CHAPTER 2

Public Speech and Brute Fact: Thucydides

A. Subject and Author

The author of the work we now call "The History of the Peloponnesian War" introduces his text with the statement that Thucydides the Athenian began working on his account of the war between the Athenians and the Peloponnesians right at the beginning of the war (431 B.C.) because at the time he expected (elpisis) that it would be great and most worthy of recording—the two main opponents (Athens and Sparta) being at the height of their strength and preparation—and because he saw (kat . . . horon) that the rest of the Greek world was either allied to or inclining toward one side or the other (1.1.1). Thus, the text, its subject (the war), and the author's work as a historian have in this opening sentence a common point of origin. From the very start, Thucydides hints that there is both a connection and a distinction between inference and observation: he saw the situations of the two opponents and the rest of Greece, and he (thereby) inferred that the war would be great and noteworthy. And, as we are told in the next sentence, Thucydides was correct in his prediction: the disturbance (kinēsis) caused by the war was not only great among the Hellenes, it involved a certain part of the barbarian world, and finally engulfed practically the whole of mankind (1.1.2). The only emendation of Thucydides' original (prewar) assessment suggested in his second (explicitly postwar) sentence is that the conflict turned out to involve barbarians as well as Greeks.1

1 Greek text: H. Stuart-Jones (OCT, 1900–1902, with revised app. crit. by J. E. Powell, 1942). Translations: R. Crawley (Everyman, 1910; Free Press, 1996 [1: Landmark Thucydides]); R. Warner (Penguin, rev. ed., 1972). Commentaries: Gomme, Andrewes, and Dover, HCT; Hornblower, Commentary (2 vols. to date). Earlier drafts of parts of this chapter appeared as Ober, "Civic Ideology," "Thucydides' Criticism," and "Thucydides' Theoreticon:" Thucydides' political view is far from transparent. The koi classical are 2.65 (praise of Pericles, see below, 3.C.4), and 8.97 (praise of the broad-based oligarchy of the Five Thousand). Modern readings have placed Thucydides all around the political map, e.g., J. Finley, Thucydides, 237: Thucydides was by nature a democrat incapable of conceiving a great progressive city except as a democracy. Woodhead, Thucydides, 34–35: Thucydides did not approve of democracy. D. Roehrig, Thucydides, 330–31, and "Alcibiades," 93–105: Thucydides sought to defend a principled democracy against the oligarchs of 404 and was an advocate of a "mixed constitution." Grem, Greek Political Theory, 35–42: Thucydides was a moderate oligarch, who preferred the rule of the intelligent few and saw democracy's shortcomings as key to Athenian military failure. Dover in HCT 5: 355–39: Thucydides' preference was for the moderate oligarchy of the Five Thousand. Abbott, Thucydides, 109–48, esp. 128: Thucydides "holds a brief" for neither democracy nor oligarchy but exposes the weaknesses of each. Conner, Thucydides, 237–42 (with review of literature). Thucydides was neither a simple antidemocrat nor a proponent of oligarchy. Papa, "Thucydides and Democracy," 276–96: Thucydides was not especially antidemocratic but regarded both democrats and oligarchs as con-

These opening sentences establish the credentials of both author and subject. The reader is alerted to the greatness of the events, the perspicacity of the historian, and the importance of the text. Thucydides did more than review past history to find events worth commemorating, he foresaw great events in the offing, assessed their significance accurately, and studied the action as it unfolded. The author of this text is no mere chronicler of past facts; he possesses a capacity for perceiving the general direction of future developments. Having established his bona fides, Thucydides underlines the magnitude of the events he has recorded by comparing the Peloponnesian War with previous conflicts. Yet making this comparison, we soon learn, is a difficult undertaking. Because of the passage of time, Thucydides was unable to establish securely (heurēin) events that occurred at any period prior to the recent war, much less those in the distant past. But despite the impossibility of fully reliable knowledge about early history, Thucydides was able to use a process of inference and probability (ek telémëtrion) to arrive at what he felt was a sound, if somewhat shocking, conclusion: the wars and other affairs of the heroic Greek past were not really very great after all (1.1.3). Although these initial passages offer the reader no hint about the author's stance toward Athenian democracy, they begin to establish the premises from which a powerful critical argument will be developed.

A.1. Historical Knowledge: erga versus logoi

After a brief, but analytically important, précis of what he was able to cobble together about the earliest development of civilization in Greece (see below, 2.A.2), Thucydides returns to the issue of the reliability of historical knowledge (1.20.1–2). He reiterates that the things he was able to discover by inference about the ancient past are difficult to trust in every particular and then launches an attack on those who believe whatever they happen to hear about the past, including things about their own country, without subjecting the accounts to rigorous testing (asassantrios). His case in point is the belief, held by "the majority (to phileon) of the Athenians," that Hipparchus (son of the tyrant Pisistratus), the man killed by Harmodius and Aristogeiton, was actually the tyrant of Athens at the time of his assassination. According to Thucydides, the Athenian contribution to the breakdown of community during the Peloponnesian War. My argument here treats the text as a whole and offers no contribution to the "Thucydidean question" of composition. For this long debate, which we may call two centuries old, see Dover in HCT 5: 361–444; Rawlings, Structure, 250–54; Hornblower, Commentary, 2: 15–16, 119–22.

1 On the opening sentence, and Thucydides' wilful creation of the Peloponnesian War as an object of analysis accessible only through the writer's text, see Lorius, "Thucydide et l'écrit en guerre," with Edmunds, "Thucydides in the Act"; Cranes, Blinded Eye, 28–29.

2 The term abanatmēta in later Greek can mean "without being put to the torture, without pain" (LSJ s.v.). Here the primary meaning must be "without proper examination." The root term is βασανος: the jeweller's touchstone by which the gold content of metal is assayed; it is a common metaphor in early Greek didactic poetry for the technique of discerning an individual's true value (see Levine, "Symposium and the Polis," 195–96). But note Thucydides' emphasis on the difficulty (erga pain) of his investigations, below.
nians did not know that in fact Hipparchus was the younger brother of the real tyrant (Hippias). If we envision Thucydides as a critic of democracy, this cannot be a casual example: Many Athenians apparently assumed that the assassination of Hipparchus was among the events that helped to bring about the establishment of the democratic government. By maintaining that Hipparchus was only a minor player in the drama of the tyranny, Thucydides undermines a foundation myth of the democracy and so deprives popular rule of one part of its "usable past." The word used by Thucydides for the ignorant Athenians who supposed Hipparchus to have been tyrant—πλῆθος—is not, in this context, a value-neutral term denoting "more than half of a homogeneous population"; like "demos," it carried strong sociopolitical connotations when used by members of the critical community in reference to the mass of ordinary citizens, who are thereby contrasted to an elite. Thus, the attentive reader is alerted to the text's critical force: it will present facts that have been "tested" and so are much more reliable than the hodgepodge of often erroneous beliefs held by the Athenian masses—beliefs that constitute "democratic knowledge" and underlie Athens' civic ideology.  

The general (and specifically popular Athenian) unwillingness to test the truth is, Thucydides implies, bad enough when the stories have to do with the distant past. But he goes on to show that the Athenians, in common with "other Hellenes," are equally credulous when it comes to the affairs of the present day, affairs that have not been obscured by the passage of time. To prove this point, Thucydides cites examples of two errors regarding Sparta: the beliefs that the two Spartan kings each had two votes in council and that there was a Spartan battalion called the "Pitanate Iochot;" which Thucydides sums up: "Such was the degree of carelessness among the many (ὅλοι τοίχοι) in the search for truth (ἀλήθεια) and their preference for ready-made accounts" (1.20.3). Although "other Hellenes" are also indicted by Thucydides' comments, this criticism seems to be directed at two primary targets: Herodotus, whose History contains those two apparent errors, and the Athenians who are implied by the sociologically loaded term ὀλοι τοίχοι. Thucydides thus situates his text in critical juxtaposition first to other political texts currently circulating in Athens and elsewhere, and next to the ill-founded assumptions regarded as typical of the Athenian masses: πλῆθος and ὀλοι τοίχοι. Moreover, his equation of the Athenian many with "other Hellenes" casts a prospective shadow on subsequent claims by historical actors about Athenian exceptionalism in regard to intellectual attainments.  

Having chastened the many for their ignorance and carelessness in regard to the truth, Thucydides then (1.21.1) asserts the relative trustworthiness of his own brief account of the distant past: the reader will not go too far wrong in believing Thucydides' inferential account, which is based on the clearest possible sources of evidence (ἐκ ἐπιφανεστάτων στήνων). In any event, Thucydides compressed ancient history is, he says, more reliable than the accounts of either the poets or the writers of prose (λογογραφοί)—I take the latter term as potentially including other historians (especially Herodotus) and writers of prose says like Ps.-Xenophon, but also certain of Athens' public orators. The poets are unbelievable because they try to make the events of which they sing seem greater than they actually were. The prose writers are more concerned with being persuasive to listeners (τοῖς ἀκοομεί) rather than with heeding close to the truth. The events the logographoi relate cannot be checked (ἀκοομεί) because they are too distant in time, and indeed, they "have won their way into the realm of the fabulous" (ἐπὶ τοὺς μαθητὰς εἰκονικεῖσθαι). This last phrase, along with the charge that poets infringe the greatness of their own subjects, hints at a context; this becomes explicit when Thucydides refuses to engage in the

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1 Thucydides refers to these events in book 6, asserting (6.53.3) that the Athenians knew that it was neither themselves nor Harmodius, but the Spartans who had liberated Athens from the tyrants. He introduces his own detailed narrative of the Tyrannicide with the comment that it will show that the Athenians themselves were no more capable than others of producing accurate accounts of their own history (6.54.1). The garbled Athenian memory of the tyrant's is directly associated by Thucydides with the demotic hysteria over the affair of the Heron (6.60.1; below, 2.6.2). Tyrannicide story in Thucydides and its critical force: Rawlings, Structure, 103–7, 256–59; Taylor, Tyrant Slayers; Thomas, Oral Tradition, 238–82, esp. 242–45; Ebura ("Battle," 361) argues Thucydides' Tyrranicide story "reveals human beings as creatures of meaning in the context of political struggle."  

"context (agónisma) for current listening pleasure." (1.22.4; see below). Thucydides locates the quasi-historical accounts presented by the poets and (other) prose writers in the context of a tournament of words; the victor's reward will be public acclaim and the easy belief of the gullible many.  

Of course, Thucydides himself has previously introduced a competition between the "greatness" of the Peloponnesian War (the subject of his text) and all previous events. But this contest, he informs the reader, will not be judged by popular acclaim. Although (1.21.2) it is human nature (kai tén anthropinán) for men to overrate the war in which they are engaged while they are fighting it, and then, once it is over, to fall back into naïve wonderment at the glories of the distant past—this war will demonstrate to anyone who is willing to pay attention to the facts themselves (kai tos pelemonous houtón... ap' autón tón ergón skopouai déidel) that it was the greatest of all. Here Thucydides introduces a conception that is central to his critical project: the superior importance and self-evident significance for the interpreter of the past of what really happened, of the brute facts about what was really done (ta erga). In this sentence, it is the war itself that demonstrates, by means of the facts themselves, its own greatness. The historian, along with the necessity of the words of his text as a conduit for an apprehension of the facts, has suddenly disappeared. The truth about the war is no longer a matter of verbal persuasion or interpretation. It has become a self-evident matter of visual perception.  

Immediately following this remarkable and momentary disappearing act comes an explicit reminder of the presence of the author, the constructed nature of his verbal record, and its problematic relationship to historical words and deeds. Thucydides' next sentence (1.22.1) is grammatically complex, and its precise meaning is held debatable among modern scholars: "...as to the things expressed in speech (logoi)," either before or during the war, neither Thucydides nor his informants could remember exactly what was said. But, Thucydides implies, this is not really a problem: "So, [given the impossibility of perfect recall,] I have recorded the various things that seemed to me (ekdóxan emoi) to be especially necessary to say in regard to the general circumstances involved."


5 See esp. 1.22.2: to ergon prochelemín. Ergon as "fact." Parry, "Logoi," 13, 20–21, 76–89, and esp. 92–93: ergon can mean anything wrought or done, or deeds of war, or the whole business of war. "But then there is a slightly different direction in the meaning of ergon, whereby it stands for fact, or reality, the thing that was actually done. It is this side of the word that makes it appropriate for the logopóiesis antíthéseis." As Parry points out (loc. cit.), the two meanings of ergon as fact and as deed are quite close and are often conflated in Thucydides. Thus, ergon in the antithesis "means external reality, but then it also means the deeds of war, and so war; and by insisting on this, Thucydides presents war as the reality, the complex of external forces within which the human intellect strives and operates. Similarly, see Immerwahr, "Ergon," 276–81.

6 Cf. I.1.1, with its implied connection and distinction between observation and interpretation. Thucydides' "disappearance" into his text: Louchou, "Thucydides a écrit la guerre." Conner (Thucydides, 29; cf. 248) notes that at 1.21.2, "The third person narrative of the opening sentence yields to a new speaker: the war itself." Visual perception becomes much more problematic later in the history: below, 2.6.114.

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in each case, holding as close as possible to the overall sense of what was actually said. This seemingly rather casual approach to accuracy in the recording of the speeches delivered by participants in the war is then sharply contrasted to the historian's stance on the actual events:

But with regard to those things (erga) that were actually done in the war, I did not deem it the correct approach to write down the facts according to the account of the first informant I came across, nor (did I write them down) just as appeared right to me (coid' his emoi edóxen); but rather in respect both to events at which I was myself present, and to the accounts of others, I deemed it the correct approach to write down the facts only after having investigated (exepetíthtis) each one as vigorously as possible in regard to accuracy (akribías). (1.22.2)  

Here the contrast between logoi (speeches that need not be recorded exactly and can include arguments that "seemed necessary" to the current author) and erga (facts that must be recorded as accurately as humanly possible and must not be presented just as seemed right to the author) is explicit. The contrast introduces the centrally important "in words x / but in fact y" antithesis that underpins much of Thucydides' analysis of political affairs.

Erga occupy a privileged place in Thucydides' narrative in relation to logoi. Speeches (especially those spoken in public by self-interested politicians) and facts often collide in the world constructed by Thucydides' text. As we shall see, individual men and states (i.e., men deploying power as organized collectives..."

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8 My translation here attempts to catch the simultaneous "generality" of the things that "always" need to be said in cases that are similar (cf. below) and the particularity of the specific cases.

9 My translation here is based on Crawley's ("But it [my account] rests partly on what I saw myself, partly on what others saw for me, the accuracy of the report being always tried by the most severe and detailed tests possible"). Cf. Gomme in HCT, and Hornblower, Commentary, ad loc.: there is a long-standing controversy about whether epexeíthtis should be taken with both the reports of others and what Thucydides personally saw, or only with the reports of others. I take it both because it seems logically entailable by "not just as seemed right to myself." There is (in long recognized; esp. cit.) a good deal of parallelism and implied contrast between this sentence, on the erga, and the previous sentence (1.22.1), on the logoi. In both there is a reference to Thucydides' own experience and that of his informants; in neither can he be (alone) or his informants be completely trusted. But in the latter case, akribías is implicitly considered possible; in the former, it is said to be charadon. In the former, "It seemed right to me"; in the second, "it did not seem right to me." Throughout there is a privileging of erga versus logoi—erga can be known with akribías if accounts are put to the test. Logoi probably cannot be known with akribías, and anyway, they are not worth the effort it would take to try to reconstruct them. This sentence is one of the most controversial in Thucydides. See, recently, Swain, "Thucydides 1.22.1." (Thucydides sought to accurately reproduce the actual intended meaning, although not the exact words, of each speaker); Xenias, Thukydidis, 61–66 (the speeches were free inventions by Thucydides himself); Florio, "Thucydides' Hypothecâtes"; Hornblower, Commentary, ad loc. Cogan (Human Things, esp. x-xiv) seems to miss the force of the antithesis and claims that the speeches were accurately reported by Thucydides. Louchou, "Thukykidês," 1167–79, surveys earlier literature.

The logopóiesis distinction is not unique, or even original to Thucydides (see, e.g., Gorgias Palamedes 34), but Thucydides' reconfiguration of the antithesis is very much his own. Parry, "Logoi," remains seminal on the antithesis and Thucydides' use of it; cf. Swain, "Thucydides 1.22.1," esp. 35–36.
as seemed right to me," nonrecoverable (or only partly recoverable) events of the distant past are implicitly equated with nonrecoverable (due to imperfect memory) speeches delivered during or just before the war. When Thucydides says that he reported erga "not just as appeared right to me," he signals a contrast between distant events and speeches on the one hand, and accurately recoverable facts about the war on the other. Speeches and early history are necessarily understood through appearance, more or less well-informed opinion, and inference; while accurate facts about recent events can be understood as objectively true. As we have seen (1.18.2), the enactment formula of the Athenian Assembly was "It appeared right to the Assembly that . . . ." (ekou tōi dénōi . . . .). Thus, when Thucydides removed facts from the realm of affairs that could properly be understood by the common culture, through listening to competing speeches, or by reference to examples drawn from a distant past, he also implicitly removed facts from the realm of things that could properly be processed by the standard procedures of the Athenian democratic government. The citizen Assembly was preeminently the realm of competitive speech, opinion, and collective interpretation. In the sentence cited above, seeming is distinguished from being; the facts themselves have been removed to a realm beyond interpretation—and certainly beyond the interpretive capacity of ordinary citizens sitting in public Assembly.

But Thucydides is not a simple sort of critic, and he recognized that the problem of perspective presented a challenge to his goal of understanding and presenting to his readers the objective facts about the recent past. He immediately complicates the notion that facts might be objective entities that can exist in a realm beyond perspective:

But my investigation proved very laborious, because the witnesses to each of the things that actually happened (tois ergoisi) did not relate the same things about these things, but rather [each spoke] according to his individual partiality (emnoloi) for one side or the other, or according to individual memory. (1.22.3)

In his prior discussion on how he treated speeches and events (1.22.1–2), Thucydides had established a hierarchical relationship between only imperfectly knowable ancient history and accurately recoverable recent history, and between ergo and erga. There he stated that, although speeches neither could be nor need be reported exactly, he subjected all reports of events (as well as his own perceptions) to the most rigorous scrutiny. But here he reminds the reader that his own knowledge of the erga was, necessarily, largely a product of listening to things said by others about what had actually happened in the war, and

"True historical objectivity, if defined as the absence of perspective, the "view from nowhere," is of course simply impossible; see, for example, Novick, Noble Dreams. Yet it is important to keep in mind that Thucydides' motive for claiming to be "objective" was not the same as that of the "scientific" historians of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries who attempted (and attempted to follow von Ranke's dictum that it is the historian's duty to relate history "wie es eigentlich gewesen." Thucydides was not writing within the confines of an established discipline, or for a disciplinary audience. And thus it seems to me relatively meaningless to criticize him for not being "truly" objective by Rankian standards (cf. below, 2n.19). Objectivity, I believe, is a rhetorical stance for Thucydides; one that offered him a needed point d'apprai for his critical project; cf. White, Metahistory, with Kenner, "Liberation," 104–5, on modern historians' employment of the "trope of irony," which situates the historian in a realm of realms denied the historical actors he or she studies. Hornblower (Thucydides, 155–50) points out Thucydides' authorial self-certainty and the rarity of this stance in ancient historiography.

11 Cf. Edwards, Chance, 166–67. Eldon (Eldon) passages from earlier in the text: 1.3.2, 1.3.3, 1.9.1, 1.9.1, 1.10.4. Later examples: Pope, "Thucydides and Democracy" 281. For the contrasts in 1.22.1–3, see Wilke, "Still," with the comments of Cole, Origins, 104–5. The assertion of the authority to speak "as seems best to me" is a trope dating back to Homer (e.g., R. 13.735: Polyphemus will advise hōs moi dokei einai arister; cf. II. 9.103 [Hesiod], 9.334 [Achilles]), and we are reminded, therefore, of Thucydides' agoi with the poets.

that these logos were recounted by multiple witnesses, each of whom imposed his own ideological perspective on his narrative, and whose memory was imperfect. Thucydides’ account of erga is thus based on biased logos.

The reader is now set for the grand revelation: How did Thucydides extract the pure gold of objective historical truth (arithēs) about events from the biased accounts of multiple, tendentious verbal accounts? What is the skillful method—in fifth-century Greek terms, the techne—that elevates the current writer’s record of the past above the error-ridden accounts of poets and logographoi? Presumably at the heart of the historian’s craft is a process of rigorous testing. Thucydides has previously complained that people tend to believe things “untested” (abaxamantōs) and that the reports of the logographoi are “not capable of being tested” (anexelenkito). By contrast, he claims to have checked out (epexelhō) the truth of reports exhaustively. What exactly does this process entail? How are narratives of past events put to the test? What is the touchstone by which the historian tests the gold content of others’ accounts?

Yet the master craftsman will not reveal his secrets, and the anticipated revelation never comes. In the place of a methodological explanation of how objective historical truth is extracted, the reader is presented with what appears at first to be a digression on the probable reception of Thucydides’ text: “When people listen to (kat’ ea ... abaxamain) my account, the very lack of fables (mahodēs) will probably make it appear rather unpleasant (arteresterōn)” (1.22.4). Here the language draws an explicit contrast between Thucydides’ unpleasant fable-free history and the accounts of the poets and logographoi, which were written with an eye toward a favorable reception and which may win their way into the province of fable. The reader has now been warned: the investigation of the facts about the war was a lot of work for Thucydides, he does not intend to reveal to us the craftsman’s technique for extracting historical objectivity from subjective accounts. Moreover, readers used to the pleasures of poetry and logography should not expect to enjoy Thucydides’ unadorned and therefore “unpleasant” narrative. So why should one bother to read it? The answer comes in the next sentence: But as many as wish genuinely to understand (to saphes skopēn) that which happened in the past and that which will happen in the future—a future that over time, in accordance with human nature (kata αnthropōn) will be much the same as the past, or at least similar—if they judge this account useful, that is quite enough [for me]. It is as a possession for all time rather than as an entry into the contest (agōnia) for current listening pleasure that I wrote.” (1.22.4)


For the claim that history should be in some sense useful, see Edmonds, Chance, 149–55; Rawlings, Structure, 254–63; Conner, Thucydides, 243–48; Flory, “Meaning.” Gomme, in IHT 1: 149–50, argues that “the future things” are future still in Thucydides, but assumed to be past to the reader. Thus, Thucydides does not suggest that his work will be of any help to one who hopes to understand what is still in his own future; and ergo, Thucydides is not to be taken as giving practical advice for political agents. Gomme’s argument strains the sense of the passage and is predicated on seeing Thucydides as a historian, with a modern historian’s interests; cf. Ste. Croix, Origenes, 30–33. For Thucydides qua “modern, scientific” historian, see Abbott, Thucydides, esp. 10–42; Cochrane, Thucydides. The other side of the “modernist Thucydides” coin is to view Thucydides as a disinterested historian, who knew that historians should be objective, but willfully decided not to be: e.g., Wallace, “Thucydides”; Hunter, Thucydides, esp. 177–84; Badim, “Thucydides and the Outbreak,” esp. 64: “It is time to appreciate the perfect skill of the advocate claiming a passion for objectivity.” Cf. Gomme, in IHT 1: 144–47: Thucydides cannot be regarded as objective, as no historian truly can; Rawlings, Structure, 263–72: no meaningful line can be drawn between the historian as reporter of events and historian as artist; Conner, “Post Modernity” (survey of the debate) and Thucydides, esp. 235–36: the text is complex and forces the reader to challenge positions that the text itself seems to establish.

Methodological lessons: see below, Chapters 4–6; cf. Cole, Origenes, 125: “The only true transmission of an entire art is, in Plato’s view, that which involves, not a set of selected samples, but all the metalexis which explains how those samples are arrived at.” Thucydides’ didactic techniques are discussed by Hunter, Thucydides, 179–83; Conner, Thucydides, Fuehr, Origenes, esp. 131–32; Edmonds, “Thucydides in the Act”; Arnold, “Persuasive Style.”

Hit. I.1. Latiner (Historical Method, 6–10) compares Herodotus’ stated intentions with those of Hecataeus and Thucydides.
prose narrative. This critical theory is in turn based on specific understandings of human nature and political power. It offers a powerful challenge, on several fronts, to Thucydides' intellectual contemporaries who wrote and conversed on political matters, as well as to the hegemony of democratic ways of knowing and acting in the political realm.

Thucydides grounds his narrative on several interlocking assumptions; these are never argued for in detail in the text, but they are crucial for understanding his critical project. First is his assumption that what is important about the past is politics, meaning the internal governmental affairs of the major poleis, inter-state relations, and the characters, doings, and intentions of major politicians. Next is his postulate that this political past is unitary: Thucydides tells the story of a single extended chain of violent events—a war (sangregarpe ton polemon, 1.1.1) that encompassed the total period in the past that is accurately knowable through the process of historical testing. The collective implication of (1) the unquestionable preeminence of the political, (2) the unity of the past, and (3) the unknowability of the distant past, is that this text is the first real record of the past and its meaning that has yet been written—Thucydides seeks to consign his competitors to the dust heap of historiography. Furthermore, since Thucydides has done it right, no other history of the period in question will ever need to be written: speaking of the overt precipitating factors (aithiats) of the war (1.23.5), Thucydides states that he will run through them so that "no one need ever again search for (cathetá) the sources of this war that fell upon the Hellenes." If we combine this "exhaustiveness" conclusion with Thucydides' claim that a careful reading of his text will allow the reader to understand past and future, it becomes possible to suggest that Thucydides saw little use in anyone ever writing history after him. This "exclusive" hypothesis, which pushes Thucydides a long way from the interests and concerns of the modern discipline of history, must be shocking if we regard Thucydides as a historian working within the context of an ongoing historical enterprise, within a tradition that sees the past as intrinsically worthy of study. It is much less surprising if we suppose that history was not an end in itself for Thucydides, but rather was a means to the end of developing a critical political theory.

A.2. Three Models of State Power: The "Archaeology"

Thucydides' text is deeply concerned with both power and human nature. The play of power is preeminent in the "Archaeology"—the section of the history (1.2–19) in which Thucydides sketches out what he feels can reasonably be inferred about early Greek history. Thucydides' Archaeology of early Greece centers on the process of demographic stabilization that ultimately allowed certain poleis to gain the prerequisites of power: a large population base, liquid capital, secure fortifications, and a large navy. In the early period, the Greek peoples wandered here and there, unable to settle down for long because of raiders (leitai) who attacked them by land and sea. When people did settle for a while on good land, some became greater and more powerful (dynamneis . . . meliorai) than others. This resulted in internecine conflicts (stasis) that ultimately destroyed these early societies (1.2.4). This passage points to the negative effects of power that is not projected outward in imperial expansion: The successful exploitation of resources (here, good land) leads to the concentration of wealth. Inequitable distribution of material goods in turn leads certain persons or groups of people in a given territory to become "greater" in respect to power than others. When the inequality becomes too obvious, it leads to stasis, which ultimately destroys the entire society. Apparently the process of consolidation of wealth and consequent social collapse was rapid and quite casual in the early period—the resources that could be gained by exploiting the land were relatively meager, so the power gained from those resources was relatively weak, and thus small conflicts (combined with raids launched by greedy and opportunistic outsiders) were sufficient to bring down the existing structures of power.

In order for greater power to be concentrated and for it to last longer, a stabilizing factor was required: Thucydides (1.7–8) identifies this factor in the building of fortifications that allowed cities to grow up in the coastal areas that were formerly avoided because of piracy. Fortifications served to protect the population of a city by deflecting the disruptive attacks of piratical sea-raiders.

On the Archaeology and its discussion of power, see Hunter, Past and Process, 17–40; Connon, The Pattern, 20, 31–32. Contrast Hunter, Thucydides, 184, and Past and Process (Herrout and Thucydides as similar "scientists" or "pro-Socratic" thinkers); Scallon, "Echoes of Herodotus." No other history of the period ever needed: cf. Herod. Od. 12.452–53: Odinus remarks to Aelius, after a four-book narrative, that "once properly told, a tale should not be repeated."
As a result of their defenses, coastal cities were able to engage in lucrative trade, which brought them reserves of liquid capital. Some cities used their amassed capital to build warships of their own. The first action each young sea power undertook was to crush the pirates, the few to subjugate its less wealthy and more indolent neighbors (1.8). The conquered neighbors lost their freedom, but they accepted their subject status because they reaped material benefits by submitting to a powerful hegemon who would (for selfishly prudential reasons) defend them from outside threats (1.8.2–3). Thus, we have a second model of the growth of state power: in this case, the location of the nascent state near the sea means that its power (gained through the concentration of resources and protected by fortifications) could be projected outward by means of naval forces, and used to extract wealth from other states by depriving them of their freedom.

This second model, which obviously suits fifth-century imperial Athens, potentially leads to much greater and longer-lasting state power, but it is not without its complications. The expansionist state may run into various obstacles (kórumata, 1.16). Obstacles may be external, that is, the presence of a greater power in the region. Thucydides cites the example of the sixth-century Ionians, who had naval power but were prevented by the more powerful Persians from expanding. The Athenian model still holds: sixth-century Persia was a land power; thus this passage foreshadows land-based Sparta’s attempt to block Athenian sea-based expansionism. Other obstacles to the growth of power were internal. Thucydides’ prime example of an internal obstacle to growth, the rule of a tyrant, points to the close relationship between governing authority and personal power—a central concern of Plutarch and other fifth-century political writers. Mainland Greek tyrants, we are told, were interested only in their own personal security and in expanding the holdings of their private households, and thus they never accomplished much (1.17). Here Thucydides establishes a key distinction between the selfish personal interest of the powerful individual and the powerlessness of the state as a whole. He suggests that a state dominated by self-interested individuals will never become truly great, a principle that plays a major role in his criticism of Athenian democracy.

The Archaeology, with its explicit focus on the development of the Greek polis, reveals that Thucydides’ model of international relations is intended to apply specifically to Greece. This is significant in that Greek writers tended to associate large-scale, hegemonic imperial structures with the East—first with Lydia and then with Persia. Athenian naval forces had been a key factor in the Greek victory over Persia in 480–478 B.C., and Athens was the Greek polis most determined to pursue the anti-Persian crusade after the defeat of the eastern invaders. In the decades after the Persian Wars, some Greek writers, notably Aeschylus and Herodotus, had begun hinting that the dramatic growth of Athenian power might have a darker side; perhaps Athens risked self-corruption as a result of having assimilated the dangerous “Eastern” passion for creating overseas empires. Thucydides’ Archaeology, by contrast, gives hegemony a firmly Greek prehistory. The question of whether democratic Athens is a radically new historical phenomenon—sui generis and unbounded by traditional assumptions about the limits of human endeavor—or whether Athens is assimilable to standard models of human, Greek, or imperial behavior is an important theme throughout Thucydides’ history.

In the scenarios sketched out above, power seems restless and destructive. The apparent conclusion is that once a state has become powerful, it has only two choices. It may attempt to extend its power (oikétēnai) through conquest and, if successful, will necessarily destroy the freedom of others. Or the internal inequalities in wealth generated by the failure to deploy power externally will eventually lead to the self-destructive trauma of stasis. Moreover, Thucydides claims that the instrumentality of great power is normally the control of the seas; all early Greek navies were sources of strength and brought those who deployed them revenues (cheirētaia) and empire (archē). By contrast, there were no wars by land that resulted in the acquisition of real power (dynamis, 1.15.1–2).

But there is a third model to be considered. In the fifth century B.C., Sparta was a genuinely powerful land-based state that maintained sufficient military strength to interfere successfully in the affairs of other poles. The key to Sparta’s remarkable ability to develop into a great power without resort to the control of the sea was an extraordinary political and social stability: despite a long period of stasis that followed the original Dorian settlement of Laecademon (presumably a reference to the struggles attending the creation of the helot state), the Spartans had kept to the same political regime (politeia) for over four hundred years (1.18.1). Thucydides does not explain in this passage how the Spartans achieved their remarkable stability—a stability that resisted the tendency for populations without access to naval expansionism to degenerate into stasis. But he has already hinted at an ideological explanation: Although it was the Athenians who first gave up carrying weapons in public, it was the Spartans who first adopted the modern standard of moderation (mētrie). This meant that those individuals who possessed more property (hoi ta meiō kēktēmenon) than others willingly acquiesced to a style of life that was identical to that of hoî polloi (1.6.4). The conflicts that destroyed the early landlocked societies were, we remember (1.2.4), caused by some people becoming greater (meżones) than others; the Spartans apparently avoided stasis because citizens who possessed more (meiōtai) did not give the public appearance of being greater. Thus, Spartan power is linked with a stable social order that emphasizes apparent material equality among citizens as well as con-
STITUTIONAL STABILITY. SOCIAL STABILITY IS MAINTAINED BY APPEARANCES (A MODERATE STYLE OF LIFE), RATHER THAN BY REALITIES. INEQUITIES IN WEALTH PERSE IN FACT, BUT THEY ARE RENDERED LESS NOXIOUS BY A STRICT CODE OF SOCIAL BEHAVIOR.


The close relationship Thucydides draws between state power and the structures of internal constitutional and social order is significant for reading his text as critical of popular rule. The two most common terms for power in fifth-century Athens were dunemos (power as instrument: national financial or military strength relative to other states) and kratos. For most ordinary Athenians, kratos, at least in the political context defined by demokratia, had the positive sense of "power as legitimate authority." The demos' kratos, the people's political power, was regarded as a natural political good. But in Thucydides' much darker vision, kratos is the violent flip-side of dunemos: either raw military might, or the forceful measures by which control over others is gained. The Athenian demos was powerful because the common people were many and were well aware of their collective strength. If the kratos of the demos is a sort of power over others, and if the will to use power as an instrument to achieve greatness can destroy others' freedom and contribute to civil strife, the implication must be that, for Thucydides, demokratia implied the potential power of

It is important to keep in mind that Thucydides' treatment of democratic power is closely associated with his attempt to understand power per se, and its relationship to human behavior, rationality, and suffering. The close association of power with irrationality and suffering informs readings of Thucydides as a pessimistic writer; see Stahl, Thucydides; Immerwahr, "Pathology"; Pomper, Necessary or Flury, 'Thucydides' Hypothesis.' Connex (Thucydides, 29–31) points out that at 1.23.1–3, the greatness of the war is redemptive in terms of the greatness of suffering.

The positive, demotic, marking of kratos as a middle ground between despotism and anarchy is well expressed by Archytas (Eunomides 528–30; cf. Meier, Discovery, 112–13; Kratos (in Thucydides) as domination: 1.143.4, 4.98.2, 8.46.1, 8.76.6; the strength to carry out a war: 3.12.7; violent means used to take a city: 1.64.3. For other examples, see Belote, Lexicon, s.v. On other terms for power and empire in Thucydides, esp. Hellenistics, arché, dunemos, see Immerwahr, "Pathology," 18–21; Wickersham, Hellenism, 51–79.

The demos to destroy the freedom of others. Démokratia therefore embodied an innate capacity to degenerate into statis. Under what circumstances might that capacity be realized?

As a "model 2" great state, Athens' power was predicated upon overseas expansionism joined with the local military security provided by massive city walls. Athens' rise to power, its constitution, and its attendant social order, unlike those of Sparta, were all of relatively recent origin; Athens had ascended to the status of a major naval-imperial power only during and after the Persian Wars. The post-Persian War history of the Aegean world (sketched by Thucydides at 1.89–117) suggested that Athenian démokratia entailed the simultaneous consolidation of the internal power of the demos qua "non-elites" citizenship over the traditional Athenian elites (e.g., the use of ostracism) and the external power of the Athenian demos qua citizen body over many other Greek peoples. That double consolidation had enabled Athens to rise with remarkable speed, and ultimately to rival in prestige the old and stable land power in the Peloponnesus.

Thucydides' account of Athenian preparedness in book 1 and the first part of book 2 leads the reader to suppose that Athens stands in a remarkably strong position at the outbreak of the war. But how well tested was Athens really? How would the closely interwoven Athenian political, social, and imperial orders weather the storms of a war of unprecedented length and ferocity? Would the Athenian demos prove capable of consistently assessing the novel and ever-changing material and political situations accurately, and thereby deploy the instrumentalities of power wisely over time? This would depend—whether Thucydides' methodological introduction—in part upon the sources of information and methods of testing for truth-value employed by the decision-making Assembly. It would also depend upon the Athenian reactions to the unforeseen circumstances, the accidents of war, that would inevitably arise (e.g., 2.11.4). And those reactions would be conditioned by a complex interrelationship between contingent social and political conditions with the behavioral tendencies innate in human nature.

A.3. HUMAN NATURE: INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE INTERESTS

The claim of Thucydides' historical narrative to teach its readers how to understand the future (in political terms) is predicated on an essentially stable underlying human nature (to anthropos, 1.22.4). Thucydides assumes throughout that humans will, by nature, act according to perceived self-interest. This may,
but does not necessarily, mean narrowly selfish personal or individual interest. If it was human nature to seek advantage, that might often mean active cooperation; indeed, the degree to which individuals did act in narrowly personal self-interest alone was inversely proportional to state strength: because the wealthier individuals among the Spartans were able to suppress the impulse to individual aggrandizement, their polis flourished. Meanwhile, the tyrants who ruled many other early Greek poleis worked for the good of their families, and their poleis therefore achieved relatively little. Thucydides seems to regard the final step toward selfishly individualistic behavior—the circumstance in which each individual acts to further only his own personal interests as an individual—as a pathological extreme. In plague-stricken Athens, for example, while some persons continued to act honorably, in many cases the ordinary bonds of family, community, and friendship were shattered by a force beyond human ability to control or comprehend; the ordinary constraints of religious ritual, social propriety, family loyalty, and proper treatment of the dead were ignored. Thucydides’ description of the hedonistic behavior of individual Athenians who had contracted the plague (or feared that they would) might be read as an explanation of how human nature (phasis) asserted itself in a condition free of the artificial restraints of law and social custom (nomos). But Thucydides claims that the effect of the plague on individuals was “scarcely possible for human nature (chalepéteteris e kata tôn authrōpeián phusin) to endure” (2.50.1). Thus, we are entitled to suppose that the plague overcame humanity in some persons and that the behavior of the plague-stricken often went beyond the realm of the natural. The plague narrative describes the ghastly end-point of a continuum of behavior whose middle range is, for Thucydides, “human nature.” For Thucydides, the selves that naturally act to further their perceived interests are collectivities: poles or groups within the polis. The stress of horrible circumstances has the potential to fragment society so that individuals act only to further individual self-interest, but life under those conditions is not fully human.

Under less stressful conditions, Thucydides’ narrative suggests, the actors and selves whose interests will be served by the dictates of human nature are corporate entities. The opposite extreme of hyperindividualism would be humankind acting as a whole in its own collective interests. But Thucydides never hints at this sort of universalism, even as a desirable ideal. Rather, the text’s implied contrast to the hyperindividualism of the plague narrative is the condition in which all of the citizens of a polis act collectively in the interests of the polis as a whole. This ideal relationship between politui and polis, citizeyn and state, is implied by much of the ordinary political language used by classical Greeks. When an Athenian said that “the Athenians” made an alliance with another state, or when a public decree proclaimed that “the demos of the Athenians” decided to sail against the enemies of Athens, the ideological underpinning was an assumption of communal action for the common, unitary, national good. In reality, of course, the decision was made and carried out by a much smaller group; the actual participants in making the decision or carrying out the action represent only a fraction of the total population implied by the language of the announcement. Indeed, critical witnesses like Ps.-Xenophon suggested that decisions made in the name of the corporate whole were in fact made by a minority acting deliberately to advance its own minority interest.

The demotic Athenian view of human nature was probably not so different from that of Thucydides, but Athenian civic ideology put a great deal of emphasis on the demos as a whole as the “self” that naturally acted to further human interests. The Athenian political ideal was for all of the citizens to decide and to act collectively in the interests of the polis as a whole. In Athens, the discontinuity between actual political actors (those who attended the Assembly, made proposals, served as jurors, implemented decisions, and so on) and the corporate whole (hoi Athenaioi) was obscured by the elaborate language of democratic politics. The Athenian governmental and social orders were predicated on synecdoche: the part of the citizen body that made policy in the Assembly represented the collective will of the demos. As such, the decree enacted in Assembly represented the collective will of the demos. As such, the decree was construed (in Athenian ideology) as an expression of the interest of the state as a whole. Thucydides’ text goes well beyond Ps.-Xenophon’s in exposing this construal as a fragile political myth by seeking to demonstrate the existence and function of much narrower interests that were ordinarily concealed by the language of Athenian politics. His text suggests that, under the stress of war, the myth of the demos often broke down and that, in light of the majoritarian decision-making mechanisms of the democratic state, this had serious consequences: Athenian political life after the death of Pericles is depicted as tending toward the selfish extreme typified by poleis beset by tyrants or plague. Alternately, the myth of unity was from time to time revived during the war, and Thucydides suggests that the consequences of this revival were even more destructive to the polis in the long run.

\footnote{Late-fifth- and fourth-century Athenian political writers were very interested in the distinction between that which is “natural” (phasis) and that which is a product of human society (nomos); the distinction was particularly important to the so-called Sophists. See Ostrwald, *From Popular Sovereignty, 202–73*, and “Nomos and Phasis”; cf. below, 3.C.1, 4.C.3. Because I do not suppose that Thucydides was a methodological individualist, I cannot agree with Pouncey (Necessities of War, xii) that Thucydides’ view is that in times of crisis (e.g., war), human nature is “tracked to its proper ground in the human individual.”}

\footnote{On this passage, see esp. Farrar, *Origins*, 136–37.}

\footnote{Plague and individual selfishness: 2.53. Contrast 2.51: examples of selfless care of others. On Thucydides’ emphasis on political groups rather than individuals, see Pepe, “Thucydides and Democracy.” The upshot is that, for Thucydides, humans will ordinarily understand and seek to explain their own advantage within the frame of group (alike, faction, polis) advantage; see below, esp. 2.E.1.}

\footnote{Pope, “Thucydides and Democracy,”.}

\footnote{Athenian ideal of consensus (homonomia); Funkhouser, *Homonomia*, Obers, Mass., 295–99. Thucydides uses homonomia and its verbal form (homonomon) only once each (8.93.3, 8.75.2, respectively), both times in highly charged political contexts associated with the reestablishment of democracy.}

\footnote{“Capital-D Demos”; above, I.B.4.}
When used by Thucydides in a "fractional" sense, ho démos is contrasted with hoi dunatoi (the chief, influential, or powerful men).

18 The significance of Thucydides' use of the word "demos" to refer to "a faction that acts, according to the ordinary dictates of human nature, to further its own selfish interests" is clarified by an assessment of the first use of "demos" in the text. The context of the stasis in the "great and populous" Epidamnus is highly privileged in that it begins Thucydides’ historical narrative properly. The Epidamnian civil conflict seems to have broken out in the course of a war against the local barbarians, although Thucydides remains somewhat uncertain about this (indicated by the phrase "it is said" [his legens], 1.24.4). But he is clear enough on the central event: "Just before the [Peloponnesian] war" (that within the domain of accurately knowable affairs), the demos of Epidamnus expelled hoi dunatoi. This expulsion is, in a sense, the first certain historical fact recorded in the text. The passage describing the Epidamnian stasis comes just after the end of the methodological introduction, at the very beginning of the narrative of the war’s precipitating factors (ailtagi). Furthermore, the internal conflict at Epidamnus was extremely important in its effects; it precipitated the chain of events that led directly to the first, and most fully described, stasis of the war.

In this key passage, the reader is presented with a polis, described as "a great and populous power," that, as a result of a difficult external war, is racked by civil conflict between the many/demos and "the powerful." This pattern recurs in a sort of progressive ripple effect throughout Thucydides’ narrative and informs his critical project.

Having been driven out, "the powerful" Epidamnians made common cause with the local barbarians, and piratically raided Epidamnus by land and sea (1.24.5). Thucydides’ ideal reader’s sympathies are hardly likely to lie with the Epidamnian dunatoi at this point—Thucydides has already remarked that piratical activity by land and sea was once common, and was no source of shame, among the primitive Greeks and barbarians, and that piracy was one cause of the weakness and instability of early Greek societies (1.5). Thus, if Thucydides intended the affairs of Epidamnus to serve as an introductory historical example that will demonstrate the practical application of the premises sketched in his introductory paragraphs, we are not encouraged to suppose that his political preference is for a narrow oligarchy of the sort that would result from the victory of hoi dunatoi. But nor does the other side in this conflict offer a paradigm of the sort of behavior likely to conduces to the maintenance of state greatness. Pressed by the raids of "the powerful," the Epidamnian demos called upon interested foreign powers for aid, first Corcyra, then Corinth. This action ultimately leads to the city of Epidamnus being successfully besieged by the Corcyraeans (1.24–29), followed by a massacre of Corcyraean opponents, carried out in defiance of formal promises (1.29.5–30.1). Although we are not informed of its final destiny, it is clear that as a result of the war, Epidamnus fell from the position of a "great power" to the level of a pawn in the games of greater powers—just as those greater powers will later become pawns in the hands of the greatest Greek powers, Athens and Sparta.

The sad history of once-great Epidamnus links stasis between mass and elite with self-interested interference by more powerful states in the affairs of lesser powers. Interference by the more powerful states leads to loss of freedom, and so factionalism helps to actualize the destructiveness inherent in the posse-estock of power. The dunatois of Epidamnus is doomed because each of the two internal sociopolitical factions, demos and dunatoi, chose its course of action on the basis of a selfish assessment of its own short-term advantage, rather than looking toward the likely future effect of its actions on the polis as a unitary community. The "humanly natural" tendency to act in accordance with self-interest is thus shown as leading to the unleashing of destructive powers, at least when the "self" whose interests are being advanced is identified as a social faction.

This model is considerably elaborated and the methods of civil warriors are detailed in Thucydides’ justly famous description of the ugly civil war at Corcyra in book 3 (69–85). Here, the important polis of Corcyra, the initial beneficiary of the Epidamnian stasis, is itself torn asunder in a battle between the demos and the wealthier class of Corcyraeans. True to the Epidamnian example, the Corcyraean demos looks for aid from a more powerful outside power; this time it is democratic Athens. The Corcyraean oligarchs, for their part, look for help from the Peloponnesians. The interference of outside superpowers adds to the carnage of stasis, and, like Epidamnus, Corcyra is consumed. Although Thucydides’ unfinished text leaves the issue of the final wave of the ripple effect in suspense, the attentive reader is led to complete the escalating chain of events for herself: Class conflict in great Epidamnus led to intervention by greater Corecyra, and conflict in Corcyra led to intervention by Athens. Surely it is easy enough to extend the pattern one step further and to imagine that the greatest states of the age will be subject to exactly the same internal pressures as Epidamnus and Corcyra were. If social classes in the greatest polis were to give in to the temptation to engage in self-interested civil conflict, we should imagine that the resulting conflict would be commensurately awful. Sparta, with its legendary constitutional and social stability, might hope to survive that scenario. Would the same be true of democratic Athens?

If the Epidamnian model is applied to Athens, the likely outcome seems clear: Athens is a great and populous dunatois, ruled by the demos but with a significant population of "powerful men." For an ordinary Athenian, the term dēnokritai meant something like “the monopoly over legitimate public authority is held by the whole of the citizenry.” The analysis offered here suggests that for Thucydides, the same term denoted something like “the lower classes
possess the raw power that gives them the means to constrain the rest of us." Thucydides does sometimes use the term "demos" to refer to the abstraction "citizenry," but, like Ps.-Xenophon and other critics, he uses the term primarily to denote a large, sociologically defined, and self-interested political faction within the state. "Demos" in this narrower sense means, as we have seen, "the mass of the poor" and is equated with τὸ πλῆθος and ὁι πολίται.4 This sociological definition had ultimately led Ps.-Xenophon to ἀπορία, but within Thucydides' historical vision δημοκρατία is reenvisioned as an unstable system likely to promote the spread of destructive, narrowly defined self-interest, and this instability will unleash the great destructive potential innate in the δυναμεῖς of both Athens and Sparta—and eventually of non-Hellenic powers, like Persia, as well. If democracy is to achieve a long-term stability (within the structure of Thucydides' argument), the demos of Athens must not be just "the many" imagining themselves as Demos, but "the many and the few united in fact." Moreover, that unified demos must have an accurate understanding of the effect of its present decisions and actions on the future circumstances of the polis as a whole. This second condition requires that public decisions be grounded in objective facts. In practice, the Athenian demos is depicted in Thucydides' text as tending to act selfishly in the narrow interest of "the many," and as making decisions on the basis of highly misleading speeches delivered by personally selfish and self-interested parties. Thucydides' first detailed description of how the Athenian demos interpreted and acted upon what they heard in public speeches follows directly from the sequence of events involving Epidamnus.

B. JUSTICE AND INTEREST: I. THE CORCYRA/CORINTH DEBATE

Thucydides informs his reader that in the years prior to the Peloponnesian War (in the mid-430s B.C.), the Corcyreans—whose island-polis occupied a highly strategic location off Greece's northwestern coast and on the route to southern Italy—were wealthy and powerful (οὐκ ἄνθρωποι) as a result of having a large navy (1.25.4). It was their naval victory over Corinth at Epidamnus that led the Corcyreans to deploy (and ultimately to overextend) their power by attacking states in the region friendly to Corinth (1.30.2). The Corinthians responded by putting together an alliance of minor sea-powers and preparing to launch a punitive expedition against Corcyra. At this juncture, the Corcyreans realized they were in over their heads and requested an alliance with Athens. The Corinthians strongly opposed the formation of a Corcyra-Athens alliance, on the grounds that it would be a breach of a treaty between Athens and the Peloponnesian League. The Corcyreans and Corinthians each sent ambassadors to Athens, and consequently "an Assembly was called, and the parties to the dispute came forward" (καταστάσεις ἐκκλησιας ἐς ἀντιλογιαν ἐλθον, 1.31.4). Thucydides presents their respective speeches.45

The paired orations of the Corcyreans and Corinthians are not only the first of the three Athenian Assembly debates offered by Thucydides, they are the first speeches of any sort in his text. Like the Epidamnian stasis, which is the first historical narrative proper, the competing speeches of the Corcyreans and Corinthians may be taken as representing an "ideal type." The speech pair offers a powerful practical example of the general principles presented in the methodological introduction. The word used by Thucydides for the dispute, ἀντιλογία, reveals that the speakers will take diametrically opposed positions. By implication, there is seemingly no possibility of a genuine compromise in this dispute; either the Athenians make an alliance with Corcyra or they don't—the eventual outcome (a limited defensive alliance) is not discussed by the disputants. Moreover, only anonymous ambassadors, "the Corinthians" and "the Corcyreans," are mentioned as speakers. The self-interest (the "selves" here being the states of Corinth or Corcyra) of the speakers is evident. Each speaker deploys various rhetorical tactics in an attempt to persuade the Athenian audience. In this case, there can be no question of reading Assembly debate as a variation of disinterested dialectical reasoning. This is not a case of public-spirited citizen-speakers who share a concern for Athens' best interests, engaged in deliberation over policy options and thus offering an intelligent audience the chance to enact sound policy on the basis of a tolerably accurate grasp of the relevant circumstances. Since Thucydides presents only the speeches of the disputants themselves, the reader is led to imagine that it is primarily on the basis of speeches delivered by foreigners looking to their own states' interest that the Athenians will have to make this extremely important decision. The question Thucydides implicitly poses is this: Can the mass audience that is the Athenian demos gathered in Assembly derive right policy (that is, a correct assessment of the relationship between present action and future advantage) from the rhetoric presented by Assembly speakers? It will certainly not be an easy task. Thucydides has already pointed out that he himself found that it required a great deal of work to extract a true account from informants whose λόγοι were twisted by the influence of preference (εὐνοία) for one side or the other (1.22.3).

The first word in the Corcyreans' speech is the abstraction "the just" (δικαίον), but their appeal is explicitly aimed at Athenian self-interest: the Corcyreans state that they know that they will fail in their goal if they do not clearly establish (σαφῆς καταστάσεως) that the alliance will be advantageous (ὑμνημόνη) for Athens and that the reciprocal gratitude (χάρις) of the Corcyreans will be secure (βεβαιόν, 1.32.1). The linchpin of the Corcyrean argument is that the addition of Corcyra's δυνάμεις (specifically the naval force) to

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4 Sealey ("Origins," 283–90) unsuccessfully (in my view) attempts to show that "demos" in Thucydides has no class meaning.

45 The speeches of the ambassadors would have been preceded by an authorizing decree of the Assembly (Aesch. 2.58). Cogan, Human Thing, 8–20, and Crute, "Power, Prestige," offer insightful analyses of the speech pair.
that of Athens will make Athens more powerful and better able to resist enemies (esp. 1.33.2, 1.36.5). Thus the Corcyraean argument is explicitly based on precisely those factors that Thucydides’ history attempts to elucidate: power and human nature as motivated by self-interest.

In order to make their interest- and power-based argument, the Corcyraeans must instruct the audience on several general principles that determine advantage in inter-state conduct: It is always better to take the initiative (1.33.4); the fewer concessions one makes, the greater one’s own safety (1.34.3); allying with a state whose enemies are the same as one’s own will bring great advantage (1.35.5)—this last is described as the “securest possible assurance” (apsechei píasis). The Corcyraeans also discuss the effects of making, or not making, the alliance on the probable course of the future: they confidently predict that there will be a war—those Athenians who do not think so “are in their reasoning” (gýmnes hamartanei) since they fail to realize, first, that the Spartans “are being impelled to war by fear of you” (phobóti tôn húmoteri póleis exeíontas), and second, that the Corinthians, “who hate you,” are a powerful influence on the Spartans (1.33.3). If the Athenians do ally with Corcyra, this show of strength “will cause your enemies to be more fearful” (tous enantious mallon phobésson) and consequently less eager to launch an attack. You Athenians “will not be showing much foresight” (ou ta krátissa autés pronoías) if, “while on the lookout for a war that is surely coming, indeed is virtually upon you” (es ton mellonta kai hason ou poronta polemon to autíla periskopía), you give up a Corcyra with its key geographic location (1.36.1).

The Corcyraeans thus claim to be able to instruct the Athenians, in interpretive principles and facts alike, through speech. But will they be good teachers? The sympathetic reader of Thucydides’ text (i.e., the reader who believes that the text as a whole may indeed be “useful” in helping her “understand . . . the past and . . . the future,” per 1.22.4) may hope to answer this question by looking at the coherence of the argument itself, by comparing the conformity of the Corcyraean prescription to the general principles previously established by Thucydides when writing in propria persona, and by comparing the Corcyraeans’ predictions with “the facts themselves” as revealed in Thucydides’ narrative of the war. Viewed from this critical perspective, the Corcyraeans’ discussion of their own historical situation and their qualifications as instructors in the proper conduct of international affairs: they admit that a policy of nonalliance, which formerly had appeared to them to be sober and moderate, now appears foolish and unsafe (thé dokousa kai hémnon proteron sôfrosyné . . . en autíla kai astheinía phainómén, 1.32.4). And thus, they intend to change their policy, since it seems that their stance of neutrality was in error (daute de mallon hamaríti tôn proteron opraaghoun, 1.32.5).

The Corcyraeans were caught in the tangle of error, appearance, and false assumption because they failed to see that their damaník, which seemed truly great when they went against the Corinthians one-on-one, was only relatively great, and that they would become relatively powerless (adunatot: 1.32.5) when faced with a Corinthian alliance. This is a pretty elementary blunder for would-be instructors in the art of diplomacy.44

The Corcyraeans are not complete fools, nor are they completely misled about the likely future: they correctly predict the coming war. And they correctly (from the point of view of Thucydides in propria persona) identify the prime cause of the war as Spartan fear (phobóti) of Athenian power. But were they correct in telling the Athenians that the war was for all intents and purposes already upon them? This brings us up the issue, much debated by modern scholars, of the causes of the war, and the relationship between what Thucydides says was the “truest but least apparent” cause (prophrós: growth of Athenian power leading to Spartan fear, 1.23.6) and the “apparent” causes (aitía), among which the Corcyraean alliance itself is the most important (1.146). Without entering into the debate, it seems fair to say that Thucydides’ text as a whole encourages the reader to feel that the Corcyraeans have seriously overstated the war’s proximity (the Spartans will require a good deal of persuading before they declare war, 1.66–88). One might go so far as to suggest that Athens’ making of the defensive alliance (evidently because they were persuaded by the Corcyraeans, 1.44) was the act that fulfilled the Corcyraean prophecy: Spartan fear of Athenian power is what is making the war inevitable, and the Corcyraeans confidently state that the alliance will both make Athens more powerful and make Athens’ enemies more fearful. Absent the alliance, would Spartan fears have been sufficiently inflamed to precipitate the war? We cannot know—but nor could the Corcyraeans. In any event, Thucydides’ narrative will make it very clear that the Corcyraeans have certainly overstated the security advantages that will accrue to both Athens and Corcyra as a result of an alliance. The confident prediction that the alliance will add substantial security to Athenian position “without risk or expense” (ánei kinóníomai kai diápopi: 1.33.2) is falsified by the narrative: the Corcyraean navy plays no significant role in a war that the narrative reveals as entailing vast risk and expense for Athens and, in the end, destroying Corcyra in a nightmarish stasis.45

The Corcyraeans warn the Athenians not to fall into the clever verbal traps that the Corinthians will set for them (1.34.3); but is the speech of the Corinthians really any worse (or better) as an example of “instruction by speech”? The first word spoken by the Corinthians is the abstraction “necessity” (anankála, 1.37.1), but they use the term only to introduce the centrality of the

44 Cf. Thucydides’ (1.25.4) own assessment of the Corcyraeans, in which, although they are called “powerful” (atous adunatos), the implication is that they think rather too much of their own wealth and strength.

45 On the much-disputed issue of the causes of the war, Ste. Croix (Origines) remains fundamental, although he occasionally stretches credibility in attempting to exculpate Athens from all responsibility. On the Corcyra affair, see ibid., 66–79, arguing that the cause of the problem was the “insane” aggressiveness of the Corinthians toward the Corcyraeans. King, “Herodotus,” offers a good discussion of the mid-fifth-century shift in the meaning of ative from blame/responsibility to “scientific cause.”

46 The irrelevance of the Corcyraean navy in the rest of the narrative: Gone, in HCT 1: 168.
issue of justice; their argument is concerned with interest and power, but they see interest and power as grounded less on gaining secure access to material necessities (ships, walls, capital) than on abstract notions of justice. The Corinthians employ a terminology of appearance, error, prediction, and word/fact, which has already become familiar to Thucydides’ readers from his methodological introduction, but these terms tend to take on a moral coloring in the Corinthian speech.4 A notable example is the Corinthian response to the Corcyreans’ claim that the latter had offered to submit the dispute to third-party arbitration. The Corinthians assert that arbitration is impossible if one side, having already grabbed an unfair advantage, seeks to negotiate from a position of security. Arbitration is only possible if, before embarking on the contest of arms, there exists an equality in fact as well as in words (tov eis aison ta te erga homidw ak tous logous prn diagnosthsh kathistanta, 1.39.1). The Corinthians are making the familiar contrast between erga and logoi, but the “fact” they allude to is not so much equality of power, but an equal standing in relation to justice.

Although they start from rather different premises, the Corinthians, like the Corcyreans, claim to instruct their Athenian audience in general principles of international relations: an overwhelming desire for victory makes people forget their true interests (1.41.2–3); it is most beneficial to do wrong as seldom as possible (1.42.2); the power that deals fairly with equals finds truer security than one that snatches temporary advantage (1.42.4). And, once again like the Corcyreans, the Corinthians claim to be able to predict the future course of events: If the Athenians establish the principle that it is acceptable for subjects in revolt to make new alliances at will, Athens will face revolts among its own subjects (1.46.6). If the Athenians look at the matter from the Spartan perspective (sphynthous), they will see that the alliance with Corcyra will bring war, not peace (1.40.2). The Corcyreans are just trying to scare you Athenians about the coming war, and it is unclear (aphantês) when or whether there will be a war (1.42.2).

Put to the test of Thucydides’ own stated methodological principles and narrative, the Corinthians, like the Corcyreans, end up with a mixed scorecard as instructors. They are certainly right in that, with the alliance made, the war came about, states subject to Athens sought to make alliances with the Spartans, and this proved to be a terrible problem for the Athenians. But what of their prediction about the inevitability of war? Here the reader is invited to reconsider an important question first raised by the Corcyreans: What Athenian actions are likely to precipitate conflict with Sparta? Albeit Athens did make an alliance, and there was a war. But did the alliance cause the war, or is this

4 E.g., 1.38.5, where the verb harmartanw means something like “to act unjustly” rather than (as it is usually used by both Thucydides and the Corcyreans) “to err.” The Corinthian perspective is about if one imagines (witt., e.g., Dahl, Democracy, 23) the world of inter-polis relations to exist in a strong Realist state of anarchy (or Hobbesian state of nature) characterized by violence rather than by law; see, however, Sheehy (“Conceptualizing”), who argues (against Ste. Croix) that the Corinthian position was in fact squarely based in traditions of Greek “international law.”

fallacious post hoc ergo propter hoc reasoning? The Corinthians imply that there is a causal relationship, and that if no alliance is struck, it will remain at least “unclear” that there will be a war. But, as we have seen, there is no way to prove or disprove this assessment. Thucydides in proper persona states (1.23.6) that it was Spartan fear at the growth of Athenian power that necessarily led to (unmistaken) the outbreak of war. As we have seen, the alliance might have led the Spartans to become more frightened because of the apparent augmentation of Athenian power, but the alliance with Corcyra did not, in the event, make Athens any stronger in an absolute sense.4 In attempting to weigh the relative merits of the Corcyrean and Corinthian arguments for causation, the reader is forcefully reminded of how difficult it really is to grasp and to explain exactly what factors actually cause great historical events. The complexity and sophistication of Thucydides’ own analysis contrast sharply with the simplistic causal explanations of both parties to the dispute. If the Corinthians were correct in their claim that the alliance in and of itself would automatically lead to war, Thucydides’ claim that power and fear were the “least apparent” causes would be unnecessary; his contrast of the hidden to the overt causes (which include the Corcyrean affair) would become incoherent, and his long excursus (1.89–117) on the Pentecostaetia would be mere antiquarianism. Thus, it appears that, assuming Thucydides’ difficult text, with its intermixure of methodological principles and historical description, is a good teacher about “the past and future,” then the Corinthians, like the Corcyreans, are inadequate instructors, at least when it comes to the key issue of the probability of war.

Yet both the Corinthian and the Corcyrean speeches share some of Thucydides’ implicit assumptions about the importance of power and self-interest. Like Thucydides, both sides propose general rules for inter-state relations, and both sides claim to be able to assess future probabilities. Furthermore, much of the terminology of knowledge, inference, appearance, establishment, error, power, interest, security, and prediction employed by Thucydides in this methodological introduction (1.1–23) is mirrored in one or both of the two speeches.4 The speakers thus claim to do just what Thucydides claims that his text will do: teach about interest and power, and offer an understanding of past events and the probable course of the future.

As we have seen, in the methodological introduction, Thucydides explicitly contrasts his own project with that of the poets and logophai, and he has cast doubt on competing logoi as reliable conduits to reality. Thus, it seems a reasonable inference to posit that in these, the first speeches in the text, the historian is intentionally contrasting his own critical-historical approach to accurately understanding past and future with the rhetorical approaches to understanding employed in the Athenian Assembly. The implied contrast is not black

4 It may, on the other hand, have prevented the Peloponnesians from augmenting their own naval resources, but that would seem more likely to provoke frustration than fear. See further Ste. Croix, Origins, 66–79.

4 E.g., sophos, skopos, dokos, phulatera, alpha, sebestrein, stenerein, hamartanw, kaustasis (and its verbal forms), logos vs. ergon, dunamis, xampherein, melolos, behades.
and white: individual points made in each speech are confirmed by Thucydides’ historical narrative. Thus, Thucydides is not claiming that “makers of speeches always lie,” or that “they are consistently wrong in their understanding of present realities and future possibilities.” Rather, Thucydides shows that a given speech will probably be a mishmash of truths, half-truths, distortions, and outright errors or lies. Why must this be the case? And what are the implications of this position?

It must be the case (according to Thucydides’ logic), first, because establishing the truth is not easy: Thucydides has emphasized how much labor his historical investigations entailed. Next, Thucydides claims that any proper understanding of reality must be based on a close correspondence between verbal descriptions and the relevant objective facts. Such an objective stance is incompatible with the competitive environment of a contest for the approval of an uncritical and pleasure-loving audience (1.21.1). Speakers of public orations were inevitably involved in a contest for their audience’s favor; they could not afford to make the issue seem too difficult for a given audience to comprehend within the narrow time constraints imposed by an oral presentation. And finally, speakers were ordinarily interested parties, and thus they viewed and described the world from a predetermined and biased perspective. Even if a given speaker were able to see and understand “the facts themselves,” he was unlikely to present these facts impartially, because he hoped to influence the audience to vote in his favor.

The audience, for its part, is presented with a mix of fact and falsehood in each speech. Because the members of the audience (in this case) are Athenian Assemblymen, they judge (that is to say, assess the effect of past and current events) on future possibilities, they vote, and by voting they determine state policy, largely on the basis of the competing views of reality presented in the speeches they have heard. How are the Assemblymen to separate truth from falsehood? How are they to determine whether their collective interest (either their “factional” interest as hois politoi, or their public interest as hoi politai) and the speaker’s particular interests are congruent or where and how those interests diverge? Thucydides’ answer seems to be, “Left to their own devices, they can’t.” The citizen masses are unable to determine truth consistently and accurately or to determine congruity of interest by listening to speeches because they have no reliable method of testing for either quality. Thucydides’ implicit lesson is that democratic knowledge does not provide an adequate grounding for assessing the truth-value of rhetorical discourse. And thus, badly—or at best indifferently— instructed by speech, the Athenian Assembly was likely eventually to fall into error and, as a result, to make bad policy. Serious policy errors may not result from the decisions made in any given Assembly. But, given the nature of the decision-making process, there is a very high likelihood that eventually mistakes will be made. By contrasting his own critical-historical approach to gaining knowledge of past and future with the rhetoric of ideal-type public speakers, Thucydides has established for his reader the existence of a potentially fatal structural flaw in the edifice of democratic ways of knowing and doing. The identification of this “flaw” is a key to his criticism of Athenian popular rule.

The outcome of the Corcyraean/Corinthian debate was initially ambiguous. At the first of the two Assemblies held to discuss the possible alliance, the tendency was for the Assemblymen not to undertake the force of the Corinthian _logoi_; but at a second meeting, the Assemblymen’s mood changed (metegnôsaoai). Thus they decided to make a limited defensive alliance with Corcyra (1.44.1). The reason for the decision was, we are told, the desire to have the Corcyraean navy on Athens’ side and the perceived (euphaineto) advantage of the geographic position of Corcyra on the route to Italy and Sicily, since “it appeared to them (exokl i. . . autos) that there really would be a war with the Peloponnesians” (1.44.2–3). Answering the question of whether the Assembly made the right decision in this case depends on how one interprets Thucydides’ discussion of the causes of the war. But in any event, it is clear (in light of the two Assemblies) that the _antilogia_ had led to an initial phase of ambivalence and indecision among the Athenian Assemblymen.

C. Leadership in Democratic Athens

The stark contrast between Thucydidean analytical method and the Assembly rhetoric displayed by the Corcyraeans and Corinthians might lead the reader to suppose that Athens’ chances of making the right decisions in the coming war are slight. And yet that reader also knows that the war was long and hard-fought. The option of making a limited defensive alliance, ignored by the Corcyraean and Corinthian speakers and yet adopted by the Athenian Assembly, suggests an alternative source of sage policy. There is obviously some missing factor, some as yet cryptic element in the power equation, that will explain the Athenian rise to power and Athenian resilience in the conduct of the war. The missing factor is thoughtful political leadership. Thucydides’ description of the inter-state maneuvering that preceded the war is remarkable in its elision of individual Athenian speechmaking: the text offers only the most indirect hints that any Athenian spoke out to explain how Athenian interests would be affected by a Corcyraean alliance. The entity that ponders the problem, weighs its options, and ultimately decides on the issue is the collectivity, “the Athenians.” While this is constitutionally accurate, given Athens’ democratic government, it leaves out the vital role played in Assembly debates by the skilled citizen-speecher, the _rhêtor_.

C.1. Themistocles and the Value of Foresight

Thucydides’ reader is made aware of the essential role of leadership in democratic Athens in two passages focusing on the career of the Athenian statesman Themistocles. The first passage introduces Thucydides’ compressed narrative of the “Pentecontaetia,” the half-century between the Persian and Peloponnesian
convicted of a particular crime, 1.135.3) by the Athenians. 15 Thucydides relates how, after being hounded from Greece by his enemies, Themistocles gained the respect of the Persian king and spent his last years as a minor grandee in the Persian empire (1.135—138.2). Quite obviously, then, Themistocles had not exhausted his reservoir of diplomatic talent at the time that the Athenians decided they had had enough of him, and he was quickly able to find other outlets for his abilities. Once again, a pattern of events that seemingly points to a serious weakness in the Athenian political system will be repeated in augmented form later in Thucydides’ text.

C.2. Pericles’ First Assembly Speech

The eulogy of Themistocles helps the reader to appreciate the essential political role played in Athenian government by the statesman Pericles, who seemingly shares Themistocles’ many political virtues. 16 Pericles, who first appears in the narrative as a successful general during the inter-war period (commanding Athenian forces at Sicyon and Oeniadae [1.111.2—3], Ereboes [1.114], and Samos [1.116—17]), is introduced to Thucydides’ readers as a consistent opponent of the Spartans: “The most able man (dunatíastatos) of his era and leading figure of the polis” (1.127.3). This uncompromising statement regarding Pericles’ prominence is reflected in the structure of the text (Pericles’ are the only speeches by Athenian politicians not countered or paired with opposing speeches) and quickly reiterates: The Spartans have sent a final ultimatum to Athens, demanding certain concessions on the penalty of war. The Athenians gather in Assembly to debate the matter and to decide once and for all whether to seek peace or accept war with the Peloponnesians. There was evidently sharply divided opinion among the citizenry: many people came forward to address the Assembly, some advocating and some rejecting compromise with the Spartans (1.139.3—4). But Thucydides offers the reader only a single speech on the matter. He reintroduces the speaker in now-familiar terms, “And among them there came up Pericles, son of Xanthippos, a man (ánér) who was at that time the foremost among the Athenians (protos Atheniów), the most forceful (dunatíastatos) in speaking or in action, who spoke as follows.”

Pericles begins his speech by asserting that his policy recommendations have been consistent over time and that he would now simply reiterate the advice he had previously given his fellow citizens. 17 After explaining that accommodation with a hostile Sparta was truly dangerous to Athenian interests and that such accommodation would amount to accepting a subordinate and slavish (1.141.1) stance, Pericles lays out in detail the material resources available to the two opposing sides. The Peloponnesians, he bluntly states, have no financial re-

10 Balot (“Genealogy of Greed,” ch. 4) argues persuasively that Themistocles is linked to Athenian unity in the wall-building story (esp. 1.90—94) and that the sacrifice of individual assets for the defense of the polis anticipates Pericles’ war strategy, which was also predicated on sacrifice for the good of the polis.

11 On the language of this passage, see Hornblower, Thucydides, 26—27.
serves and no significant naval forces. Thus they will engage in the war at a severe disadvantage. They are used to fighting only short, simple wars among themselves—the sorts of contest typical of impoverished people (1.141.1–3; cf. the Archaeology, 1.15). The Peloponnesians’ lack of the essential resource that (as we have seen) undergirded Athenian-style (imperial-naval) dunameis is exacerbated by the diffuse Spartan alliance structure. The Peloponnesian alliance is incapable of acting as a single entity, and thus, divided in their councils, the Peloponnesians tend to fritter away their opportunities (1.141.6). Pericles assures the Athenians that they need not be concerned for their security in the face of Spartan-led invasions of Attica because the invaders will not be able to construct fortifications capable of threatening Athens’ own massively fortified city-harbor complex (1.142.2–3).

The bulk of the speech expands on these central themes. Pericles argues that, having begun the war with inadequate reserves, the Peloponnesians will not easily be able to acquire capital surplus, nor will they easily develop a credible sea power. He explains that the Athenians will be completely secure as long as they preserve intact their citizen manpower and the overseas empire that is protected by the deployment of Athenian manpower through the instrumentalties of imperial treasure and sea power. Pericles’ strategy for the war entailed withdrawing Athens’ population from rural Attica (Athenian home territory) behind the impregnable city walls. It also required refusing to meet the Peloponnesian infantry in open battle, since a major land battle in Attica would put Athenian manpower resources at risk (esp. 1.143.5).

The speech concludes with a rousing patriotic appeal to live up to the standards set by the Athenians of the recent past. But before this peroration, Pericles introduces a note of caution: Athens must not engage in expansionist imperial adventures during the course of the war, “for I am more afraid of our native errors than of our enemies’ strategic plans” (mullon gar pepheinai tas okeias hēmōn harmatias è tas tōn enantion dianoias, 1.144.1). The exposition of what this means is deferred. Pericles announces that this matter will be clarified (dèlithēsai) in another logos, when the time has come for erga (1.144.2). The Athenian Assemblymen must be content with that. But Thucydides’ reader has already been invited to ponder the problem of the likelihood that the Athenian Assemblymen will make serious mistakes and thereby will inaugurate bad policy. Now he learns that the Athenian capacity for error is “native” (oikeia). This is the same term that Thucydides had used to describe Themistocles’ “native” acuteness of mind. The verbal echo suggests that there is an association to be made between an innate “general Athenian” capacity to err, and the innate genius of Athens’ two most prominent statesmen. By implication, as long as the inherently error-prone Athenians follow the advice and accept the leadership of inherently insightful men, all will be well. But absent wise leadership, the Athenians will be liable to fall into error. As the text has already suggested, that native tendency is a result of the interplay of human nature (phusis) with the particular political culture associated with democracy. And the reader will remember that Themistocles had suffered ostracism at the hands of his fellows.

The result of Pericles’ first speech is straightforward: “The Athenians, believing that his advice was best (aristó), voted as he recommended” (1.145). The contrast between Thucydides’ presentation of this meeting of the Assembly and the Corcyrean debate is striking. Here an individual Athenian politician, introduced as the leader, the first man, and the most able of the Athenians, delivers a speech; we are told that there were other speakers and opinions were expressed on the other side, but they are irrelevant in the face of the force of Pericles’ established leadership position and his powerfully persuasive discussion of material realities. Unlike the Corcyreans and Corinthian speakers, Pericles does not rely on general maxims alone; he understands and can skillfully communicate the essential material bases of state power. In the ensuing narrative, the reader learns that despite the psychological and material suffering that Pericles’ austere war policy inflicted on those Athenian citizens (a majority of the total) with holdings outside the city walls, the Athenians went along with Pericles’ initial recommendations. They refused the Spartan ultimatum and declined to meet the Peloponnesians in open battle when the latter invaded Attica in the summer of 431. The invaders left after a couple of weeks, having accomplished nothing of substance other than demonstrating their incompetence at siegecraft by a failure to capture the fortified Attic deme (township) of Oinoe. Although there were some bad moments, notably when the numerous residents of the rural deme of Acharnai realized that their town was to be the site of a Spartan expedition (2.21), after the first campaigning season the war seemed to be going according to Pericles’ strategic plan. Athenian casualties in Attica were limited to cavalrymen lost in skirmishes intended to restrict the scope of Peloponnesian ravaging. The reader is hardly surprised to learn that it was Pericles who was chosen by his fellow citizens to deliver the traditional oration over Athens’ fallen warriors that winter.

C.3. The Fragility of Greatness: Funeral Oration of Pericles

The Funeral Oration, delivered by Thucydides’ Pericles in early 430 B.C. over the Athenian war-dead of the first campaigning season has long been recog-

10 The term, with its root oikeia, has associations of that which is the private property of a family, kinship group: MacDowell, “Oikos”; Foxhall, “Household”, use of oikeias in Thucydides: Béïni, Lexicon, s.v.
nized as an idealizing portrait of the democratic polis.\textsuperscript{29} In addition to praising the bravery of those who gave their lives fighting for the common good, the speech emphasizes Athenian freedom and unity, and celebrates the value of working for the common good of the polis, for public rather than selfishly private ends. Throughout, the speech is dominated by a vision of the greatness of Athens and its \textit{dunamis}; the splendor and power of the city itself are elevated into a sufficient justification for the sacrifice of the lives of those who fell in its defense.\textsuperscript{30} The Funeral Oration thus addresses the issue of the inverse relationship between acting in narrowly individual self-interest and polis greatness, an issue to which the reader’s attention is repeatedly drawn elsewhere in Thucydides’ text.

Pericles’ Funeral Oration is deeply complex and often seemingly deliberately ambiguous, both in its syntax and in its presentation of the polis. The complexity begins with Pericles’ first words (2.35.1): Many (\textit{hot polynomial}) of those who have given this sort of speech praise the tradition of the funeral oration itself. But in my view the fallen have already shown themselves to be excellent in action (\textit{ergôs}), so it should be enough to honor them by the action (\textit{ergon}) of erecting the public grave monument that you see (\textit{horatse}) before you. As in Thucydides’ methodological preface, Pericles’ opening words establish a hierarchy of value in which \textit{erga} and the faculty of sight are elevated above \textit{logos}. By this initial focus on the sufficiency of \textit{erga} performed and witnessed, and by reminding his listeners at the beginning and again at the end of the speech that he is delivering a \textit{logos} only because it is customary (\textit{nomêti, kata nomon}, 2.35.1, 35.3, 46.1), Pericles subverts the “actuality” of his own expressed sentiments.\textsuperscript{31} By pointing out that his \textit{logos} is not an \textit{ergon}, Thucydides’ Pericles alerts his audience to the element of idealization in his portrait of Athens.

The \textit{logos} of the \textit{ergon} contrast is reiterated throughout the oration,\textsuperscript{32} but two passages are particularly noteworthy:

Furthermore, the power (\textit{dunamis}) of the polis itself, a [power we established by those [Athenians] very qualities, demonstrates \textit{siatmeis} that this [Pericles’ statement regarding Athenian excellence] is the truth (\textit{aliathêa}) — and not a product of words (\textit{ logos}) produced for the present occasion rather than at a product of fact (\textit{erga}). (2.41.2)

Here, Pericles calls his own speech into question: he admits that since his speech was (by definition) merely a construct of words and was prepared for an honorific occasion, it \textit{might} not be true in all particulars. But, he claims, the self-evident power of the city, a “fact” rather than a product of words, will establish the truth of Athens’ greatness. The reader is immediately reminded of Thucydides’ earlier claim (1.21.2) that “this war itself” would demonstrate its own greatness — and the historian’s subsequent discussion of the difficulty he had in coming to an accurate understanding of the facts about the war in the face of accounts twisted by patriotic preference for one side (\textit{eunoeis}). The issue of greatness and proof arises again a few lines later:

Our power (\textit{dunamis}) is not without the witness of great demonstrations (\textit{megalon sêmeion}), and we will be the source of wonder for those yet to come, as we are for our contemporaries. Furthermore, we have no need of a Homer to sing our praises, nor of any suchlike whose fine words please only for the moment, since the truth (\textit{aliathêa}) will show that in comparison with the facts (\textit{erga}), [the verbal depiction] is an underestimation. (2.41.4)

Once again, the contrast is between false, flowery praise in words (i.e., what Pericles is doing) and the trustworthy evidence of facts. But in this passage, the subversion may go even deeper. It is through the witness of great proofs, \textit{megalo sêmeio}, that future generations will be amazed at Athens. But what are these \textit{sêmeia}? The \textit{sêmeia} will survive to convince “these yet to come.” In light of the attack on Homer, the \textit{sêmeia} can hardly be in the form of poetic words; we are led to imagine permanent monuments of some sort. Although Pericles does not say so explicitly, the audience is, I would suggest, being put in mind of (inter alia) the city’s new public buildings, and perhaps especially the great “Themistoclean” city walls that provided Athenian security and the backdrop for the extramural public cemetery (2.34.5) at which Pericles was speaking; these monuments were an obvious, lasting, physical manifestation of Athens’ power.

As modern readers know, Pericles is right to suggest that future generations will be amazed at the architectural monuments to Athenian power. But does our amazement reflect a correct assessment of Athens’ actual power? Not if we are to judge by Thucydides’ earlier comment (1.10.1–2), in which he specifically states that to criticize Homer’s logos on the Trojan War on the basis of the \textit{sêmeion} of the small size of the existing town of Mycenae would be improper method. In this same passage, Thucydides points out that if future generations were to judge by the physical magnificence of the city alone, the \textit{dunamis} of

\textsuperscript{29} Cf. Comme, in HCT, ad loc.: the challenge to those who write “fine words” implicitly includes the \textit{leitourgiai}. On Thucydides’ use of \textit{silêmeis} and (the related \textit{kalêmeis}), see Immerwahr, “\textit{Ergon},” 277–78; Connor, Thucydides, 28; Hornblower, Thucydides, 100–107. Nagy (Pindar’s Homer, 234) discusses the use of \textit{sêmeia} in earlier Greek literature to “indicate” rather than state explicitly. Hornblower (Thucydides, 188–22) discusses the possibility that Thucydides may have been influenced by Socratic thought and vocabulary; contra: de Romilly (Thucydides, 366–67) who argues that Thucydides seems unaware of Socrates.

\textsuperscript{30} Pericles’ audience might call to mind the templēs on the Acropolis, the city wall with its impressive gates, and the ship-sheds. Presumably the proofs would also include victory monuments established in enemy lands (implied at 2.41.4). Contrast Immerwahr (“\textit{Ergon},” 286–89, with literature cited), who denies that actual monuments are necessarily the referent here.
Athens would appear twice as great as it was in fact. Read in light of this earlier passage, Pericles’ rejection of Athens’ need for a Homer because the megale Æneia will impress future generations with the truth about Athenian dunamis seems a painfully empty boast. Once again we are being implicitly reminded that only Thucydides’ accurate account of the historical facts, his “imperishable possession,” will allow readers to know about either the real past or the probable future.

The self-subservient quality of the Funeral Oration is not limited to the issue of word and fact. In the course of Pericles’ speech, each praiseworthy ideal eventually points to its opposite. Freedom is proclaimed as the prime good of the polis, but there is a strong hint that, as Thucydides’ readers already know, the dunamis of Athens deprives the politeis within the empire of their freedom. Public service defines the value of the citizen, but Pericles’ language lets on that not all Athenians are public-spirited; some, those he calls “useless,” prefer their own advantage to that of the polis. Even the bravery and self-sacrifice of the dead will inspire not only desire for emulation, but jealousy and disbelieve. Thus Pericles’ discussion of Athens’ politeia as an ideal type is compromised by its location in a tremendously complex speech (as well as by its textual propriety to the shocking plague narrative). Likewise, Pericles’ evocation of Athenian government does not encourage the careful reader—one who reads the text’s speeches critically in light of both the methodological principles established at the beginning of book 1 and the subsequent narrative—to embrace the role of the demos as a simple good.

Early in the oration, Pericles defines democracy:

And it [our politeia] is called by the name (onoma) démokratia because government (to oikhein) is not oriented toward the few (ex oligous) but toward the majority (ex pleionous). However, in regard to access to the law for resolving disputes, all are equal. Yet again in regard to acknowledged worth, it is a matter of individual reputation; the nature of a man’s public contribution is not decided in advance on the basis of class (oik apo merous), but rather on the basis of excellence. And if someone is worthy and can do something worthwhile for the polis, he is not excluded by poverty, nor because of his obscurity of birth. (2.37.1)

In the first clause of this passage we learn that démokratia is the name (or signifier) used for the reality (or referent) “the politeia of Athens” because government (to oikhein) is oriented toward the majority (ex pleionous) rather than the few (ex oligous). This is a somewhat ambiguous statement, when viewed from the perspective of power and self-interest. Pericles does not go so far as to say that démokratia is the rule of the many in their own interest over and against the interests of the few, but neither does he say that it is the collective interest of all citizens in the common interest of all. Pericles’ Athens (like unhappy Epidamnus) is divided into two interest groups: the few and the many. The politeia is called a democracy because it tilts toward one group rather than the other. The questions the reader must ask are how strongly the system tilts and whether the interests of the few can be kept congruent with those of the many in Athens. If they cannot be kept congruent, the model of Epidamnus points to a conflict of class interests that could lead to the terrors of civil war.

The next two clauses of the passage, which should explain and clarify the referent politeia, are spectacularly antithetical. The clause, “However, in regard to access to the law for resolving disputes, all are equal,” does not explain the signifier démokratia, but contrasts it to (onoma men . . . meteis de), Thus, the equality in regard to the law is grammatically opposed to the government favorable to the majority, and therefore terms for “many” cannot stand for “all citizens” (as they did in Athenian democratic ideology). The third clause, “yet again in regard to acknowledged worth, it is a matter of individual reputation . . . ,” not only contrasts the individual citizen to the groupings of the citizenry into “few” and “majority” in the first clause, but also contrasts the citizen’s individual worth to the generalized equality of “all” in the second clause. In Athens, the individual who is worthy, but poor and obscure, is not excluded from public service (as he would be if the few were to control the administration), but neither is he forced into a sort of equality that would deny his individual merit. This meritocratic ideal denies the priority of preestablished classes or orders (oik apo merous), and gives priority to individual good reputation (en tōi endekainke). All of this sounds good in principle: the list, group-interest-oriented administration / equality before the law for all / individual merit in public service, seems nicely (if delicately) balanced. One might extrapolate from Pericles’ vision of democracy a model of a politeia in which legislation is enacted by interested groups, justice is carried out impartially by and for all citizens, and offices are executed by competent individuals. But the passage in question does not clarify what happens if there is a conflict between the perceived interests of the groups, or between the equality of all and the merit of individuals. Can a political balance based on such a complex set of contrasts hold up under the...

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66 Freedom praised: 2.37.2, 2.40.5, 2.41.1, 2.43.4. Athens deposes politeis of freedom: implied at L.139.3; explicit at 2.8.8.

67 Especially 2.40.1–2: each citizen has both private and public interests, and even those who are mostly interested in their private affairs have opinions on politics; the man who is interested only in his own affairs (oμαχομένοι) is not respected among us.

68 Their self-sacrifice: 2.41.5, 2.42.3–4, 2.43.2; this may provoke jealousy: 2.35.2, 2.45.1.
stressful circumstances of a long, hard war? We must not forget that this is an oration over war dead, and the reader already knows that the fighting has only just begun."

Let's jump ahead to the next passage in the Funeral Oration that deals explicitly with how the Athenians run their polity.

And we ourselves can [collectively] judge rightly regarding affairs, even if [each of us] does not [individually] originate the arguments; we do not consider words (logoi) to be an impediment to actions (erga), but rather [regard it] essential to be previously instructed (proedarchetai) by speech (logoi) before embarking on necessary actions (erga). We are peculiar also in that we hold that we are simultaneously persons who are daring and who vigorously debate (ehlogizetha) what they will put their hands to. Among other men, ignorance (amathia) leads to rashness, while reasoned debate (legomenon) just bogs them down. (2.40.2–3)

This passage, virtually a definition of democratic knowledge and its relation to enactment and action, helps to clarify the contrast between group-interest-oriented government and individual merit, alluded to in the previous passage. The Athenians recognize that not everyone is equally capable of coming up with plans (this will be the job of the individual political leader), but the many can participate in making the decisions (as Assemblymen). So far so good, but in the next clause it becomes clear that the Athenians are proud of making policy on the basis of logoi, and they reject the existence of a hierarchy of value between logoi and erga. As we have seen, Thucydides considers untested and competing logoi to be a dubious basis for understanding reality, and he elevates erga above logoi in his hierarchy of explanatory values. Moreover, as we have seen, Pericles himself has emphasized the logoten ergon contrast and has described his own logon as strictly unnecessary in the face of the self-evident ergon of accomplishment and monument.

So are Pericles' Athenians an exception to the general rules that Thucydides has established in his preface? The Funeral Oration certainly suggests that its ideal Athenians believe themselves to be exceptional; Pericles points out that other people are unable to blend speech and action in the Athenian fashion.

But the reader must remember Thucydides' own rejection of Athenian exceptionalism in regard to intellectual attainments in the methodological introduction (above, 2.4.1). Moreover, even while claiming to base its praise of Athenian exceptionality on the clearest proofs (cf. 2.42.1), the Funeral Oration itself calls that very exceptionality into question, by revealing fissures within the ideal of a politics based, first, on seamlessly bleeding the interests of the few, the many, and the individual, and second, on employing public speeches not only to plan deeds but to create social realities. The oration shows that these problematic ideals are the basis of Athens' power, and thus reveals to the reader the potential instability of Athenian power. That instability remains only potential. As long as the Athenians are well instructed by logoi that are properly grounded in Athenian interests and in material reality—as long as Athenians follow wise leaders—the system can work. But Thucydides' reader has already been given reason to doubt that the Athenians are consistently well informed by the speeches they hear; she knows that they have willingly expelled one of their wisest leaders; and she has been told that they have a "native" tendency to err. If the Athenians are not presented with appropriate bases for decision-making—if they must rely for instruction on the sorts of speech delivered by the Corcyrean and Corinthian ambassadors—the great and stable Athens established by Pericles' Funeral Oration may prove to exist only in the idealizing discourse of the eulogistic speaker, and through a suspension of the disbelief encouraged by the Funeral Oration's own antithetical structure.

C.4. The Last Days of Pericles

In the summer after Pericles' Funeral Oration, the second year of the war (430 B.C.), came another and longer Spartan invasion, a devastating plague, a crisis in Athenian confidence, and the second (and last) of Pericles' Assembly speeches recorded in Thucydides' history (2.60–64). Pericles begins this speech by asserting that he had accurately predicted the downturn in the Athenian mood—the reader is led to suppose that very pronounced shifts in the national climate of opinion were factored into Pericles' strategic planning and thus that mood swings within the electorate could be accommodated by Pericles' political calculus. He staunchly reasserts the priority of the unified public interests of the state over the diverse private interests of each individual Athenian (2.60.2–5). The reader of the Funeral Oration was made aware of the tension between public and private, between the self-identity of the Athenian as a citizen and as a private person or a member of a social subgroup. Now Pericles bluntly underlines the essential precondition of Athenian flourishing: the individual's identification with the state must take priority over all other loyalties and allegiances. Pericles then claims that he will let his audience in on a secret that lay at the heart of Athenian policy: the special character of Athenian

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8 The incorporation of interest-group politics into a democratic matrix might seem to a modern reader to approach the ideal of "polyarchy" advocated by Dahl (Democracy but Thucydides' idea of a good "well-mixed" constitution (a zoehrista) is a moderate oligarchy that excluded the majority of free adult males from participatory citizenship: 8.97.2.

9 Cf. Immerwahr, "Ergon," 285: the "central ideal of the [Funeral] Oration is the definition of democratic courage as a kind of knowledge."

10 Pericles is presumably referring, implicitly, to the Spartans. But cf. Hdt. 7.50.1–2: King Xerxes' defense of the need to act without much reflection lest nothing be accomplished.

11 See esp. 2.36.4: Athenian politia and tropoi were what made Athens megalé. Cogn (Human Things, 41–42) argues that Athenian exceptionalism is the central point of the speech. Near the end of the text, at 8.96.5, Thucydides in propriis persona confirms Athens' character as tending to swiftness and enterprise, with specific contrast to the slow and unimaginative Spartans; but he also points out the limits of Athenian exceptionalism by adding a third party to the equation: the Syracusans are "most like" the Athenians in character and so fought best against them.

12 Scholarship on the speech: de Romilly, Thucydides, 120–130; Edmonds, Chance, 70–76; Hornblower, Commentary, ad loc.; Yon, Timings, 83–85.

sea power. Ps.-Xenophon had also focused on Athenian sea power, but rather than emphasizing the relationship between lower-class rowers and Athenian government, Pericles describes sea power in quasi-mystical terms as the control of one of two earthly spheres and as a power completely unlike anything produced on land. Because of their command of the seas, there is no power on earth, not even the king of Persia, capable of stopping the Athenians from going where they might choose. This passage in Pericles’ second Assembly speech stands as a particularly evocative attempt to define the mysterious essence of Athenian dunamis. Pericles’ speech suggests to the reader that sea power is a latent strength; the ships can lie motionless in their sheds until needed. So, too, were Athenian reserve capital and manpower latent sources of strength: Capital lay dormant, most strikingly in the form of the cult statue of Athena Parthenos, with its removable golden drapery. Athenian fighting men remained passive behind their walls while the enemy invaded Attica. But at the moment a need arose, capital could be conjoined with men and ships to produce extraordinary levels of deployed power and virtually limitless freedom of action. The Athenians could go where they wished, do as they liked, because Athens’ latent strength could be almost instantaneously materialized as the mobilized fleet cutting through the waves of the Aegean to effect Athens’ will upon any object identified by the policymaker. Pericles describes this as a secret, because when regarded from the set of traditional Greek assumptions about the sort of power produced by hoplite republics and delivered by classical land armies, the sea power of the democratic polis was nearly incomprehensible. The rapidity and precision with which power could be deployed by the state commanding superior naval forces collapsed conventional assumptions about the relationship between power, time, and space. Athenian sea power narrowed to the disappearing point the gap between desire and fact, between the wish of the policymaker that something should occur and the accomplishment of that wish in the material world. In 430 B.C. the sum of Athens’ accomplished wishes was the Athenian Empire. But this freedom was not absolute; with the empire came stern responsibilities.

Much of the rest of the speech focuses on the nature of empires (arche) itself, which Pericles reminds his listeners is “now like a tyranny” (2.63.2). Pericles is at pains to explain to the Athenians that the possession of an empire entails grave security risks—but only if they were foolish enough to suppose that their freedom of action was a freedom from imperial responsibilities. The entirely unrealistic and pseudo-altruistic policy advocated by certain apathetic and useless Athenians who wanted to relinquish the empire would, according to Pericles, put Athens in extreme danger (2.63). Pericles does not need to spell out the equation in detail; its outlines are clear enough from what had gone before: Giving up the empire meant that Athens would lose the revenues that provided for the fortified security of the city and maintained the navy. Moreover, the weight of Athenian tribute and punishments of recalcitrant subjects had brought home the meaning of lost autonomy to the states of the empire. Their original, self-serving decision to pay Athens to maintain Aegean security now appeared short-sighted and resentment at their own past folly led to hatred of Athens (2.63.1, 2.64.5). Any Athenian attempt to abandon imperial responsibilities would spark attempts at revenge. Deprived of imperial resources, a weakened Athens would suffer the consequences of the self-interested policies that had created and maintained its current strength. In sum, the aggressive foreign policy that put Athens in a position of hegemonic authority carried with it foreign-policy burdens that could not lightly be shed.

Pericles’ second speech reveals Athenian dunamis as an extraordinarily powerful and complex mechanism that conjoins Athens as a sociopolitical entity with Athens as a military and imperial power. The machine produces vast wealth for its operators, but it cannot be shut down without disastrous consequences. Its efficient operation depends on national cohesion: the subordination of private interests to the public good. It also, at least by implication, requires the skills of a master craftsman, a political leader who understands its complicated workings and who can make adjustments as necessary. Thucydides thus focuses the reader’s attention on the foresighted and realistic vision of Pericles, a man she now realizes is as important to the future success of imperial Athens as Themistocles was to the past foundation of the empire. In Thucydides’ account, both Pericles and Themistocles understood the conjoined material factors of manpower, sea power, fortifications, and capital—the very factors that Thucydides in his own persona has underlined as essential to the flourishing of Greek civilization in the Archaeology.

Pericles’ two Assembly speeches, read in the context established by the methodological introduction and the prior narrative, lead the reader to suppose that Athens enjoyed great political and material advantages heading into the war and should indeed have won it. But then comes section 2.65: a laudatory summary of Periclean policy, the announcement that Athens in fact had lost the war, and the statement of Thucydides’ opinions that Athens lost the war because Pericles’ inferior political successors did not stick to his policy with regard to sea power and empire, and that they gave away Athenian chances by looking to their private good rather than to the common good of the state.

At the beginning of section 2.65, having explained that Pericles’ second Assembly speech was meant to stanch the Athenians’ anger at Pericles himself and to turn their thoughts away from their present miseries, Thucydides makes a particularly telling comment. In respect to state policy (dunamis), the Athenians did accept Pericles’ words. They did not send a peace embassy to Sparta, [2.62.2–3; contrast 1.16 in the Archaeology: the Ionians, an early Greek sea power, are stymied by the rise of Persia, a major land power.]

[On Athenian dunamis as a radical departure from traditional forms of Greek power, see Crane, “Fear and Pursuit,” and “Power, Prestige.”]

[The ironically close relationship between democracy and empire in fifth-century Athens: Finley, “Fifth-Century Athenian Empire”, Reithmuhl, Entdeckung der Freiheit, esp. 244–48, and “Democracy, Power, and Imperialism”, Wood, Peasant-Citizen, 135–36. Forrest (“Athenian Generation Gap”) suggests that in 413–412, Athenian oligarchs were misled by this “doctrinaire view” into believing that since the empire had begun to crumble, the democracy could easily be deposed.]
and they began to prosecute the war with renewed vigor. But in respect to their interests as private individuals (idēai), they still felt aggrieved (2.65.1). Taken as individuals, the Athenians are further broken out by Thucydides into classes: the ordinary people (hōi dēmoni) were angry since they had lost little that they had, while the powerful elite (hōi daunatoi) had lost their landed estates in the country. This sociological terminology is ominously familiar to the reader: the conflict of “demos versus daunatoi” had sparked the Epidamnian status narrative. Potentially dangerous internal divisions, obliquely signaled in the Funeral Oration, have now begun to haunt the Athenians.98

Yet as long as Pericles lived, the tendency of the Athenians to fragment into mutually hostile private-interest-oriented sociological classes was seemingly restrained, and they were still able to act collectively in the public interest. Pericles was slapped with a fine, but soon, “as is the habit of a crowd (hòminai),” he was receded general and entrusted with the conduct of all public affairs. This turnabout Thucydides attributes to conjoined public and private factors: the Athenians were feeling their “own personal” (oikeia) troubles less acutely, and they believed that Pericles was the most worthy man they had when it came to the needs of the polis as a whole (2.65.2–4). In this latter opinion Thucydides heartily concurs: Under Pericles and during the peace, he says, Athens had been wisely led, and the polis reached its acme. Moreover, “when the war broke out, in this circumstance, too, he seemed an accurate prognosticator in respect to power” (prognous tēn dunamin, 2.65.5). Pericles did not live long after his second Thucydidean Assembly speech: he died two and a half years into the war. Yet after his death, we are told, his forethought (pronoia) in respect to the war became clearer than ever, since he had told the Athenians that they would prevail in the war if they avoided risking their sea power, attempting to expand their empire, or otherwise endangering the polis (2.65.6–7). Thucydides here suggests that Athenian power, understood in the terms laid out in the methodological introduction and the prior narrative, would have prevailed if only Periclean leadership had been maintained.99

Unfortunately, Thucydides continues, post-Periclean leadership was not up to Pericles’ standard. The key difference, we are immediately told (2.65.7), is that Pericles’ successors failed to pay attention to the interests of the state, and they made policy on the basis of what they supposed would conduce to their private (idia) fame and private advantage. As a result, their successors brought advantage and reputation only to themselves, while their failings weakened the ability of the state as a whole to conduct the war. Pericles, by contrast, with his inherent distinction (axiōma) and capacity to reason (grōme), was self-evidently incorruptible and impervious to bribery. He treated the plēthos as a free man should (eleutherōs), and he was not led by them; rather, he was himself the leader (ouk égeto... autós ége). Since he had no desire to gain influence by improper means, he was not compelled to say things that his audience would find pleasurable (pros hēdomēn ti legein); rather, he had the capacity to contradict and speak angrily to his audience. Thus he was able both to deflare dangerous public moods of overconfidence and to restore confidence when the citizens were excessively discouraged. We have seen, in Pericles’ second speech, an example of confidence-restoring rhetoric under profoundly adverse conditions. Yet the reader who has pondered the lessons of the Archidamian may be even more impressed by Pericles’ capacity to restrain what she has been led to suppose is a natural tendency to state aggrandizement, especially under apparently near-ideal “pleonectic conditions” of domestic security (walls and money) and immense instrumental capacity for imposing the national will overseas (fleet and money). With Athens’ risks apparently minimized and its means to affect other states maximized, the task of preventing the Athenians—whose active and ambitious national character has been frequently asserted—from freely exercising their expansionist impulses seems daunting indeed.

This is the context for Thucydides’ dramatic revelation of the true nature of Athenian politics under Pericles: the polis was—or at least was tending to become—“in logos a democracy, in ergon the rule (archē) of the foremost man” (tou prōtou andros, 2.65.9).100 Pericles’ successors, more or less equal to one another but each eager to become first man, sought to please the demos (etrapoonto kathē hēdones tōi dēmōn). Which is to say, based on the narrative so far, they acted only toward the selfish interests of one sociological class within the polis. In so doing, they gave up control of the affairs of state (ta pragmata, 2.65.10)—that is, they allowed free rein to the aggressive tendencies of a putatively secure people of active character and instrumental capacity, without adequate regard to historical contingency or the feasibility of particular projects. And so, as the attentive reader has been led to expect, given these circumstances and given a “great polis with an empire to govern,” serious mistakes were made (bēnaristhē, 2.63.10–11). Thucydides takes as his case in point the error (hamartēma) made by the Athenians in respect to the Sicilian Expedition and its aftermath. He then concludes chapter 2.65 with a return to the theme of Pericles’ excellence: Even after the disaster in Sicily (413 B.C.), the Athenians held out for another eight years against a staggering array of enemies, including the son of the king of Persia, who provided the necessary capital for a Peloponnesian fleet (2.65.11–12). Thus, in the end it was the Athenians who destroyed themselves by their “private quarrels” (idiai diáphorai). “So overwhelmingly

98 Poucet (Necessities of War) regards the degeneration of Athenian capacity for collective action and the growth of a malicious devotion to individualist selfishness to be Thucydides’ main, pessimistic, theme.

99 Thucydides on the stabilizing factor of Periclean leadership: Contrast, Thucydides, 62; Farrar, Origins, I 158–77; Vaux, Tübingen, 64–67, 83. On the complex question of the accuracy of ‘Thucydides’ depiction of Pericles’ financial preparations, see Meigs, Athenian Empire, 324–39; Kallet-Murray, Money; with Hornblower, Commentary, 2: 93–98. There is reason to suppose that Pericles seriously underestimated the material costs to Athens of maintaining the empire.

100 Ste. Croix (Origins, 73) argues, on the basis of the imperfect epigeta, that we should translate “was tending to become” rather than “was.”
great," concludes Thucydides, "were the resources that Pericles had in mind at the time when he prophesied an easy victory for the polis over the Peloponnesians." (2.65.13).

At the watershed chapter 2.65, the confident prediction of victory on the basis of Pericles' strategic planning is closely related to the claim that while Pericles led Athens, démokratía remained a convenient title (logos) for an institutional framework, while in fact the state was being ruled by the first man—through his strength of personal character, intelligence, and rhetorical ability. By contrast, after Pericles' death, démokratía as a political culture achieved the status of ergon. This meant that the firm public policy of the insightful statesman was replaced by divisive selfishness and pandering on the part of would-be leaders, which in turn explains what went wrong in Athenian war policy and why Athens eventually lost. But in many ways the analysis Thucydides offers here seems altogether too pat. Rather than simply aberrant selfishness on the part of a few bad leaders, the long narrative following 2.65 suggests that it was deeper structural problems associated with the process of decision-making and policy formation in the Athenian démokratía that led to Athens' loss in the Peloponnesian War. We will revisit Thucydides' summation of Periclean and post-Periclean politics (below, 2.8.2). For the present, it seems fair to say that Thucydides' reader is offered a convenient provisional summary of Athenian wartime political developments at 2.65, a summary that focuses her attention on the character of Athenian leadership and its association with imperial policy and public speech. The rhetorical practice of post-Periclean leaders was for Thucydides a key symptom of serious political problems, as the next scene set in the Athenian Assembly amply demonstrates.

D. Justice and Interest II: The Mytilenean Debate

In the fourth year of the war (428 B.C.), the great polis of Mytilene on the island of Lesbos declared itself independent of Athenian control. This event confirmed Pericles' comment about the hostile attitudes of subject states and fulfilled the prediction about the tendency for Athens' imperial subjects to seek new allies, made by the Corinthian envoys in the debate over Corcyra. Thucydides points out that the revolt of the Mytilenean occurred at a difficult time for Athens: the city was suffering from plague and "from the war, which had only just now reached its full strength" (3.3.1). Beset by these concerns, most Athenians were reluctant to acknowledge the truth of the report (3.3.1). Thus, unlike Thucydides' ideal reader, they interpreted what they heard according to their own self-interested preferences, and they rejected the truth-value of unpleasant news out of hand. But eventually the danger of the situation intruded on the Athenian consciousness, and a fleet was sent to besiege Mytilene. The Mytileneans were soon shut up behind their city walls. Hard-pressed by an efficient Athenian siege and betrayed in their hopes of reinforcements from Sparta, they ran low on food. The aristocratic leaders of the revolt consequently armed the Mytilenean lower classes in anticipation of a battle. Yet once armed, the demos of Mytilene refused to support the insurrection. Faced with domestic insurrection and the specter of civil war, the leaders of Mytilene hurriedly surrendered (3.28).

Thucydides' narrative demonstrates that the material factors detailed in Pericles' two Assembly speeches played key roles in the Athenian suppression of the Mytilenean revolt. If the Mytilenean campaign consumed considerable Athenian time, effort, and capital, Athenian dynamis had stood the test. Athenian financial resources, sea power, and generalship in the end proved fully capable of overwhelming or overawing all opposition. But if Athens were to remain a great power, deployment of military strength must be conjoined with an appropriate imperial policy. Making good policy would not be easy in the absence of Pericles' stabilizing presence. As the Athenian Assembly set about deciding who had been responsible for the uprising and who should be punished, the atmosphere within the central Athenian decision-making body was characterized by strong emotions, confused perceptions regarding the wellsprings of national power, and stark social divisions.

The Mytilenean revolt had coincided with a Spartan naval expedition to Ionia (3.29–33). Although the Spartan admiral Alcidas and his small fleet accomplished relatively little in military terms and failed to aid the Mytilenean revolt, he threw a bad fright into the Athenians. The Athenians were used to thinking of the Aegean as their private lake; yet Alcidas was able to move about the Aegean at will, and he brutally murdered a number of captives (3.32.1). The mood of the first Assembly held to decide the fate of the Mytileneans was not charitable. In a fit of anger, the Athenians voted (hapo ergós edoxoi autoi) to treat the population of Mytilene as a single entity. They ordered their general on Lesbos to kill all adult male Mytileneans and to sell the rest of the polis' population into slavery (3.36.1–3). A trireme was dispatched to Lesbos carrying the grim instructions. But very quickly, while the ship was still en route, Athenian anger was replaced by a sense of remorse, and "it became clear" that "most of the citizens" wanted a chance to reconsider their action (3.36.5). A second Assembly was hastily called, and we are told that several speeches were given on either side of the issue. Thucydides presents two orations that, he
says, represent the most starkly opposed positions (3.49.1). The first of the pair is spoken by Cleon, son of Kleisthenes, the citizen who had been "victorious" (enxenēkei, 3.36.6) in advancing the general punishment at the first Assembly. Thucydides describes Cleon as "the most violent of the citizens [of Athens] and by far the best trusted by the demos" (3.36.6). Cleon's speech, which opposes any amelioration of the sentence against the Mytileneans, is attacked by a certain Diotis, the son of Eukrates, about whom we are told nothing other than that he had also spoken against Cleon at the previous meeting (3.41). The two speeches are a matched pair and share several themes; both offer a substantial "meta-rhetoric" (i.e., a rhetorical discussion of the nature of public deliberation), and both purport to explain the proper foundations of state policy. To-gether they offer Thucydides' reader her first detailed insight into the environment and tenor of post-Peloponnesian democratic politics and policy-making. Although, in line with the analysis of 2.65, the self-interest of Athenian politicians is a key factor, the Mytilenean Debate as a whole suggests that self-interested behavior on the part of politicians was only one factor in a much more complicated social and political situation.

Cleon begins his speech with an implicit rejection of one of Pericles' points in the Funeral Oration: he had often noticed that a démokratía is incapable of running an empire (3.37.1). Why is this? Because the Athenians fail to see that their empire really is a tyranny (not just "like a tyranny," per Pericles' second Assembly speech), and because of their indecisiveness (3.37.2). The root of the problem is overclever public speechmakers. Athens has no need for these men; indeed, ignorance (amathia) mixed with moderate sobriety (óphrwsas) is more useful (óphilèlmeteron) [to the polis] than cleverness mixed with insubordination. Ordinary men, when compared with the more gifted, actually administer (olkousi) polities better. For the latter [the gifted] wish to appear wiser than the laws and to excel at speaking about the public weal, since they are unable to express a clear opinion in regard to more important things. And thus they often ruin polities. But the former [ordinary men], not trusting overmuch in their own sharp wits (sunestis), are content to remain less learned than the laws, and are unable to pick apart a speech by a good speaker. These are men who can judge impartially rather than [acting like] rivalrous competitors (ogínontai), and so things go well. It would be best for us [politicians] to do likewise and avoid being too swept away by cleverness and the competition in intelligence (deinonti kai sunexêstis agóni) that we contradict our own true opinions when we advise you, the masses (to pléthos), (3.37.3–5)

Thus, if there must be politicians, Cleon suggests that they should act and speak more like ordinary Athenians. Thucydides in proper persona had praised Themistocles' "mental acuteness" (sunestis), and Pericles had praised a generalized Athenian capacity for reasoning in the Funeral Oration, where acting rashly out of ignorance is regarded as typical of non-Athenians. Cleon, for his part, disparages those who regard themselves as clever, and he praises ignorance (amathia) as the basis of good popular government for Athens. But as it is, he goes on to say, instead of politicians acting like ordinary citizens, the ordinary folk all wish that they could be clever speakers themselves. Lacking actual oratorical attainments, they fancy themselves connoisseurs of oratory (3.37.6–7). As a result, debate causes delay, which is to the advantage of wrongdoers. Instead of wasting their time listening to speeches and then endlessly changing their minds about policy, the Athenians would do better to act (that is, vote on policy issues) in the heat of righteous anger and then stick by those decisions (3.38.1). Again, the contrast is both with Thucydides' Themistocles, who combined brilliant political analysis with quick action, and with Pericles' ideal Athenians, for whom there was no dissonance between reasoned debate and decisive action.

Cleon implies that there can be no good reason for opposing his own policy of general punishment, of treating Mytilene as a political unit rather than as a diverse society. He sets up a narrow and exclusionary framework to explain the motives of those Athenians who spoke against his proposal: either they hoped to make a public display of their rhetorical powers, or they had been bribed to support an inherently bad policy. In either case, Cleon reminds his audience, in these sorts of contests (agones), it is the speakers who reap the prizes (i.e., adulation or bribe money), while it is the polis that is exposed to dangers (3.38.2–3, cf. 3.40.3).

But you [citizens] yourselves are the cause of this evil for having set up these contests (agones); you have become accustomed to being spectators of orations (logos) while gaining your knowledge of facts (erga) from what you hear. You decide what is possible regarding what has to be done in the future by looking to those who speak well. Even regarding events of the past, you don't rate the evidence of what you actually saw above what you have heard in some overclever bit of verbiage. (3.38.4)

This statement, with its emphasis on the priority of vision, experience, and erga and its overt rejection of speech contests as a means of imparting a valid understanding of either past or future, has clear and obvious affinities to Thucydides' own approach to "useful" (óphilèlmeteron) history as laid out in the methodological introduction. Thucydides offers to lead the reader away from contests of words to a dispassionate understanding of "objective" historical truth that will prepare him to understand what is to come. Cleon likewise claims to know what is "more useful" (óphilèlmeteron) to the polis (above, 3.37.3), and his mission is to lead the Athenians away from their foolish habits of spectatorship at speech contests (3.39.1). But what does Cleon offer instead? Hardly a dispassionate grasp of either material necessities or historical realities. Rather, Cleon urges the Athenians to recall vividly their own emotions at the time the revolt first broke out, and he advises them to act according to that mimetically restored emotional state (3.40.7). Like Thucydides of 2.65, Cleon finds much to criticize in democratic Athens, and he employs some of the same terminology, but in the end Cleon urges his listeners to take the easy path of relying on their visceral
emotions when making decisions. Thucydides’ reader, struggling with the complex text, is not offered such an easy road to right judgment.\(^{\text{a}}\)

Cleon’s meta-rhetoric results in his anti-Pericles claim that political speech is an impediment to action and that strong-felt emotion is a more appropriate wellsprings of policy than public debate. Diodotus, on the other hand, stoutly defends reiterated public discussion of especially important affairs. Indeed, he says, it is anger and overquickness that are the greatest impediments to good policy (enboulia, 3.42.1).

But if someone argues that speeches (logoi) are not teachers in regard to affairs (pragmata), either he be a fool (axmetos) or he be on the lookout for some private (iudia) advantage. He is a fool if he supposes that it is possible to consider the uncertain future by some other means; he is seeking his own advantage if he hopes to propose some shameful thing, and is unable to speak well or convincingly regarding it, yet by flandering well is able to strike fear into both the opposing speakers and the listeners. (3.42.2)

Here, Diodotus reveals the obvious flaw in Cleon’s anti-public-speech metamrhetoric: Cleon’s attack on clever speech is embedded in a clever speech, and thereby demonstrates the impossibility of communicating complex meanings except through the medium of words. Like Cleon, Diodotus attributes to his opponents an illegitimate private interest in personal gain, and he claims that those private interests will endanger the state. But, having suggested that Cleon either is a fool or is out for personal advantage, Diodotus then attacks the rhetorical practice of claiming that one’s enemies place personal gain over the public good (3.42.3–6). It would be much better, Diodotus goes on to say, if the Athenians would abandon their habit of dishonoring those who lose public debates. If they quit punishing losers of oratorical contests, then rulers would speak their minds honestly, rather than advocating policies they did not believe in with an eye toward gaining the favor of the many (charizomenos . . . to plēthos, 3.42.6). But, he continues, as it is, we do just the opposite, and because speakers have to work under constant suspicion of being bribe-takers, the polis loses the benefit of good advice. Evil and good-willed speakers alike are forced to lie, and the polis is the only entity for whose good it is impossible for a citizen to work openly.\(^{\text{b}}\)

Although the appeal to the public good initially recalls Pericles, Diodotus’ meta-rhetoric is almost as muddled as Cleon’s: he accuses Cleon of self-inter-

\(^{\text{a}}\) Cleon’s criticism is conventional, strikingly similar (e.g.) to a fragment of Solonian poetry (F 11.7–8 West): you (Athenians) “gape (orate) at the tongue and at the words of a wily man, but you do not perceive (bryepen) the thing (argos) that is done”; for other parallels, from Heuer and socratic poetry, see Levine, “Symposium and the Polis,” 186–89. Andrews (“Cleon’s Ethoepoiesis,” 27–33) emphasizes the oft-noted parallels with the language of Thucydides’ Pericles, to the point of claiming that Pericles, like Cleon, is a “champion of argo” (28). This seems to me to overstate the case; see below, 2.2.1.109.

\(^{\text{b}}\) nousin te polin dios tas peripheias eu poieistik ek tôn prophanasen và exaparèssan edimaton (3.43.1–3). On this passage, contrast Yunis, Tanning, 59–101 (who attempts to get Diodotus off the horns of his dilemma), with literature cited.

est, and in the next breath points out how destructive the rhetorical practice of making such accusations is to the political practice of decision-making. Indeed, he claims that slanderous rhetoric is specifically destructive in that all speakers, even good-willed men (like himself), are made into liars. In sum, Diodotus willfully embraces the well-known “Cretan Lie” paradox. Since Diodotus is an orator, and all orators are liars, the truths he claims to teach through speech are thoroughly compromised, and his defense of the value of public discussion becomes paradoxical. What public good can result from reiterated debates among liars? Moreover, his comment on the impossibility of doing good openly for the polis explicitly contradicts Pericles’ Funeral Oration excommunication of Athenian public spiritedness. If public speakers are liars and unable to do good for the state in any overt way, how are we to take his next statement (meant to refute Cleon’s claim that ordinary, ignorant citizens are good administrators): it is necessary, he says, that we speakers look a little bit further ahead (peralero pronoovonta) than the rest of you citizens who just glance things over in a superficial manner (3.43.4). Thucydides is all in favor of forethought. But Diodotus’ comment remains obscure: What techniques will the speaker use to gauge the likely course of future events? How will the results of this forethought be translated into good state policy in a democracy, given the necessity of public mendacity? Why should listeners believe that an acknowledged liar is sincere when he claims to seek the public good rather than private advantage? Diodotus does not say, but then, given his argument about the impossibility of doing good openly, he simply cannot.

The reader of these convoluted meta-rhetorical arguments may opine that neither Cleon’s claims for policy-making by reference to the ignorance of ordinary men nor Diodotus’ claims for leadership of the democracy by foresightful yet meeklyacus public speakers is particularly convincing. Our sense of urgency is not assuaged by their respective arguments regarding the proper basis for policy. Both speakers agree that the main determinant in the Assembly’s decision must be Athens’ imperial interests, and each claims that his policies will best serve Athenian interests. Each orator acknowledges the fact that Athens’ imperial income derives from prosperous cities, a very salient point given the importance of reserve capital in the Archaeology and in Pericles’ discussion of Athenian strengths. Cleon comes up with a tortured argument for linking the utter destruction of Mytilene with imperial prosperity (3.39.7–8), but the economic point clearly favors the case for leniency: dead men don’t pay tribute. Yet Diodotus mentions the negative economic consequences of Cleon’s policy only in passing (3.46.3).

Rather than work through the cost/benefit equation with specific reference to Mytilene, both Cleon and Diodotus emphasize that the issue at hand has more to do with the future than with the present, and with the empire in general rather than with the polis of Mytilene in particular (3.40.7, 3.44.3, 3.48.2). Both speakers are theorists of power before being practical policymakers concerned with contingent realities. They agree that the treatment of Mytilene will be a test case for what happens to insurgents, and thus the issue is not the material
and particular results of exterminating a certain great and prosperous city, but rather it is how Athenian harshness or leniency will be perceived by the other subject states. Each speaker, in short, claims theoretical insight and states that policy should be made on the basis of his theory of human behavior. Neither makes any serious use of actual Greek history.

The issue thus becomes group psychology rather than the "material or historical facts of the matter”—indeed, neither speaker suggests that facts matter very much. And as a result, the two contestants must base their arguments on appeals to human nature, to assumptions about what "men or states are likely to do in a given situation." As we have seen, human nature is a major issue for Thucydides. But how, according to these Athenian public speakers, is one to know human nature? Despite his stated confidence in ordinary citizens as decisionmakers and his frequent use of maxims depending on the common sense of the many, Cleon implies that the everyday experiences of the men in his audience are not an adequate basis for making judgments about international relations (3.37.2), whereas Diodotus—who believes that only politicians with special insight into affairs can come up with good public policy—clams (3.45.2–3, 45.6) that the collective behavior of poleis closely mimics the private behavior of individuals. Cleon claims that the Mytileneans did not revolt, but rather they willfully attacked Athens, on the grounds that people revolt only when they have suffered some form of violence (3.39.2). Thus he is able to argue that it would be improper to forgive the Mytileneans on the grounds that "it is human nature to fall into error" (hamartein anthropinai, 3.40.1). Diodotus disagrees: it is in the natural tendency of all men, both in private and in public, to make mistakes (hapesantes idiai kai demosai hamartanein, 3.45.3). Yet for Diodotus it is not only suffering violence that leads people to revolt, but a wide variety of factors: poverty, wealth, hope, chance, and emotion of various sorts (3.45.4–6). Once again, neither speaker offers any concrete examples to buttress his opinion.

If they disagree on the wellspring of human folly, neither do the two speakers agree on what factors will successfully deter the tendency of people to make mistakes (in this case, the tendency of subjects to resist their more powerful hegemon). For Cleon, it is a universal truth that people despise kindness but respect harsh treatment (3.39.5). Wrong, according to Diodotus, is the harshest punishment known is the death sentence, and that has not prevented people from doing wrong in the past. To support this claim, Diodotus develops a quasi-historical argument: It "seems probable" that long ago (3.45.3) sentences for wrongdoing were less strict than they are now, and that they were gradually made harsher in a vain attempt at deterrence. He cites no historical authority for this opinion, and it is not at all clear that it would fit what most Athenians thought they knew about their own past history. But it does fit Diodotus' argument nicely, and rhetorical expediency, not historical validity, is obviously the point.

Cleon's position on the value of the deterrent example is part and parcel of his general rule that holding an empire is a matter of raw strength rather than goodwill (eunovia, 3.37.2). He therefore refuses to take into account the political implications of social distinctions between Mytileneans: the Athenians must not say that it was the few (hanoi oligoi) who were the cause of the revolt and let the Mytileneans demoi go free; the few and the many were all equally guilty of wronging us (3.39.6). Diodotus, on the other hand, urges that punishment be meted out individually, and to as few individuals as possible (3.46.3). Rather surprisingly, in light of his prior linkage of individual and state behavior, he focuses on internal social distinctions within poleis. He notes that as matters now stand, in every polis of the empire, the demos (meaning the lower class) is well disposed (eunovus) toward Athens. As a result, if in some allied town, hoi oligoi initiate a revolt, they cannot count on the support of the demos, and so you (Athenians) have to peithos as an ally (3.47.2). Obviously, if the Athenians treat Mytilene juridically as a single political unit, that is, punish demoi and oligoi identically, they will lose this valuable ally. Notably, both speakers use the term "demos" in its sociological/factional sense ("lower class," not "citizen-ry"), and thus they reveal what Pericles' Funeral Oration attempts to conceal, the "fact" (recalling Ps.-Xenophon) that dêmokratia was the self-interested rule of a socially defined faction, rather than the rule of all citizens by all citizens. But Diodotus wants to use this sociological fact pragmatically in Athens' interest; Cleon, who Thucydides has told us is the darling of the Athenian demos and whose strongly egalitarian sentiments might be expected to appeal to poorer Athenians, sees no purpose in encouraging a "transnational" lower-class sociopolitical solidarity that would cut across the nationalist sentiments of poleis populations.

The two speakers also differ on the question of whether justice has anything to do with the decision. Cleon pretends it does: his conglomerate argument

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8 For example, the well-known tradition that the early Athenian law code of Draco entailed the death penalty for all categories of crime: Aristotle Pol. 1274b15–19; Plut., Sol. 17; cf. Garguris, Early Greek Law.

9 In books 3–5, the reader is confronted with a growing tendency for sociological distinctions between many and few, dême and dêmata, to escalate into civil war. Cleon's refusal to see beyond Athens' narrowly defined self-interest and his emphasis on Athenian exceptionalism limits Athens' ability to employ dêmokratia as an ideological weapon, as Ps.-Xenophon suggests was standard Athenian practice; cf. Finley, Politics, 61, on the general tendency of ancient conquest-states to impose governments similar to their own upon subjects. Sparta saw to it that its allies were governed by oligarchies: Thuc. 1.19; Ps.-Hermes Polis politikos 30–31. Yet Athens did not consistently impose democracies on states within the empire, even after 427: Mitton and Chion remained oligarchic, as, perhaps, did Samos: Quinn, Athens and Samos, 13–23, 39–49. Athenian imperial ideology was apparently less centered on the moral superiority of democracy than on autocratic and Ionian ancestry: Loraux, Children; Dougherty, "Democratic Contradictions."
switches back and forth from the language of law and right (familiar from the speech of the Corinthians) to that of necessity and advantage (favored by the Cosmopolitans): the Athenian empire is a tyranny, he claims, and whether it is just or unjust is irrelevant (3.37.2, 3.40.4); yet by opposing this tyranny, the Mytileneans haveacted terribly unjustly, and so they deserve the general punishment demanded by righteous anger. Diodotus is quick to jump on Cleon’s inconsistency: this is not a jury trial, but a policy debate, not a case in which justice and national interest go hand in hand, but one in which advantage alone deserves a hearing. Whether guilty or not, the Mytileneans are more useful to Athens alive than dead, and that should be the end of it (3.44.1–4, 3.47.5).

So what is the audience—either the original audience of the Mytilenians or the audience of readers—to make of all of this? The contest in the Mytilene Debate pose several questions that Thucydides’ reader already knows are vitally important: Can a post-Periclean democracy run an empire? What is the relationship between deployment of power, domestic politics, and social diversity? What is the proper role of politicians and public debate in the democratic society? What is the relationship between an individual speaker’s personal interests and the public interests? How can one determine if there is some discontinuity between public and private interests, and what should be done about it? Can prudent (in this case, restrained) policy and decisive action be reconciled? What is the appropriate basis for a future-oriented policy? How is foresight cultivated?

Arguably, the workability of democracy and the success of Athens as a great power depend on having the answers to these questions. Yet neither the speech of Cleon nor that of Diodotus gives a convincing answer to any of them. The reader is surely led to prefer Diodotus’ position, by the clearly prejudicial introduction to Cleon as most violent and most influential of the public speakers, by the brutality of the policy Cleon advocates, and perhaps by the relatively greater degree of rational realism in Diodotus’ arguments. Diodotus’ approach of exploiting social distinctions within the allied states might be made congruent with the logic developed in the Archilochus and the prior narrative by assuming that Diodotus recognized that social divisions made for weakness in communities; Athens would have an easier time ruling weaker states. But his rhetoric is a long way from the confident integration of public speech and foreign policy that characterized Thucydides’ portrayal of Themistocles and Pericles, and the reader has become very aware that there are deep social divisions in Athens, as well as in the subject states. If she is not sanguine about the chances of the cryptic and necessarily mendacious style of leadership that Diodotus offers his audience, she may not be surprised to find that Diodotus disappears from Thucydides’ text after the debate. The unsatisfactory nature of the two speeches is reflected in the final decision: Diodotus prevailed (ekratēsete, 3.49.1), but, Thucydides points out, the vote was very close.

The Mytilene Debate exposes the reality of self-interest that lies beneath the ideology of the Funeral Oration: freedom is for Athenians only, and acting in the public interest requires deception. No more fine talk about being “an education to Hellas.” And, ominously, little hope that speakers like Cleon and Diodotus have anything to teach. Neither speaker has a coherent vision of the relationship between speech, action, and the material world to offer in the place of Pericles’ problematic Funeral Oration idealism. We are warned in advance that Cleon is “most violent,” although “best trusted by the demos”—and his speech is a masterpiece of convoluted argument that in the end is based on nothing other than the assumed validity of short-term emotional responses. We are not told by Thucydides in advance how we should react to Diodotus, but his speech is almost as unsatisfactory as Cleon’s. Any reader convinced by his argument for a strict segregation of justice from advantage will have to face the consequences of that position when they are made chillingly clear by the Athenian speakers in the Melian Dialogue (below, 2.5).

The Mytilene Debate is clearly a context (agōn) of words; this is implied by Thucydides’ introductory and concluding comments ( Klein. en enekikēi, 3.36.5, eīthēn. eis agōna, 3.49.1) and is underlined by Cleon’s terminology. The contest of words is reduplicated in the vivid narrative description of its material result: the battle between the triremes dispatched to Lesbos—the first with a message ordering the Athenian general on Lesbos to kill the Mytileneans, the second carrying the pardon (3.49.2–4). The nature of the debate is emphasized by Thucydides’ selection for presentation of the two most-opposed arguments delivered that day, a narrative strategy that obscures the dialectical tendency of Athenian public debate. This strategy can, of course, be defended as economically presenting the reader with the full range of options open to the Assembly. Yet it also presents Assembly debate as precisely the sort of contest for audience applause that Thucydides himself has explicitly renounced as a basis for his own text, on the grounds that contestants are always more concerned with approbation than with the truth.

Each of the two contestants of the Mytilene Debate represents himself as a concerned citizen, worried about the good of the polis. But the reader is led to ask whether these citizens are any more concerned with advocating Athens’

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60 Compare Macleod, “Reason and Necessity,” 99–102: “In the last analysis Diodotus, no more than Cleon, offers any protection to Athens” (100). Compare the much more positive readings of Diodotus’ speech by, e.g., Yunis (Sailing, 99–101) and Saxonnhoze (Athenian Democracy, 72–86).

61 Note the lexical similarity of enekikēi to the criticism of logographē: epit to mathēdē ekmeriskōna (above, 2.4.11). Agonal language in Cleon’s speech: agonimē, 3.37.4; et tōn ti hōlēn agōne to eun αthlē, 38.3; agōnikotemene, 38.4; antagōnikonomēn, 38.6.

62 This desperately serious race is recapitulated in the purely agonistic trireme race as far as Aegina that launches the Sicilian Expedition: 6.32.2.
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actual good than were the more honestly self-seeking Corcyrean and Corinthian ambassadors. Hence, the rhetoric of the citizen-politicians inclines in the direction of the ideal-type *antilogia* of the Corcyrean Debate. And thus, the decision-making processes of the post-Peloponnesian democracy are implicated in Thucydides’ demonstration that ideal-type speech contests cannot offer a secure grasp of realities or a secure basis for prudent policy. Pa.-Xenophon’s point about self-interest seems to be affirmed, but his simplistic discussion of democracy as an efficiently immoral system of government has been replaced by a redescriptions of democracy as a system of decision-making by speech contests that necessarily obscure and confuse the objective facts that decision-makers must command if they are to make good policy. In both the Corcyrean and the Mytilenean debates, there was a tendency to indecisiveness on the part of the Assembly: in the first example, indecision gave way to action (a treaty was made); in the second, the decision (to spare the Mytilenean demos) led to the nullification of a previous decision and the prevention of an act. In neither case did speech lead to a strong consensus. In the third and last Athenian Assembly debate in his text, Thucydides presents the other side of the coin: a debate that initiates a decisive, daring, and popular policy.

E. DISASTROUS CONSENSUS: THE SICILIAN DEBATE

Book 6 begins: “In that . . . winter the Athenians decided . . . to sail against Sicily and, if possible, conquer it.” The winter is that of 416/5; the words “that winter” refer back to the event with which book 5 ended, the Athenian invasion of the island-polis of Melos and extermination of its native population. The conquest of Melos was preceded in Thucydides’ text by the peculiar “Melian Dialogue” (5.84–113), a debate between Athenian military commanders and Melos’ rulers regarding the Melians’ most reasonable course of action when faced with an Athenian demand that they submit to imperial control. The Athenian line of argument in the Melian Dialogue forcefully recalls the Mytilenean Debate, which had concluded with a triumph of instrumentalism: Diodotus had beaten Cleon and saved most of the Mytileneans by demonstrating that the Mytilenean demos was of greater use alive than dead; by extension, the only reasonable criterion for deciding how to treat persons in Athens’ power was by reference to Athenian interests. The reader is led to suppose that the volatile mix of agonistic Athenian politicians and a rudderless demos was producing ever simpler and crude expressions of the pleonctic tendencies analyzed in the Archaeology. The Melian Dialogue starkly reveals the depth of Athenian devotion to self-interest, but in a strikingly new format. The Athenian generals, who arrived on Melos with an impressive expeditionary force, sought to negotiate a surrender before commencing a siege. But they were not allowed to address the Melian demos; Melos’ oligarchs demanded that the Athenians discuss the situation in camera, with the few who ruled (5.84–85). The thinking behind the Melian oligarchs’ demand is clear enough by reference to Mytilene, where the oligarchic rulers had decided on their own to resist Athens and where the demos, once armed, immediately called for accommodation.

The discussion between the Athenian generals and the Melian oligarchs is framed not as a speech pair but as a prose dialogue—a genre Plato would seek to make his own (see below, Chapter 4). This is the only dialogue in Thucydides’ text; its unique form underlines the distinctly “philosophical” argument developed by the Athenians. Like Plato’s Socrates, they are concerned with the relationship between force and persuasion, they seek to prevent extraneous matters from being dragged into the discussion, and they try to demonstrate that reason alone demands a specific course of action. And yet, chillingly unlike Platonic political philosophy, the premises of the discussion forbid appeals to justice or piety, and the unequal standing of the speakers is essential to the reasoning: the conclusions of this debate will be far from the “unrefuted arguments arising from uncoerced conversation” that ideally informed the actions of the sincere Socratic. The Athenians attempt (and fail) to demonstrate to the Melians that, in light of the great inequality in power, the Melians must recognize themselves as Athenian instrumentalities, rather than as free men. The Melian oligarchs, unable to accept this redescriptions, refuse to surrender and express hope that they will somehow prevail. The Athenians end the discussion by reference to the key Thucydidean issue of foresight and in terms that anticipate the upcoming Athenian decision to invade Sicily: “You [Melians] seem to us quite unique in that you judge the future as something more certain (saphesterai) than that which is before your eyes, and you view uncertainties (aaphanei) as realities (gignomeni), simply because you wish them to be so” (5.113). This sort of misguided hopefulness is the polar opposite of Pericles’ decision-making, but, as Thucydides’ reader soon learns, the Melian oligarchs and the post-Peloponnesian Athenian demos have much more in common than the Athenian generals supposed.

The Melian rulers’ decision to resist led to the commencement of Athenian hostilities, which culminated in an atrocity similar to the one barely averted by the Mytilenean Debate: Melos’ entire adult male population was executed, the women and children enslaved (5.116.4). The material brutality of Athenian imperial power was clearly revealed at Melos, and the renewed Athenian taste for conquest was evidently whetted by the relatively easy victory. But Sicily was not Melos. In the continuation of the sentence with which this section began, Thucydides states that “hói polloi [of the Athenians] were ignorant (apeiron) of the great size of the island, of the numerosity of its Greek and barbarian population, and that they were undertaking a war not much smaller than that against the Peloponnesians” (6.1.1).13

Thucydides’ narrative then digresses onto “Sicilian Antiquities”—a detailed

13 Commes (Thucydides, 158–69) emphasizes the key foreshadowings of the first sentence of book 6. Macke (“Korone and Thucydides,” 103) argues that by borrowing from Homeric journey-narratives, Thucydides’ focus on Athenian ignorance helps to “convey the notion that the expedition to Sicily is a kind of heroic quest into the unknown that goes disastrously wrong.” On the Melian Debate, see Hotton-Williams, “Conventional Forms”; Macleod, “Form and Meaning.”