressed, encouraged, and asked them to remember that they were fighting against unarmed bandits in defense of their native land, their children, their altars, and hearths. (59.5)[7]

The model for this passage is without doubt Thucydides's account of the Athenian military leader Nicias just before the decisive battle against the Syracusans:

> he once again called on each one of the trierarchs, addressing them by their father's name, their personal names and the names of their tribes . . . He went on to say all those things men come out with in such moments of crisis, when they cease to be embarrassed about using the traditional language of references to wives, children and the ancestral gods. (7.69.2)

Not least, there are chronological concordances that become evident: a certain date is mentioned in the *Histories* (2.80 M): "*in the same year . . . at the beginning of spring" (eodem anno . . . principio veris).* This accords with Thucydides's dating based on the seasons. Already the ancient grammarians had noticed that Sallust, just like his role model, distinguished between "early, mature and advanced spring" (*ver novum, adultum, praeceps*, fr. inc. 38 M). He does not even fail to remark on several agricultural dates that allow for a more precise fixation of events (see e.g., Thuc. 2.19.1, 2.79.1, 4.1.1, 4.2.1, 4.6.1, 4.84.1). Thus one passage reads (*Hist.* 3.98 M): "and the autumn crops were ripe in the fields at that time" (*et tum matura in agris erant autumni frumenta*).

Sallust's emulation of Thucydides in terms of his adoption of whole thought configurations and argumentative structures are most obvious in the letters, excursuses, and speeches in his historical works. Much like Thucydides, Sallust inserts (fictitious) letters into his text: The letter that Pompey sent to the Roman Senate from Spain in the year 75, which included a pressing plea for reinforcements (*Hist.* 2.98 M), was modelled on the letter that Nicias had sent to the Athenians in 414 from Sicily for the same reason (Thuc. 7.10–15). Moreover, both historians include digressions allowing for historical review and explanations concerning historical developments. The passage about early Rome (*Cat.* 6 ff.), for instance, is an emulation of Thucydides's *Archaeology* (1.2–19). In both cases, the development of events is sketched from their origins to the present. Whereas in Thucydides it is all about Greece's rise of political power reaching its apex in the Peloponnesian War, Sallust puts his emphasis on the moral demise of Rome culminating in the conspiracy of Catilina. Siegmar Döpp has remarked quite rightly that "whereas Thucydides is surely not the model for the contents of the passage *Cat.* 6–13, he does serve as a model for the structure of its historical argumentation in two ways: For one, the historical overview, just as in Thucydides, serves as the background for the individual occurrences that are mentioned within the text. On the other hand, Sallust follows the Greek in his efforts to give the outline of the whole a clear direction, a provable aim, thus render it with an intentionally modified perspective."[8] This leads us to the most important imitation of Thucydides in Sallust: his excursions into the political and moral demise of the Roman Republic.

According to Thucydides (3.82.1), the internal conflicts in Corcyra were the beginnings of the troubles and civil wars that would soon spread all over Greece. Sallust had borrowed numerous

ideas from Thucydides's depiction of the *stasis* for his *Catilina*, *Iugurtha*, and for his *Histories.* This parallel perspective is based on the fact that both historians had endured a difficult time of crisis and that both wrote about it, Thucydides the Peloponnesian War, Sallust the fall of the Roman Republic. Before discussing this borrowing of Sallust in detail, here are, in three parts, the most important original (translated) passages of the *History of the Peloponnesian War* to which Sallust refers to:

(1) Such was the savage progress of the civil strife, and it seemed all the worse because it was the first of its kind, though later practically the whole Greek world was in turmoil as everywhere there were rival efforts by the leaders of the populace to bring in the Athenians and by the oligarchs to bring in the Spartans. In time of peace they would have had neither pretext nor inclination to ask for help; but when these states were at war any faction seeking radical change readily found allies who could be brought in both to help damage their opponents and to bolster their own position. Civil strife inflicted many a terrible blow on the cities, as always does and always will happen while human nature remains what it is, though the degree and kind of damage may vary in each case according to the particular circumstances. In times of peace and prosperity, cities and individuals alike show better judgment because they do not fall prey to forces beyond their control. But war is a violent master: it robs us of the means of providing easily for our daily life and needs, and it usually generates passions to match our circumstances. Civil strife therefore became a fact of political life, and those cities affected later rather than sooner, hearing what had happened elsewhere, went

to ever greater extremes in inventing ingenious forms of attack and outlandish reprisals. (3.82.1–3)

(2) Men assumed the right to reverse the usual values in the application of words to actions. Reckless audacity came to be thought of as comradely courage, while far-sighted hesitation became well-disguised cowardice; moderation was a front for unmanliness; and to understand everything was to accomplish nothing. Wild aggression was a mark of manhood, while careful planning for one's future security was a glib excuse for evasion. The troublemaker was always to be trusted; the one who opposed him was to be suspected. The man who devised a successful plot was intelligent, the one who detected it still cleverer; but the man who thought ahead to try and find some different option was a threat to party loyalty and must have been intimidated by his opponents. In short, the way to be praised was to be first in planning an outrage and the cheerleader for others who had never considered it. (3.82.4–5)

(3) At the root of all this was the desire for power, based on personal greed and ambition, and the consequent fanaticism of those competing for control. The leaders in the various cities would each of them adopt specious slogans professing the cause either of "political equality for the masses" or "aristocracy—the government of moderation"; they pretended in their speeches to be competing for the public good, but in fact in their struggle to dominate each other by any available means they brazenly committed all manner of atrocities and perpetrated even worse acts of revenge. (3.82.8)

Here are the corresponding comments and explanations in Sallust's imitation of Thucydides: Pertaining to (1) Thucydides paints a dark picture of the rapid demise of morality during the

course of the civil wars; above all, it is human nature that he holds responsible for this. He is convinced that "human nature remains what it is" and bears only negative traits. These are greed (*pleonexia*), ambition (*philotimia*), and fear (*phobos*) (see. 1.75.3, 1.76.2, 2.65.7, 3.82.8). Sallust adopts this opinion, not in a literal translation, but in analogy:

> The first quarrels arose among us (sc. in Rome) through a defect of human nature which, restless and unbridled, is always immersed in struggles for liberty or for glory or for power. (*Hist.* 1.7 M)[9]

Thomas Scanlon has rightly made the following point in this regard: "But the most striking and controversial of all Sallust's passages modelled on Thucydides occurs in the prologue of Sallust's *Historiae* (1.7 M), where the fault of human nature is described as the source of Roman dissent, just as human nature is linked directly to the hardships of Greek civil strife by Thucydides. The two portraits of human nature may differ in detail, but Sallust's allusion to Thucydides is unmistakable. The significance, as we may surmise, is that the grim picture of human nature which brings in train the inversion of morals and perversion of language was for Sallust both a relevant common thread linking the two historians' works, as well as a dire threat to both historians' native states. This concept of human nature and the realization of the perversion inherent in all civil strife shows the most direct and original influence of Thucydides on Sallust's concept of history."[10]

With regard to (2), Thucydides speaks of the perversion of moral values and words in the course of the troubles on Corcyra: "Men assumed the right to reverse the usual values in the application of words to actions" (*kai tēn eiōthuian axiōsin tōn onomatōn es ta erga antēllaxan tēi dikaiōsei*). Sallust also followed him regarding this assertion, as we can see at numerous points: (a) especially important

is a passage in the speech of Cato about the fate of the Catilinarians where he heavily criticizes the previous speaker Caesar:

> In these circumstances, does someone mention to me clemency and compassion? To be sure we have long since lost the true names for things. It is precisely because squandering the goods of others is called generosity, and recklessness in wrongdoing is called courage, that the republic has been placed in a crisis. (*Cat.* 52.11)[11]

(b) In the *Histories*, the tribune of the plebs Licinius Macer addresses the people with a long speech. Here he stresses *inter alia*:

> I remind you of this fact; I beg you to keep it in mind; do not change the names of things to suit your own cowardice and give to slavery the title of peace. (3.48.13 M)[12]

Döpp has rightly remarked regarding this text passage: "Unlike in Thucydides 3,82 the figure of thought 'manipulation of language-use' here is the element of paraenesis."[13]

With regard to (3), this part deals with the alleged and actual aims of the parties. Thucydides highlights that the inner conflicts were in fact not driven by the general well-being of the state, as they should have been, but instead by the aspirations for power of individuals and factions that had ruined the state. This idea reemerges in Sallust:

(a) In the context of the reestablishment of the tribunes' power in the year 70 BC, Sallust stresses:

> For after the tribunician power had been restored in the consulship of Gnaeus Pompey and Marcus Crassus, young men, whose age and disposition made them aggressive, attained that very great power and thereupon began to stir up the commons by criticizing

> the senate and then to inflame their passions still more by doles and promises, thus making themselves conspicuous and influential. Against these men the greater part of the nobles strove with all their might, ostensibly on behalf of the senate but really for their own aggrandizement. For, to tell the truth in a few words, after that time, whoever disturbed the state under the guise of honorable slogans—some as though defending the rights of the people, others so that the senate's influence might be dominant—under pretense of the public good, each in reality strove for his own influence. Such men showed neither self-restraint nor moderation in their strife; both parties used their victory ruthlessly. (*Cat.* 38.1–4)[14]

(b) Sallust makes similar remarks in his introduction to the *Histories*:

> Once the fear of the Carthaginians was removed the way was clear for the exercise of political feuds. Frequent riots, party strife, and finally civil wars broke out, during which a few powerful men, to whose influential position most people had lent their support, were attempting to win absolute rule masquerading as champions of the senate or of the people. The terms "good" and "bad" were applied to citizens, not on the yardstick of services rendered or injuries inflicted on the state, since all were equally corrupt; any individual of outstanding wealth and irresistible in his lawlessness was considered "good" because he was the preserver of existing conditions. (1.12 M)[15]

(c) Finally, Sallust in his famous excursus on party politics in *Iugurtha* emphasizes that the state had almost been brought down as a consequence of the quarreling factions.

> Furthermore, the institution of political groups and factions, and afterward of all evil practices, originated at Rome a few years

> before this as the result of peacetime and of an abundance of those things that mortals prize most highly. For before the destruction of Carthage, the people and senate of Rome together managed political affairs between them peacefully and with moderation. There was no strife among the citizens either for glory or for mastery; fear of the enemy abroad kept the state within the bounds of good morals. But when that dread departed from the minds of the people, there arose, of course, those vices which tend to be fostered by prosperity: promiscuity and arrogance. Thus the peacetime for which they had longed in time of adversity, after they had gained it, proved to be more cruel and bitter than adversity itself. For the nobles began to abuse their standing and the people their liberty, and every man took, pillaged, and plundered for himself. Thus the community was split into two rival groups, and the state, which had formerly been shared, was torn to pieces. (41) (Translation J. C. Rolfe)[16]

Just compare the last words with Thucydides's similar formulation *ta de mesa tōn politōn . . . diephteironto* ("And the citizens who were in the middle fell prey to both parties").

Of all of Sallust's means of presentation, the speeches are the most "Thucydidean." Scanlon remarks on this:

> The speeches of Sallust and Thucydides, as we noticed earlier in our analysis of the style, share a similar function in their attempts to embody the general issues of the events as well as the particular historical details, and thus to give a universal significance to the speech as well as to carry forward the action of the narrative.[17]

Notable are Sallust's adoptions of Thucydides's *epitaphios*: at the beginning of this speech, Pericles ponders on the question of what it is that one often comes to criticize in a public speaker:

> The listener who is close to these events and a friend of the dead may perhaps think that the presentation falls short of what he wants to hear and knows to be the case, while a stranger to the situation may suspect some exaggeration, envious if he hears of feats beyond his own abilities. (2.35.2)

Sallust adopts this idea with regard to criticizing historians:

> But when you recount great merit and renown of good men, while everyone accepts with equanimity that which he thinks he could easily do himself, everything over and above he regards as false, tantamount to fiction. (*Cat.* 3.2)[18]

In a later passage in the *epitaphios*, Pericles emphasizes:

> Our idea of doing good is unusual, too. We make our friends not by receiving favours but by conferring them. (2.40.4)

Sallust transfers this maxim (*Cat.* 6.5) onto the ancient Romans: "Afterward, whenever their prowess repelled dangers, they rendered aid to their allies and friends, and established friendly relations rather by giving than by receiving kindness."[19] In addition, the hortative speech of Jugurtha to his soldiers in Sallust is in parts modelled after Phormio's speech to the Athenian seamen in Thucydides (2.89.11): in both cases the point is that the opponent had already been defeated before and that therefore there was no cause for the people to be frightened.

Whereas the speeches in Thucydides often occur in pairs, that is, as speech and response (so-called antilogies), in Sallust there are in general only single speeches. Only once does he use an antilogy in the work that has survived, namely in the *Catilina* where in a passage concerning the future fate of the Catilinarians he lets Gaius Julius Caesar speak (51) followed by M. Porcius Cato (52).

In following Willy Theiler,[20] L. Canfora has recently stated this opinion:

> Willy Theiler has demonstrated that the two speeches, which are the very heart of the monograph De Catilinae coniuratione, are based (and at times modelled) upon the duel between Nikolaos and Philip in Diodorus Siculus (13.25–32). The situation was analogous: a debate on whether to vote for clemency or severity in the treatment of Athenian prisoners. Ephorus (who in this case too is Diodorus's source) adds this ornamental extra to Thucydides's unsurpassable account of the Athenian campaign against Syracuse.[21]

This hypothesis is mistaken in three regards: First, Nikolaos's respondent is not Philip but Gylippus (i.e., the renowned military commander of the Spartans). Second, these paired speakers in Diodorus Siculus come not from Ephorus, but from Timaeus.[22] Third, the Caesar-Cato duel in Sallust is not modelled after the paired speakers Nikolaos-Gylippus in Diodorus, but in fact after the debate between Cleon and Diodotus in the Mytilenean affair in Thucydides (3.37–48), as Viktor Pöschl had already pointed out.[23] In following Pöschl we may add a few more details with regard to both the similarities and the differences between Sallust and Thucydides. The significant similarities are: First, in both cases we are dealing with an antilogy, that is, a speech and response. Sallust's following of Thucydides becomes apparent in formal terms, especially, as mentioned before, in light of the fact that this is the only (surviving) antilogy in Sallust. Second, the point of departure is similar for both cases: in Thucydides another debate is held before the people about the future fate of the defected and, in the meantime, subjugated Mytileneans, in spite of the fact that the decision to execute them had already

been taken. In Sallust, in turn, another debate is carried out in the Senate about the future fate of the Catilinarians, in spite of the fact that the motion sealing their execution had already been put forward. Third, in both Thucydides and Sallust, the respective alternative is either the death penalty (favored by Cleon and Cato) or a less harsh treatment (for which Diodotus and Caesar plead). The proposed "milder" treatment turns out to be rather harsh, as it were: Diodotus (3.48) demands the execution of the culpable Mytileneans, Caesar (Cat. 51.43) calls for the Catiliniarians' life-long imprisonment. Fourth, the tone that the respective opponents adapt is starkly different from each other. While Diodotus and Caesar argue in a predominately factual and rational way, the speeches by Cleon and Cato are full of emotion.

There are verbal similarities between the beginnings of Caesar's speech and the initial remarks by Diodotus. Diodotus emphasizes:

> On the contrary, the two things I consider most prejudicial to good counsel are haste and high emotion: the latter usually goes with folly, the former with crude and shallow judgement. (3.42.1)

And Caesar remarks:

> Members of the Senate, all men who deliberate upon difficult questions had best be devoid of hatred, friendship, anger and pity. When those feelings stand in the way, the mind cannot at all easily discern the truth and no one has ever served at the same time his passions and his best interests. (Cat. 51.1)[24]

Fifth, in both cases the antagonists point toward the political ramifications that punishment would entail. Cleon is of the opinion that the execution of the Mytilenians would deter the other

allies of Athens from defecting. Cato, in turn, believes that the execution of the Catiliniarians would cause the army of conspirators in Etruria to lose its courage. Diodotus foresees a hardening of resistance by the rebellious allies, should the execution be carried out. Caesar warns as to the dangers that such a precedent would cause for the future course of political strife (*Cat.* 51.25).

The main differences are the following: First, Athens was dealing with a case of external emergency, that is, the conservation of Athenian dominance over its allies. In Rome, however, the case was one of internal emergency, that is, the survival of the *res publica*. Second, historical examples do not play a role in the argumentation of the speakers in Thucydides, for Sallust, however, they are of great significance (see e.g., *Cat.* 51.37–42, 52.30). This has to do predominately with the obligating effect of the *mos maiorum* among the Romans. Third, in Sallust moral deliberations are emphasized, but not so in Thucydides: Cleon's speech is primarily about taking revenge on the defecting parties, Diodotus underlines the aspect of "what is beneficial for Athens," which are thus matters of reason of state. In contrast, much value is placed on the moral aspect in Caesar's speech in Sallust. He thus deems the *sententia* for the execution of the Catilinarians *aliena a re publica nostra*, "contrary to the best interests of our country" (51.17). Furthermore, he finds capital punishment for the Catiliniarians questionable, since legitimate executions in the past have often led to arbitrary executions, and the execution of the Catiliniarians, too, could be followed by arbitrary ones in the future (51.27–34). Fourth, there is also a distinct divergence between Thucydides's and Sallust's stance on capital punishment and its impact. Diodotus disputes its alleged deterring virtues with seemingly modern arguments (3.45). In contrast, Caesar in Sallust (52.20) emphasizes that death is not a punishment,

but a deliverance from all toils and tribulations. Fifth, whereas in Thucydides the religious aspect has no significance, it is very important in Sallust: Caesar takes the enlightened position of the Epicureans that all ends in death (51.20). Cato, in turn, rejects this notion and adheres to the traditional popular belief:

> A short while ago, in fine and well-ordered phrases Gaius Caesar discoursed in this meeting on the subjects of life and death, regarding as false, I presume, the tales which are told concerning the inhabitants of Underworld, that along a different path from the good the wicked occupy gloomy, desolate, foul, and frightful regions. (52.13)[25]

Sixth, the speeches in Sallust are less radical than those in Thucydides. Thucydides's speeches include a general critique of the institutions of democratic states. Cleon maintains the opinion that democracy is fundamentally incapable of reigning over others. Diodotus criticizes the irresponsible decision-making by the great masses in contrast to the inherent responsibility of the well-advising politicians (3.43.4–5). Different to that, Caesar argues in moral terms, which he derives from the Roman constitution (see 51.37–42).

Viktor Pöschl correctly concludes in this respect: "The comparison of the paired speeches in Thucydides and Sallust can make a substantial contribution towards understanding the Greek and Roman idiosyncrasies and the Athenian and Roman state and social order."[26] Thomas Gärtner has just pointed out additional allegiances of Sallust to Thucydides pertaining to the speech of the Consul Gaius Aurelius Cotta (*Hist.* 2.47 M) and its relation to Pericles's last speech in Thucydides (2.59–64):[27] they accord with each other in the sense that both these speeches were held just shortly before the death of both politicians.

Moreover, as Gärtner shows, both speeches seem to echo each other's motifs: Pericles, regarding to the fickleness of the masses, emphasizes:

> I have not changed and my positions have remained the same. What has happened is that you were persuaded. (2.61.2)

Giving consideration to the changed external circumstances, Cotta remarks:

> Adversity and success kept changing my resources, but not my character. (*Hist.* 2.47.1 M)[28]

Pericles refers to the duty of the Athenians to uphold authority:

> It is right for you to uphold the honour, in which you all take such pride, that your city derives from your empire; but of you pursue the privileges of prestige you must also shoulder its burdens. (2.63.1–2)

Cotta makes a similar remark:

> Imperial power involves great anxiety, many heavy burdens; it is in vain for you to seek to avoid them and to look for peace and prosperity when all the provinces and kingdoms, all lands and seas are racked by hatred or exhausted by wars. (*Hist.* 2.47.14 M)[29]

Here too, the imitation of Thucydides is apparent, although Gärtner has rightly pointed toward the different tenor of both speeches.[30]

To conclude this analysis of Sallust's reading and use of Thucydides: The close following of a Greek model in both form and substance, as it can be found in the writings of Sallust, is without parallel in Roman prose. Yet this is not a case of mere

servile imitation, but an adaption, which regardless of its borrowing from the predecessor takes into account the changed historical situation and carries its own intellectual content.[31] Similarities *and* differences together are what makes Sallust a Thucydidean. Patzer has thus rightly remarked about Sallust's imitation of Thucydides: "Thucydidean does not mean Thucydides: it includes an independent way of understanding Thucydides and of applying his model in the given situation."[32] Quintilian is not wrong when he remarks on Greek and Roman historiography in general and on the relation between Sallust and Thucydides and between Livy and Herodotus in particular:

> In history, however, we hold our own with the Greeks. I should not hesitate to match *Sallust* against Thucydides, nor would Herodotus resent Titus Livius being placed on the same level as himself. (*Inst.* 10.1.101)[33]

Notes

1. On the relationship between Sallust and Thucydides see: Latte (1935), pp. 15 ff.; Patzer (1981), pp. 102–20; Perrochat (1949); Theiler (1956); Syme (1975), pp. 50 ff., 239 ff.; Scanlon (1980); Pöschl (1981), pp. 368–91; Büchner (1982), pp. 326 ff., and (1983); von Albrecht (1992), p. 359; Schmal (2001), pp. 148–53; Canfora (2006); Grethlein (2006); Parker (2008); Döpp (2011).
2. Patzer (1981), p. 108 ("Sallusts klassisches Vorbild").
3. Latte (1935), p. 18 ("der römische Thukydides").
4. Mehl (2001), p. 82.
5. The translations of Sallust are taken from *The War with Catiline and the War with Iugurtha*, translated by J. C. Rolfe and revised by J. T. Ramsey (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), and *The Histories*, translated with introduction and commentary by P. McGushin (2 vols, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992–4). The translation of Thucydides is

from Jeremy Mynott (Thucydides, *The War of the Peloponnesians and the Athenians* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013]).

6. *Cum sit praecipua in Thucydide virtus brevitas, hac eum Sallustius vicit, et in suis illum castris cecidit. Nam in sententia Graeca tam brevi habes quae salvo sensu detrahas . . . at ex Sallustii sententia nihil demi sine detrimento sensu potest*.
7. *Ipse equo circumiens unum quemque nominans appellat, hortatur, rogat, ut meminerint se contra latrones inermis pro patria, pro liberis, pro aris atque focis suis certare*.
8. Döpp (2011), p. 191; the original quote is: "So ist Thukydides gewiss nicht Vorbild für das Inhaltliche des Abschnitts Cat. 6–13. Wohl aber ist er Vorbild für die Anlage der historischen Argumentation, und dies in zweifacher Hinsicht: Zum einen dient der geschichtliche Überblick wie bei Thukydides als Folie für das Einzelgeschehen, das in der Schrift thematisiert wird. Zum anderen strebt Sallust dem Griechen in dem Bemühen nach, dem Abriss des Ganzen eine klare Ausrichtung auf ein Beweisziel zu geben, also in der entschiedenen Perspektivierung."
9. *Nobis primae dissensiones vitio humani ingenii evenere, quod inquies atque indomitum semper inter certamina libertatis aut gloriae aut dominationis agit*.
10. Scanlon (1980), pp. 218 f.
11. *Hic mihi quisquam mansuetudinem et misericordiam nominat? Iam pridem equidem nos vera vocabula rerum amisimus: quia aliena bona largiri liberalitas, malarum rerum audacia fortitudo vocatur, eo res publica in extremo sita est*.
12. *Quod ego vos moneo quaesoque, ut animadvertatis neu nomina rerum ad ignaviam mutantes otium pro servitio appelletis*.
13. Döpp (2011), p. 193; the original quote is: "Im Unterschied zu Thukydides 3,82 ist die Denkfigur der Manipulation des Sprachgebrauchs hier Element der Paränese."
14. *Nam postquam Cn. Pompeio et M. Crasso consulibus tribunicia potestas restituta est, homines adulescentes summam potestatem nacti, quibus aetas animusque ferox erat, coepere senatum criminando plebem exagitare, dein*

largiundo atque pollicitando magis incendere, ita ipsi clari potentesque fieri. Contra eos summa ope nitebatur pleraque nobilitas senatus specie pro sua magnitudine. Namque, uti paucis verum verum absolvam, post illa tempora quicumque rem publicam agitavere, honestis nominibus, alii, sicut populi iura defenderent, par, quo senstus auctoritas maxuma foret, bonum publicum simulantes pro sua quisque potentia certabant. Neque illis modesita neque modus contentionis erat: utrique victoriam crudeliter exercebant.

15. *Postquam remoto metu Punico simultates exercere vacuum fuit, plurimae turbae, seditiones et ad postremum bella civilia orta sunt, dum pauci potentes, quorum in gratiam plerique concesserant, sub honesto patrum aut plebis nomine dominationem affectabant, bonique et mali cives appellati non ob merita in rem publicam omnibus pariter corruptis, sed uti quisque locupletissimus et iniuria validior, quia praesentia defendebat, pro bono ducebatur.*
16. *Ceterum mos partium et factionum ac deinde omnium malarum artium paucis ante annis Romae ortus est otio atque abundantia earum rerum, quae prima mortales ducunt. Nam ante Carthaginem deletam populus et senatus Romanus placide modesteque inter se rem publicam tractabant, neque gloriae neque dominationis certamen inter civis erat: metus hostilis in bonis artibus civitatem retinebat. Sed ubi illa formido mentibus decessit, scilicet ea, quae res secundae amant, lascivia atque superbia, incessere. Ita, quod in advorsis rebus optaverant otium, postquam adepti sunt, asperius acerbiusque fuit. Namque coepere nobilitas dignitatem, populus libertatem in lubidinem vortere, sibi quisque ducere, trahere, rapere. Ita omnia in duas partis abstracta sunt, res publica, quae media fuerat, dilacerate.*
17. Scanlon (1980), p. 103.
18. *Dehinc quia perique, quae delicta reprehenderis, malevolentia et invidia dicta putant, ubi de magna virtute atque gloria bonorum memores, quae sibi quisque facilia factu putat, aequo animo accipit, supra ea veluti ficta pro falsis ducit.*
19. *Post ubi pericula virtute propulerant, sociis atque amicis auxilia portabant, magisque dandis quam accipiundis beneficiis amicitias parabant.*

20. Theiler (1956).
21. Canfora (2006), p. 737.
22. See Meister (1967), pp. 63 ff.; (1970), pp. 508–17.
23. Pöschl (1981), p. 388 with n. 15.
24. *Omnis homines, patres conscripti, qui de rebus dubiis consultant, ab odio, amicitia, ira atque misericordia vacuos esse decet. Haud facile animus verum providet, ubi illa officiunt, neque quisquam omnium lubidini simul et usui paruit.*
25. *Bene et composite C. Caesar paulo ante in hoc ordine de vita et morte disseruit, credo falsa existumans ea, quae de inferis memorantur: divorso itinere malos a bonis loca taetra, inculta, foeda atque formidulosa habere.*
26. Pöschl (1981), p. 397, translated from the original quote: "So kann der Vergleich der Redepaare bei Thukydides und Sallust einen wesentlichen Beitrag zur Erkenntnis der griechischen und der römischen Eigenart und der athenischen und römischen Staats- und Lebensordnung leisten."
27. Gärtner (2011), pp. 122–5.
28. *malae secundaeque res opes, non ingenium mihi mutabant.*
29. *Multa cura summo imperio inest, multi ingentes labores, quos nequiquam abnuitis et pacis opulentiam quaeritis, quom omnes provinciae, regna, maria terraeque aspera aut fessa bellis sint.*
30. Gärtner (2011), p. 123: "Trotz solcher punktueller Bezugnahmen auf Thukydides ist die Cotta-Rede im einzelnen von einem gegenüber den letzten Äußerungen des Perikles wesentlich verschiedenen Charakter."
31. On the differences between both authors see now Grethlein (2006).
32. Patzer (1981), p. 110, translated from the original quote: "Thukydideer heißt nicht Thukydides: eine selbständige Weise, Thukydides zu verstehen und zu erfüllen, ist darin mitbeschlossen."
33. *At non historia cesserit Graecis nec opponere Thucydidi Sallustium verear, nec indignetur Herodotus aequari Titum Livium.*

CHAPTER 7

Thucydides as a "Statesmen's Manual"?

Christian Wendt

Many scholars are used to talking about the Athenian author Thucydides in terms that place him among the theoreticians of politics, whether philosophers, statesmen, academics, or others. In 2006, Josiah Ober, describing Thucydides as the inventor of political science, labelled his work as a "political systems users' manual,"[1] and in an earlier article even called him a "theoretikos."[2] This is in my opinion the most drastic interpretation of Thucydides in a line of others that have expressed a similar view, including those of scholars such as J. H. Finley, Hartmut Erbse, or Georg Schwarzenberger.[3] Their views obviously feed on a pointed interpretation of Thucydides's own dictum of having conceived his account as a *ktēma es aiei,* an "ever-lasting possession," for the end of providing future readers with deeper or clearer insights into the dealings of human societies with one another (1.22.4).

I discuss how this perspective could prove helpful in enhancing our understanding of the Thucydidean text. The questions guiding my reflections in this matter are as follows:

1. How can a text which does not contain any concrete hints or advice be called a manual?
2. Who is the text aimed at? Is it the statesman or the one "using political systems"?
3. If we assume Thucydides's writings to be an attempt at a pragmatic historiography along the same lines as Polybius, what use comes from such a reading? In other words: Is there any kind of theory or political advice that the author aims to establish?

These questions obviously cannot be fully answered here, but they give an indication of the key issues that drive my argument.

Thucydides as a Manual

Thucydides is in no way a good advisor. The insights he wants to convey are mostly well hidden;[4] conversely, wherever they seem to lay at the surface, they are loaded with intertextual relations that tend to undermine any certainties we could possibly hope for. That is why the majority of unilateral readings of the work have proved rather fruitless, or at least contestable, attempts at depicting the multilayered construction behind the author's conception. They do not reveal anything but a vague idea of the work's general purpose. Cicero's characterization of Thucydides as being "obscure"[5] (or better: using obscure talk) seems entirely apt. So, if any political leader wanted to learn from Thucydides, he would certainly err in hoping to find useful guidance on how to manage

concrete situations or how to face real threats and challenges. Therefore, to suggest that Thucydides's text contains operating guidelines would be misleading. The *History of the Peloponnesian War* is not a manual and was never conceived as one.

But which term could better capture its nature while taking into account its explicitly didactic agenda? This question cannot be answered without acknowledging that Thucydides had a certain idea of his readership's reaction while composing his account of events. This includes the fact that his own comments were intended to present a more general perspective. Apart from genuine historical knowledge, set out for the benefit of later generations, he offers, in his own words (1.22.4), something profitable (*ōphelima*) for those who seek a clear and precise assessment of the past, which will thus enable his readers to prepare themselves for the future since the human factor or human nature (Thucydides's leading category illustrated by his concrete topic) will remain unchanged in substance (1.22.4).

Is the work thus intended, as Ober puts it, to "produce leaders with Periclean abilities"?[6] If we consider that Thucydides deals with a broad variety of states or state-like entities, all of them involving different political orders and persons, it is hard to imagine exactly what kind of leader he could have envisaged that would fit all the given constellations. Does he want to educate an Athenian or a Spartan leader, a pan-Hellenic statesman, a Corinthian or Chian oligarch? Or did he want to create a virtual, timeless, perfect specimen of leadership? It is more likely that the author wants to address all the people involved in the process of decision-making. The work's dedication in 1.22.4 to "those who should desire to look at the clear truth" (*hosoi boulēsontai . . . to saphes skopein*) alone indicates that Thucydides does not restrict his wisdom to an audience defined by its concrete function but,

on the contrary, wants it to serve anybody seeking a clear perception of the essential structures and interconnections between decisive factors. Given his rather pessimistic perspective on most people's ability to acquire a deeper understanding of occurring phenomena, one could assume that in his eyes only the chosen few were capable of understanding his analysis in the first place—but on the other hand this does not mean that he writes explicitly for statesmen, even if the adequacy of the decisions of states is his main interest. From this perspective, he takes in the conditions for good or able statesmen as they tend to be the ones pushing forward decisions, sometimes even dictating them. Ned Lebow's metaphor (in a slightly different context)[7] of a "grammar" points in a similar direction, but still tends to evoke in my opinion too sharp an image of guidance than we can definitely find in the work. But if Thucydides's *History* could produce more convincing answers to situations in the future, it would have fulfilled the author's intention, and we could call this case study a textbook for the correct principles of decision-making in the political, and especially the interstate, context.

Duties and Purposes of Statesmen

Thucydides is aware of several core elements that define a good decision-maker. They are closely connected to the challenges that men in charge have to face. This not only implies that they need to react wisely under given circumstances, but rather, they must also consider the long-term developments that could follow from one decision or its alternative. The main ability required is the necessary insight that will allow a calculation of the future.[8] It is this long-term perspective, the capacity of *pronoia/prognōsis/promēthia*,[9] which is fundamental to achieving the goals an able political mind

(*xunetos*) should strive for, since no decision can prove to be a correct one until its future consequences have been revealed. This clairvoyance should in fact not be restricted to statesmen, but we find this connection in modern scholarship as well.[10]

Yet Thucydides does not attempt to train his readers in this matter, for he acknowledges implicitly that only exceptional individuals are gifted enough to act as competent predictors of future developments, as visionaries of an adequate political strategy. His characterization of Themistocles shows unmistakably that no educational or intellectual influence was responsible for producing this greatest of all prognostic actors, but only his innate talent and dedication (1.138.3). The attribute *xunetos* or other references to the mental force of a number of individuals in the work[11] seem to constitute the required basis for an adequate use of *pronoia*. But this is far from enough. The work's central focus is in fact addressed to those sufficiently skilled to see its preeminent value as a paradigmatic analysis, providing them with useful material for finding their own answers when faced with actual situations, in addition to showing them the relevance and the limits of intelligent and correct analysis.

Once the task of skillful prevision is accepted as essential, it is crucial to know to what effect the right persons should use their abilities. This touches on one of the most ambivalent terms within Thucydides: As we can see in 3.82, where the deterrent powers of stasis and factionalism are vividly portrayed, the society in question, Corcyra, lost all proportion and abandoned the standards it used to follow.[12] Above all, the leading actors no longer accepted "the welfare of the polis" (*tēi polei xumphoron*) as their main point of orientation. Here we can see what Thucydides would describe as the uncontestable, rather self-evident aim of any political action within a community: the *xumphoron* of the state, its benefit or

profit. In this context, this word has no negative connotation at all: what is expedient to the polis is something of high value that must be striven for. If we consider other passages in Thucydides in which protagonists claim *xumphoron* as their motive,[13] we find only their respective interpretations of what is expedient. So, even if we concluded that they are wrong in most cases, the only possible deduction is not that Thucydides himself would a priori oppose such an argument, but that his protagonists do not judge the given situation well, and therefore misconceive their argument, using *xumphoron* inadequately or following an erroneous analysis.[14] Morality is of no concern in this matter, even if *to dikaion* is by no means irrelevant to the author[15]—nevertheless, the benefit for the state is a general category that is dear to Thucydides. That is why those who are in charge are theoretically bound to decide or to urge the people to decide in a way that turns out to be profitable for the polis in question.[16]

So, generally, the good decision-maker should possess two major attributes implicitly required by Thucydides: first, the necessary mental strength and ability resulting in *pronoia*, and second, the dedication to one decisive value being the common good or the polis' benefit. The question remains how somebody who has read Thucydides and possibly understood him in the intended way can achieve an adequate interpretation of what would be really expedient for the challenge in question. If not advice, what else has Thucydides to offer that could represent "a possession for all times" to future readers?

The Use of Thucydides

As noted above, we are presented not with a manual, but with an intellectual demonstration encompassing all the parameters

Thucydides sees as historically relevant. That is why the possible usefulness of his *History* can only be realized by those who are willing to consider his overall argument. Deductions from individual passages or particular comments can only result in isolated statements and therefore lead to misleading generalizations;[17] nevertheless, this seems to be a problem for many writers who have concentrated on the most prominent passages in Thucydides, such as the Melian Dialogue (5.84–116), the Funeral Oration (2.35–46) or the *alēthestatē prophasis* (the so-called truest explanation) in 1.23, often interpreted as the first glimpse of a "power transition theory."[18] The reader has to take into account those highlights as well as the context of their appearance—in other words: the composition of the work is just as important as the several dicta that we may identify as approximate to Thucydides's own position. That is why I do not agree with Morrison's claim (with reference to the Melian Dialogue) that the "reader's ultimate task is to examine lessons from the rest of the *History* and apply them in this new context."[19] That sounds as if we are able to extract certainties from given Thucydidean examples in order to rearrange them in a later context—but this does not really seem to be a convincing approach, since it leaves no room for the tensions and ambiguities always present in the work.[20] There is not one single, reliable, and genuine truth in Thucydides that we can take for granted and on which we could build further arguments. And this is why only an analysis regarding the complete text and its immanent logic can bring about results that we can take as ideas that we may, with some optimism, deem to be Thucydidean teaching.[21]

Since there is no evident political theory in his whole oeuvre, it has to be accepted that the only legitimate claim the reader can make is one that may give assistance in interpreting situations in

a way Thucydides would have approved of. This would mean that the author's plan was to establish standards for deliberating and taking decisions in a satisfactory manner, that is, with the essential focus on the correct calculation of consequences in order to develop successful and profitable strategies for the community in question. Once again, there is no concrete mode of governance or strategy that Thucydides propagates directly.[22] For example, some scholars claim that Thucydides backed so-called Athenian imperialism,[23] while others make him out to be an apologetic voice for *sōphrosunē*, moderation, or even defensive thinking.[24] To me, both sides miss the point here, for Thucydides is not primarily attached to one motivation or the other and does not consider one or the other to be wiser or nobler. He simply accepts the existence of some of the driving elements behind the decisions taken, and points to the direct or more distant consequences of those proceedings. That is why, even if gifted readers who are willing to learn from Thucydides would tend to accept the causations offered by the historian[25]—which is definitely a premise for a possible didactic value of the work—their lesson could only consist in applying for themselves the methods and following the premises Thucydides sets as defining parameters. In the following, I focus my attention on two of them as being essential for strategic thinking in Thucydides.

First, there is the status of history in Thucydides's *History*.[26] The analysis and interpretation of the past is in his eyes a *conditio sine qua non* for all those who need to learn about the essence of human behavior and by doing so construct the necessary analogies for judging future challenges and perspectives of development. Accuracy or *akribeia* in reconstructing the past is nothing but a tool for gaining insights that enable a thinker to establish more probable predictions. Knowledge and critical interpretation

of the historical material is an indispensable task for anybody who seeks to find expedient answers in decisive situations. That is why the importance of history is so decisive for the core of his argument.[27]

Second, Thucydides shows the existence of interdependencies or reciprocities as a vital factor in all kinds of policies. A constant human nature (*to anthrōpinon*; *hē anthrōpeia phusis*)[28] is a central precondition for assuming the insights of a historical work can be useful to later generations, as human motives and human strife will not be altered dramatically in time.[29] The Thucydidean account aims at showing the consequences of decisions, actions, and passivity in a given system of interacting political entities; this is the framework in which the superordinate concept of human nature shows itself in concrete actions or in the omissions the historian can analyze. The question is whether the presented insights can be generalized for any political constellation as some kind of timeless lessons, or if contextualism dictates that only systems or challenges with the same or similar parameters are close enough to the author's material to convey the substantial analysis to their situation.[30] To put it another way: How suitable is this text as a source of analogies?

Generally, it requires the reader to accept that every deduction can only be obtained *ex negativo*, including the interpretation that the different political and strategic approaches shown in the work are judged as mistaken and disastrous, and that the consequences are the greatest *kinēsis* for mankind so far.[31] Also, the reader can deduce from the concept of a "possession for all times" that the author was convinced of the possibility of and the necessity for political learning[32] and, indeed, promoted a sense that things might improve: Even if the general *conditio humana* was not about to change, politics had to find a better way to deal with it.

Therefore, the ideal reader of Thucydides should have a personality inclined to adhere to the teacher and his pedagogical material and concrete analyses, in order to produce his own intelligent deductions. These have to be focused on the aspects Thucydides has underlined as being decisive for the deeper historical and political insights the work provides. Possibly, concrete conclusions or findings are intentionally excluded from the author's conception in order not to diminish the didactic value of his work that should transcend the work's specific theme. In theory, Thucydides expects those gifted enough and involved in historical processes to become—through his demonstration—better analysts and better equipped with a set of prognostics that will help them assess and influence political developments. Perhaps he even dares to think that there is one single person whose mental capacities are even stronger than those of Themistocles or Pericles, the sole champion in analyzing the past and the present correctly—Thucydides the Athenian.

So, if we would not wish to call the work a "statesmen's manual," perhaps we could agree that Thucydides hoped for more prudent calculations and deliberations among the decision-makers, and hoped to promote more statesmanlike behavior in the way they dealt with political issues.[33] He wants to demonstrate essential perspectives and, perhaps even more so than providing the correct answers, to ask the right questions.

Lessons?

But how can states or deciding bodies learn concrete lessons in order to develop a better understanding of how to take more prudent and enlightened decisions? At this point, the unpredictable steps onto the stage. This is a very important theme in

Thucydides, and he stresses the point that even the best foreseers of the future, such as Pericles, could never hope to envisage every possible development.[34] We could, in following Hans-Peter Stahl, conclude that Thucydides wanted to teach his readers that they should not pin their hopes on controlling the future, since any such attempt would turn out to be an impossible mission. That is why, according to Stahl, Thucydides is not *a priori* a "practical manual for future statesmen."[35] I would like to argue that Thucydides's demonstration seems just a bit too complex and detailed for such a simplistic outcome. On the contrary, capable decision-makers have to take into account this circumstance and so find approximate solutions based on the highest probability. The uncertainty of the future is no more than one parameter in an adequate political analysis and strategy,[36] alongside the different military or economic options. All these factors have to be integrated into a far-sighted consideration of momentary gains as well as long-term consequences and developments in order to define *xumphoron* in a complex manner and with a clear view of chances, risks, and the possible ramifications of decisions.

On this level, no moral or philosophical argument is involved. This does not mean that Thucydides would completely ignore them.[37] But he would attach importance to them only on subordinate levels. No one can generally be mistaken as a result of neglecting moral issues, but he surely will be if he fails to understand that sometimes morality or justice can be expedient, too. This is the case because of the inherent promise that the active party will remain a reliable factor in the constellations to come, since their chosen way of acting is determined by values of some kind. Brasidas seems to be one striking example, at least for the expediency of a virtuous image.[38] Also, that is what the Melians try to tell the Athenians (5.90 and 5.98)—unfortunately, they

have no means of figuring as convincing teachers in this context, and tend to overestimate their own relevance.

An aspect not prominent enough in many interpretations is that Thucydides is no follower of any clearly defined political party, ideology, or "constitution."[39] Moreover, no side in the conflict, with the exception of Syracuse, is portrayed as truly victorious or superior.[40] In my understanding, Thucydides has no political penchant toward either moderation or expansionism; he does not want to define war or peace as values in themselves or as ideas. His ambition is to show to what extent the adversaries fail in analyzing their situation and finding solutions for it. The work is an intense panorama of the deterioration of law, order, etc.[41] and so, by using these destructive dynamics as essential factors in the composition, Thucydides demonstrates the urgent need for efficient principles of order[42]—most notably, for a multipolar world where no party has the capacity to impose its will on the overall system. His approach does not depend on moral ideas or ethical discourses, and even the process of decay or decadence is not the primary concern for Thucydides; he is, in my view, much more interested in the functional aspects of a system that he deems to be in a state of disorder and which is heading toward complete dissolution. As he depicts the catastrophe of this process, the alternative and only profitable option (so to speak a *xumphoron tais polesin*) seems to be the possibility of avoiding the mistakes that led into the destructive war Thucydides had to witness.

In this context, order is an ambivalent category. Those who treat the existing principles or institutions as pure facade tend to accelerate their erosion; for Thucydides, all the main Greek parties do this, and at a progressive rate. As a result, they effectively establish an endurance test for the strength and efficiency of the system that in fact turns out not to be vigorous enough

to withstand attacks against or even explicit negations of its relevance. On the other hand, Thucydides shows these protagonists as bad analysts who are not perceptive enough to understand the vital principles and core elements of their own world. They are therefore not able to foresee the long-term consequences of destabilizing a system.[43]

This would lead to the conclusion that political strife for the benefit of a polis is only possible when based on a correct analysis of its own structural conditions; in consequence, the orientation of any political decision would have to be the construction and conservation of a sound and accepted order, since the opposite development has proven disastrous. The realization that any concrete polis is inevitably dependent on order (internally as well as in the field of so-called international relations) is a primordial lesson of Thucydides, even if "one of the least advanced." Its negation leads to perdition for Hellas and, in the future, perhaps the same will be true for all those who are not aware of this necessity. Though this message is aimed not only at statesmen, but also at all of his capable readers, Thucydides defines standards for the decisive persons within a state, and he does so by portraying the failure of their prominent predecessors.[44] Therefore, he himself is a violent teacher,[45] and his lessons will not help those seeking pragmatic answers, but only those who are willing to adopt a more fundamental perspective.

As my interpretation of the *ktēma es aiei* has shown, there is a need for more dialogue between the different approaches to Thucydides found in different disciplines that may serve to inspire more sophisticated studies. Moreover, statesmanlike academics could profit a lot from reading and studying Thucydides. Political science has to offer a lot to classicists in this matter, and, hopefully, the reverse is also recognized.

Notes

1. Ober (2006), p. 132.
2. Ober (2001).
3. Finley (1942), p. 50; Erbse (1969); Schwarzenberger (1969), p. 121: "classic text-book on international relations."
4. Strauss (1964), p. 153, on the Thucydides who "silently conveys" instructions.
5. Cic. *orat*. 9.30: *Ipsae illae contiones ita multas habent obscuras abditasque sententias vix ut intellegantur*.
6. Ober (2006), p. 157.
7. Lebow (2003), p. 299, presumably alluding to Laski and Schwarzenberger.
8. Thuc. 1.138: for example, Themistocles as the person able to take the necessary measures at once since he was the best portrayer (*eikastēs*) of the future, due to his able judgment of the given situation.
9. Examples besides Themistocles: Pericles in 2.65.6, and making a plea for the need of *pronoia* in 2.62.5; Phormio promises to make provision to the best of his ability (2.89.9: *hexo tēn pronoian kata to dunaton*); Hermocrates discussing *promēthia* in 4.62.4; the lack of *pronoia* as a problem in the allies' decisions: 4.108.4; Nicias in 6.13.1 on the factor of *pronoia* in strategic planning; Tissaphernes in 8.57.2 (following the plans of Alcibiades).
10. Finley (1942), p. 50; Spahn (2011), p. 42: "Dies ist auch die Aufgabe des handelnden Politikers, für den Thukydides in erster Linie schreibt;" Morrison (2000), p. 119: "the statesman must consider the past and speculate about the future," but on p. 137 extended to "Thucydides' readers, politicians, generals, citizens," a thought that has already been in Arnold (1835), p. XXII: "the instruction of the statesman and the citizen."
11. Examples: Archidamus: 1.79.2; Alcibiades: 6.15.4 (*dianoia*); Pericles: 1.139.4: *legein te kai prassein dynatōtatos*/2.65.8: *gnōmē*; in the Athenians' own appraisal of Themistocles, 1.74: *xynetōtatos stratēgos*; Theramenes: 8.68.4.

12. This phenomenon becomes fully vivid in its famous insistence on the loss of meanings in the used language, a sign of mere confusion and disorientation; explicitly summarized in the more dubious chapter 3.84, which could be a later interpolation.
13. For example, Athenians: 3.40 a. 44; Corinthians: 1.42; Corcyraeans: 1.35; Sicilians: 4.60; Melians: 5.98; for the Spartans: 4.55; for the Persians: 8.46.
14. As observed by Lebow (2003), p. 126: "Thucydides rejects any narrow construction of interest," the motive of a misinterpretation of the own interest: Isocr. *Peace* 7; see Anastasiadis (2013).
15. See as a striking example 3.82.8; or the twisted use of *dikaion* in Cleon's speech (3.40).
16. Diodotus' argument in favor of that claim is nevertheless highly ambivalent, not only because he himself acknowledges that the people love to be seduced by lies and wrong accusations, see 3.42–3. For this, see Manuwald (1979) and Orwin (1994), who both—to a different degree—interpret the speech as a suggestive attempt to influence people not by the argument itself, but by the way of using it for a (better) purpose. For the perspective adopted here, the answer to that question is of lesser relevance.
17. Thauer (2011), p. 198; see Lebow (2007), p. 164 as an immanent critic of that proceeding; Welch (2003); Wesel (2003).
18. See exemplary Kauppi (1996), p. 143: "Realists interested in the unequal growth of power have been inspired by Thucydides' simple proposition. The result has been what is termed 'power transition theory.'"
19. Morrison (2000), p. 145.
20. A most influential reading emphasizing that point is Connor (1984) who argues that the ambiguities are part of the auctorial conception, for example, p. 15; this insight has influenced so-called constructivist readings of the work, as Lebow (2003), p. 68, points out.
21. Connor (1984), p. 15.
22. The attempts of interpreting Thucydidean preferences for one or the other "constitutional" or state system have proven rather fruitless; see

Ober (1998), p. 52, and Raaflaub (2006); in contrast, see W. Will in this volume for virtual models that could have met the author's approval.

23. Schwartz (1919), pp. 139–42; Vogt (1956), p. 256: "Mit innerer Notwendigkeit hat dann die Stadt die Symmachie zur Herrschaft umgestaltet—nach der Auffassung des Thukydides ein großes Beispiel des natürlichen Vorgangs, daß der Starke herrscht;" de Romilly (1963); more cautiously: Andrewes in Gomme, Andrewes, and Dover (1945–81), vol. IV, p. 183.
24. Strasburger (1958), p. 40; Strauss (1964), pp. 147–54, 153: "A sound regime is a moderate regime dedicated to moderation"; Woodhead (1970), pp. 43–7; Gehrke (2006); Stockhammer (2009), pp. 104–8.
25. Bluhm (1962); Rood (1998), pp. 205–10; for the requirements toward the readership see Connor (1984), p. 13.
26. It is striking that Thucydides himself does not make use of any term such as *historial historiē* (Hdt. 1.1; 2.118), as Peter Spahn reminded us during the conference "Between Anarchy and Order"; see Ober (2006), p. 131.
27. Spahn (2011), p. 42, with a slightly different emphasis: "Und da Politik seines Erachtens wesentlich durch die Zeit bestimmt wird, Schnelligkeit, Gegenwartsanalyse und Zukunftsberechnung erfordert, kann politische Lehre nach Thukydides nicht durch reine Theorie gewährleistet werden, sondern durch eine theoriegeleitete Geschichtsschreibung (a theory-based historiography, author's translation)."
28. Two famous examples are 1.22.4 and 3.82.2.
29. This is the main assumption in 1.22.4.
30. For this question, see Neville Morley in *CoO*.
31. Bleckmann (1998), p. 318: the war as a "Gesamtkatastrophe."
32. In an often rather rude manner, as seems to be referred to in 3.82.2, where Thucydides famously calls war a "violent teacher" (*biaios didaskalos*).
33. Similar to Macleod (1974), p. 391: "statesmanlike forethought."
34. This uncertainty is an important aspect in the speech of Hermocrates at Gela, see 4.62.4; Pericles himself acknowledges that problem in 1.140.1; the Plataeans make appeal to it in 3.59.1.

35. Stahl (2002), p. 68.
36. Hermocrates is made to tell us this in 4.63.1.
37. For Leo Strauss's account of Thucydides on morality, see Liisi Keedus's article in this volume; on the whole subject Low (2007); specifically on Thucydides, Low (2011); the highly influential work by Orwin (1994); Podoksik (2005).
38. 4.81.3: *einai kata panta agathos*.
39. See Leppin (2011), p. 113.
40. Sparta as the winning party seems not to deserve an appraisal comparable to that of the Syracusans in 7.87; one would imagine that the Spartans' victory would be the *ergon megiston* and *lamprotaton* in Greek history—but Thucydides deems the Athenians' defeat at Syracuse to be of greater importance than Sparta's triumph at the end of this greatest war of all.
41. Wendt (2011), p. 224; Lebow (2007), p. 172 and *passim*.
42. This is close to the argument of Ernst Baltrusch in this volume.
43. For that issue, see the excellent treatment in Lebow (2003), esp. pp. 40–1, 64, 96, and 293–7.
44. This includes even those whose intellectual capacities Thucydides tends to accept and to admire, such as Themistocles who sets the path for the conflicts by cheating the Spartans in 1.89ff.; or Pericles, whose abilities were impressive and convincing enough to dominate the deciding body in Athens as one man above the egalitarian system, see 2.65.
45. This refers again to 3.82.2.

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Contributors

Ernst Baltrusch is Professor of Ancient History at the Freie Universität Berlin. He has published widely on various topics in Ancient History, especially on Jews and Judaism in the ancient world, international law and Sparta in antiquity, including *Symmachie und Spondai* (1994), *Die Juden und das römische Reich* (2002), *Sparta* (4th edition, 2010), *Außenpolitik, Bünde und Reichsbildung in der Antike* (2008), and *Herodes: König im Heiligen Land* (2014). He is the coeditor of *Ein Besitz für immer? Geschichte, Polis und Völkerrecht bei Thukydides* (2011), and of *Amici—socii—clientes* (2015).

Liisi Keedus is a research fellow at the Erik Castrén Institute of International Law and Human Rights at University of Helsinki. She is the author of *The Crisis of German Historicism* (2015) and of various articles on modern political philosophy and its historical influences, including the writings of Hannah Arendt, Leo Strauss, and Thomas Hobbes.

Richard Ned Lebow is Professor of International Political Theory at King's College, London, and James O. Freedman Presidential Professor of Government at Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH. He is the author of many books on international relations, comparative politics, political theory, political psychology, history, and classics, especially Thucydides, including *The Tragic Vision*

of Politics (2003), *A Cultural Theory of International Relations* (2008), *Forbidden Fruit: Counterfactuals and International Relations* (2010), and *Constructing Cause in International Relations* (2014).

Christine Lee is a tutor at St. John's College, Annapolis, MD. She has published various articles on the politics and ethics of realism in International Relations and on the modern reception of classical antiquity. She was also a postdoctoral fellow for the AHRC-funded project "Thucydides: Reception, Reinterpretation and Influence" at the University of Bristol.

Klaus Meister was Professor of Ancient History at the Technische Universität Berlin before retiring in 2005. He has published widely on many aspects of Graeco-Roman history, historiography, and philosophy, including *Historische Kritik bei Polybios* (1969), *Die Ungeschichtlichkeit des Kalliasfriedens* (1982), *Die griechische Geschichtsschreibung* (1990), *"Aller Dinge Maß ist der Mensch"* (2010), and *Thukydides als Vorbild der Historiker* (2013).

Christian R. Thauer is Senior Lecturer in International Relations at the Center for German Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He is the author of *The Managerial Sources of Corporate Social Responsibility* (2014), coeditor of *Business and Governance in South Africa* (2013), and has published various articles on political economy, governance, and international relations.

Christian Wendt is Professor of Ancient History at Freie Universität Berlin and head of the Berlin Thucydides Center. His publications include *Sine fine* (2008) and numerous articles on Greek historiography and political thought, ancient international

law, and the reception of Thucydides in modern political theory. He is the co-editor of *2000 Jahre Varusschlacht* (2012), *Ein Besitz für immer? Geschichte, Polis und Völkerrecht bei Thukydides* (2011) and is currently co-editing a volume on ancient sea power (*Seemacht, Seeherrschaft und die Antike*).

Wolfgang Will is Adjunct Professor of Ancient History at the University of Bonn. He is the author of various books and articles on many aspects of Greek and Roman history, including *Alexander der Große* (1986), *Der römische Mob* (1991), *Julius Caesar* (1991), *Perikles* (1995), *Thukydides und Perikles* (2003), *Der Untergang von Melos* (2006), *Demosthenes* (2013), and *Herodot und Thukydides* (2015).

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