

Rhetoric and History

(Thucydides 6. 16–18)

Thucydides, like most of his successors in the ancient world, is a rhetorical historian. This much he tells us himself when he says that he wrote his speeches *ὡς δ' ἂν ἐδόκουν ἑμοὶ ἕκαστοι περὶ τῶν αἰεὶ παρόντων τὰ δέοντα μάλιστ' εἰπεῖν* (1. 22. 1): for *τὰ δέοντα λέγειν* is what the rhetorician claims to teach. Thus Gorgias in announcing his purpose in the *Helen* writes: *τοῦ δ' αὐτοῦ ἀνδρὸς λέξαι τε τὸ δέον ὀρθῶς καὶ ἐλέγξαι . . . τοὺς μεμφομένους Ἑλένην* (2), or Isocrates, in attacking the dialecticians: *περὶ μὲν τῶν μελλόντων εἰδέναι προσποιουμένους, περὶ δὲ τῶν παρόντων μηδὲν τῶν δεόντων μήτ' εἰπεῖν μήτε συμβουλευσαι δυναμένους* (xiii. 7–8). *τὰ δέοντα* is a two-fold notion, as indeed rhetoric itself is two-fold. On the one hand, it presupposes a system of practical reasoning: the orator must be aware of the relevant factors in political deliberation and able, in the light of that awareness, to construct arguments for particular circumstances. An elementary form of such theory can be found in the *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum* and complex examples of it in Thucydides. So in his speeches recommending and rejecting an alliance or a war we can see in action arguments like those mentioned in the later treatise (1424 b 28 ff.);¹ we can also see an implicit discussion of larger questions such as the merits of foresight against experiment (6. 9–18), expediency against justice (1. 32–42; 3. 37–48) or prudence against honour (5. 85–113). To this extent, then, rhetoric is the medium of thought about politics, embodying a rational approach to practical questions and designed to answer them in the best possible way;² and *τὰ δέοντα* is the application of this in any particular situation. But the orator's business is not only—indeed, not necessarily—to find the wisest thing to do: it is to persuade, and rhetoric, in one classic formulation is defined as 'the manufacturer of persuasion' (Plat. *Gorg.* 453 a). Against this background *τὰ δέοντα* means something more like what Aristotle, in speaking of drama, calls *τὰ ἐνόντα καὶ τὰ ἀρμόττοντα* (*Poet.* 1450 b 5) or *τὰ ὑπάρχοντα πιθανά* (*Rhet.* 1355 b 10): i.e. those elements that a speech needs in order to present its

case effectively (whether or not the case is valid). There must be something of this sense in Thucydides' use of the term, for not all of his speeches, which commonly contradict each other, can be offered to the reader as the right advice.

Why does oratory deserve a place in the work of a great historian like Thucydides? In part because that place corresponds to its place in history. Men who went into political life prepared themselves at the schools of Gorgias and his like.¹ *ρήτωρ* is, in effect, the Greek for 'politician'; and the dominant statesman in a democracy is, in Thucydides' phrase (3. 36. 6; 6. 35. 2), the one 'best able to persuade the people', since to get through a policy means convincing the assembly, the people, that it is right. For this reason Plato's *Gorgias* grows naturally from a dialogue about the art of words into a dialogue about the art of government.² However, the speeches in Thucydides do not simply try to mirror their counterparts in real life; for *τὰ δέοντα* in 1. 22 is in clear contrast to *τῶν ἀληθῶς λεχθέντων*. In fact, Thucydides has created rhetorically ideal equivalents to the actual wording while, as he says, sticking as closely as possible to the gist of it.

This is not an idle game of the intellect. In the speeches Thucydides does what any artist and any historian must do: he refashions his subject in order to draw out its significance. (We cannot say anything in detail about this process, but we know from his own words that it took place.) This means not simply reproducing it; the Mytilenean debate has to be reworked to become Thucydides, 3. 37–46, just as the Mont Sainte-Victoire does to become a Cézanne. At the same time, the overriding purpose is to be faithful to the reality—granted that to interpret something, however inadequately, is more faithful to reality than to fight shy of interpretation altogether. Moreover, Thucydides is representing words in words, and his reshaping uses techniques analogous to those of the orators themselves; for both he and they are producing a piece of rhetoric. But there is still a difference between the subject and its representation. Cleon and Pericles are seeking to persuade an audience: Thucydides is seeking not merely to record that attempt, but to show us how and why they succeeded or failed, to help us understand, and so also to judge, the speaker and his public. This purpose we can achieve in two main ways: by sifting the arguments and by examining their relation to the narrative. The speeches are so constructed that a careful reader can see into—or see through—the speaker's reasoning; and the debate form, which confronts opposing arguments, is one of the chief means to this end. There may also be a revealing relation between speeches which do not belong together in time; a particularly valuable point of reference

¹ e.g. Xen. *Anab.* 2. 6. 16f.

² Cf. E. R. Dodds, *Plato Gorgias* (Oxford, 1959), 3f.

¹ Cf. R. Zahn, *Die erste Periklesrede* (Kiel, 1934), 69–71. Note also Arist. *Rhet.* 1359 b 33 ff., 1369 a 7 ff.

² On the wide knowledge rhetorical skill may imply, see J. H. Finley, *Three Essays on Thucydides* (Cambridge, 1967), 35 n. 52 (= *HSCP* 49 (1938), 52 n. 1).

are those of Pericles, for Thucydides Athens' best leader. So too a complex pattern of verbal and conceptual echoes between speech and narrative helps him trace the path from proposal to event. This relation of words to deeds is at the heart of Thucydides' thinking; for the whole work is a passionate, though often gloomy, enquiry into the possibility of rational behaviour in politics and war. Hence Thucydides' concerns are close to those of rhetorical theory; and this is why he chooses to present his history as a combination of λόγοι and ἔργα (1. 22), rather than leave the facts to speak alone.

I wish now to examine Thucydides 6. 16–18 in the light of these remarks.

Alcibiades' speech begins with a λύσις διαβολῆς, an attempt to wipe out the slurs of his opponent (12. 2). This is sound rhetorical practice: a defendant, according to Aristotle (*Rhet.* 1415 a 28–34; cf. *Rhet. ad Alex.* 1437 b 38–41), should in his prologue clear the way for his case by rebutting attacks on his reputation, whereas the prosecutor, as Nicias in fact does, should save them for his epilogue, from where they will best leave their sting in the hearers' minds. Also normal is his justification for such a beginning (ἀνάγκη γὰρ ἐντεῦθεν ἀρξασθαι, ἐπειδὴ μου Νικίας κατήψατο).¹ Its rhetorical value is to imply that his adversary has spoken off the point and to present a self-eulogy, which might otherwise be invidious, as inevitable. Alcibiades' other main speech (6. 89–91) also begins—and indeed ends—with an apologia; and his persistent need to clear his character focuses attention upon it. Contrast the quite impersonal λύσις διαβολῆς of Diodotus in 3. 42. There what counts is the relation between politicians and assembly in general: here it is Alcibiades' behaviour and ethics which have influenced and will again influence the course of history, as has just been explained in chapter 15. It is his ambitiousness and unconventionality which cause him to be suspected of tyrannical aspirations and force him, after the mutilation of the Hermae, to flee Athens; and those too are the qualities he shows in turning traitor to his own city. This is of strategic importance since his advice both helps to rouse the inert Spartans and directs their strategy, and so ultimately leads to the disaster in Sicily. These facts again underlie Thucydides' judgement on the expedition in 2. 65. 11, where he says that it failed not so much because it was a mistake in itself as because the people at home did not vote the right measures for the armada in the West. It is generally agreed that the latter phrase alludes to the treatment of Alcibiades. But it does not imply that his presence on the campaign would have brought success, only that his recall and condemnation began a chain of events which ended in catastrophe,

¹ Cf. 1. 37. 1; 3. 61. 1; 6. 82. 1; Herod. 9. 27. 1; Gorg. *Palam.* 32; Eur. *Hipp.* 990.

and so that the internal squabbles which fed on suspicions against Alcibiades were the ultimate cause of Athens' defeat.¹ Since his personality generates such suspicions, it is a historical factor of considerable weight.

The character of Alcibiades and the questions which gather around it are also illumined by the contrast with Nicias; for chapter 16 corresponds to 9. 2 in the earlier speech, both representing the topic Aristotle calls *περὶ αὐτοῦ* (*Rhet.* 1415 a 28). The older man represents his own caution as a patriotic virtue, the younger does the same for his own extravagance. Both speakers' view is limited by their own interests and habits of mind;² neither embodies, as Pericles can claim to do (2. 60. 5), the ideal statesman. But Alcibiades' claims for himself are particularly disturbing. Nicias argues: 'I have an interest in the city's prosperity as one who has something to lose by her misfortune' (i.e. 'I depend on the city'); Alcibiades: 'My success increases the city's power' (i.e. 'The city, in a sense, depends on me'). But let us now examine Alcibiades' argument as a whole.

Alcibiades' λύσις διαβολῆς is distinguished by its aggressive and entirely unapologetic tone, in sharp contrast with *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum* 1437/a 1–b 15 which suggests lines of self-justification for a speaker in an assembly. It falls into three main sections:

(1) 16. 1–3 answer Nicias' charge that Alcibiades seeks his own glory and enrichment at the city's expense. Nicias' *ἰδίᾳ ἐλλαμπρύνεσθαι* and *ὠφελῆθῃ* he polemically echoes with *λαμπρύνομαι* and *τοῖς ἰδίοις τέλεσι* ... *ὠφελῇ*. At this point he is arguing from expediency: his behaviour, he claims, in fact does the city good and so far from taking the city's money, he has spent his own for its benefit as well as his.

(2) 16. 4–5 answer the implicit charge of arrogance by asserting that his behaviour is also morally justified and therefore should not bring odium upon him. *λαμπρότητι* in this section again echoes Nicias' *ἐλλαμπρύνεσθαι*.

(3) 16. 6–17. 1 appeal to his past activities as a statesman to refute Nicias' claim that he is too young. *ἢ ἐμὴ νεότης καὶ ἄνοια* sarcastically echoes *νεώτερος* and *νεωτέρω*.

In other words, Alcibiades presents himself as a useful and just citizen; but he does so in a highly individual way.

His opening sentence makes a double claim: 'I have a better right than others to hold office' and 'I am worthy to do so'. This may be set

¹ Cf. J. de Romilly, *Thucydides and Athenian Imperialism* (Eng. tr. 1963; Paris, 1956), 207–9. I refer to this work in what follows as *TAI*. On the harmony between 2. 65 and Book 6 see W. Liebeschuetz, *Historia* 17 (1968), 302–6.

² On 6. 9. 2 cf. G. F. Bender, *Der Begriff des Staatsmannes bei Thukydides* (Würzburg, 1938), 54; see also p. 49 n. 138 on 7. 77. 2.

against a passage in *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum* (1427 a 40ff.; cf. Isocr. 6. 1–6, Lys. 16. 20) which tells a young speaker to refute those who hold his youth against him, as Nicias has just done here, by asserting that the subject under debate is one which particularly concerns a man of his age: Alcibiades' *προσῆκει μοι* corresponds to *ἐκ τοῦ προσήκοντος τούτω* there. But Alcibiades' argument is for himself *tout court*, not for himself as a young man; it is also of general application and not confined to the circumstances of the debate. Pericles' words in his last speech, likewise a *λύσις διαβολῆς*, are also a striking contrast: *ὅς οὐδενὸς ἡσσω οἶομαι εἶναι γινώναι τε τὰ δέοντα καὶ ἐρμηνεύσαι ταῦτα, φιλόπολις τε καὶ χρημάτων κρείσσων . . . ὥστ' εἴ μοι καὶ μέσως ἡγοούμενοι μᾶλλον ἐτέρων προσεῖναι αὐτὰ πολεμεῖν ἐπείσθητε, οὐκ ἂν εἰκότως νῦν τοῦ γε ἀδικεῖν αἰτίαν φεροίμην* (2. 60. 5; 7). Both use the words *μᾶλλον ἐτέρων*. But Pericles justifies his claim by his incorruptibility, his public spirit and his political wisdom, Alcibiades by his prowess as a racehorse-owner and choregos. So Thucydides' censure (2. 65. 8) on those who got power *ἐξ οὗ προσηγόντων* clearly applies to him no less than to others. And Alcibiades' argument is related to the judgement of the historian, expressed on three different occasions, that Alcibiades' own interests played a considerable or decisive part in his actions as a statesman;¹ and the preceding narrative (6. 15. 2) heavily stresses his egoistic motives. Again, the condemnation (2. 65. 7) of politicians who acted with a view to 'private gains and private ambitions' fits Alcibiades: *τὰ ἴδια . . . εὐτυχίας χρήμασί τε καὶ δόξῃ ὠφελήσιν* (6. 15. 2) corresponds to *κατὰ τὰς ἰδίας φιλοτιμίας καὶ τὰ ἴδια κέρδη*. Here, then, his claim to disinterested statesmanship is weak.

Let us now consider in more detail his arguments. One line of thought is that while he gains honour and glory, the city gains not only that, but solid benefit from his activities (16. 1; compare and contrast Lys. 19. 63). This rather artificial distinction is intensified by the subsequent antithesis between *νόμῳ μὲν γὰρ τιμῇ . . .* and *φθονεῖται φύσει*, which serves to suggest that Alcibiades' honour comes only from the other Greeks and is less real than the envy he incurs at home.² The assumption that such envy is natural finds support in a proverb to be found in Herodotus: *πολιότης μὲν πολιότηι εὖ πράσσοντι φθονεῖ* (7. 237. 2). The reality as Thucydides has just described it is less bleak: now at least his prestige is to prevail over any suspicions. Furthermore *ὠφελῇ* at the end of the section, governing *ἑαυτὸν* as well as *τὴν πόλιν*, undermines the pretence that he has won for himself only honour and glory. In fact his prestige has helped put him in office now (15. 3); and Nicias has suggested that

¹ Cf. *TAI* 228, quoting 5. 43. 2 and 8. 47. 1.

² Cf. F. Heinemann, *Nomos und Physis* (Basel, 1945), 164–6, who also adduces the Herodotus passage.

he will use his office to cover his private expenses, a suggestion Thucydides confirms in the phrase *χρήμασί τε καὶ δόξῃ ὠφελήσιν* (15. 2). But Alcibiades' words are designed to win him, in one breath, both admiration and sympathy; he both commends his personal triumphs and makes them seem a form of self-sacrifice: and that neatly chops off both heads of Nicias' accusation that he indulges his pride to the city's detriment. The point is reinforced by the phrase *χορηγίας καὶ ἄλλω τω*. Nicias had identified only one area of his expenditure, racing; Thucydides has just spoken of 'racing and other expenses' (15. 3). But Alcibiades, reversing the emphasis of the historian's phrase, mentions a form of public spending and tucks away under the blanket-term *ἄλλω τω* his private extravagances.

But there are in this passage other significant antitheses. *Νόμῳ* and *τιμῇ* contrast with *ἐκ τοῦ δρωμένου* and *δύναμις*, and again with *ἰσχὺς*: this echoes the earlier contraposition of *δόξαν* and *ὠφελίαν*. Further, *φθονεῖται φύσει* contrasts with *ἰσχὺς φαίνεται*. This latter antithesis introduces something of a confusion. For if *φαίνεται* is set against *φύσει*, it must denote an impression as opposed to a fact; and in that case the same force is naturally to be felt in *ὑπονοεῖται*—as in *ἐνόμισαν*, which is picked up by *νόμῳ*—just before. *ὑπονοεῖται* or *φαίνεται* need not carry such overtones; but in a context where appearance and reality are being contrasted, it is hard to exclude them. So Alcibiades' subtle antithesis is blurred because the words for reality (*δύναμις* and *ἰσχὺς*), which are in the first instance set against words for appearance, are then linked to further words for appearance. The confusion is deliberate: the historian is unmasking his character. The real benefit Alcibiades says he has brought the city is at the most a diplomatic success, an increase in its prestige. *καὶ ὑπὲρ δύναμιν* (16. 2) has already made it clear that the appearance of strength his successes gave was partly illusory; and where he is about to recommend an expedition which, as Nicias' second speech makes painfully clear, will test to the full the real strength of Athens, this line of argument is all the more suspect. Sure enough, when he does so, the tell-tale words *δοκεῖ* and *δόξομεν* slip out (17. 1; 18. 4): he expects results from the mere fact that Nicias 'is evidently successful' and that Athens 'will be seen' to sail against Sicily. Likewise, his proposals as a general are centred on diplomacy (6. 48) and Thucydides clearly implies that they were inferior to Lamachus' more vigorous ones (7. 42. 3). Similar implications attach to Alcibiades' account of his past activities in the Peloponnese. In short, he deals above all in semblances; and his attempt to show they are something more only rams home this judgement.

In 16. 4–5 he develops one of the themes of 1–3, his own position within the city. Broadly speaking, the argument is an example of what

Aristotle calls *τόπος ἐκ τῶν πρὸς ἄλληλα* (*Rhet.* 1397 a 23 ff.),¹ i.e. its apparent form is: 'if it is right for the unfortunate to be treated by others as inferior, then it is right for the prosperous to treat others in that way'. But as so often, the rhetorical argument is a veil for sophistry. There are two main oddities in it. One is the shift from *πρὸς οὐδένα . . . ἰσομοιρεῖ* to *μὴ ἴσον εἶναι* (I quote the two phrases in their order of logical priority). First we have a fact: a man in trouble 'does not equally share' his misfortune; from this we move to a judgement: a successful man is right to 'behave unequally'. Similarly, *ἰσομοιρεῖ* refers to a state of affairs, whereas *μὴ ἴσον εἶναι* refers to a deliberate choice of behaviour. The seeming balance between the two phrases, with their common *ἴσος*-element, conceals a logical jump. It is, in fact, a transition familiar in sophistic rhetoric. A close analogy is Darius' argument in Herodotus: 'Oligarchy and democracy both in time, by a natural process, lead to monarchy; hence monarchy is best' (3. 82), or Callicles' in the *Gorgias*: 'Stronger is better by nature'. Further: just as the illusory balance between *πρὸς οὐδένα ἰσομοιρεῖ* and *μὴ ἴσον εἶναι* made the reasoning more specious, so also does a hidden imbalance. *κακῶς πράσσω* corresponds not to *εὖ πράσσω* or an equivalent word, but to *ἐφ' ἑαυτῷ μέγα φρονοῦντα*. The purpose of this is to make it seem that success and pride are synonymous, since the word for pride takes the place of the expected word for success. So the concluding challenge (*ἢ τὰ ἴσα νέμων τὰ ὁμοῖα ἀνταξιούτω*) rings altogether emptily, because by now Alcibiades' attitude has been established as inevitable, and so right.

The ideology of this section is also remarkable. Dover's comment implies that since 'pity had less scope in Greek ethics than in ours', Alcibiades' remarks are relatively inoffensive. But it would be strange if they were not in some way disturbing, however plausible. In fact many accounts and justifications of pity can be found in fifth-century and earlier literature.² Moreover, pity is one of the leading ideals of Attic democracy (especially Plat. *Menex.* 244 e), perhaps most strikingly represented in the Theseus of Euripides' *Suppliants* (especially 763-8) or Sophocles' *Oedipus Coloneus*; and for the orators Athens and her democracy are distinguished from other countries and constitutions by their humanity (*φιλανθρωπία*) and kindness (*πράοτης*).³ So too when Cleon brands pity as one of 'the most dangerous things for an empire' (3. 40. 2), he confirms his own principle that a democracy is incapable of ruling

¹ Cf. L. Radermacher, *Artium Scriptores* (Wien, 1951), C 51; Plat. *Gorg.* 476 a-477 a and Dodds ad loc.

² e.g. Soph. *Ajax* 121 ff.; *Oed. Col.* 565 ff.; Herod. 1. 86. 6. In general, see W. Burkert, *Zum altgriechischen Mitleidsbegriff* (Erlangen, 1955); E. B. Stevens, 'Some Attic common-places of pity', *AJP* 65 (1944), 1-25.

³ e.g. Isocr. 7. 20; Dem. 22. 51 (= 24. 163), 23. 69, 24. 171.

others (3. 37. 1). Rather than characteristically Greek, then, Alcibiades' position is undemocratic, un-Athenian, and indeed merely brutal. It also has uneasy political implications; for this goes ill with the democratic ideal of equality as expressed by Pericles (2. 37. 1).¹ In short, his words illustrate the collapse of traditional ethics and manners which Thucydides carefully traces in his work; the *φύσις*-based morality is part of the epoch. And if such arguments can be offered to the Athenian people in their assembly, that shows not only Alcibiades' audacity and *παρανομία*, but equally how precarious the democracy and its ideals are.

In 16. 5 he resorts to a rhetorical generalization suggesting there are many historical cases to support his claim that successful men are hated in their lifetimes but idealized after death. This argument says about individuals something like what Pericles says about empire: *τὸ δὲ μισεῖσθαι καὶ λυπηροῦς εἶναι ἐν τῷ παρόντι πᾶσι μὲν ὑπῆρξε δὴ ὅσοι ἕτεροι ἐτέρων ἠξίωσαν ἄρχειν, ὅστις δὲ ἐπὶ μεγίστοις τὸ ἐπίφθονον λαμβάνει, ὁρθῶς βουλευέται. μῖσος μὲν γὰρ οὐκ ἐπὶ πολὺ ἀντέχει, ἡ δὲ παραντίκα τε λαμπρότης καὶ ἐς τὸ ἔπειτα δόξα αἰείμνηστος καταλείπεται* (2. 64. 5).² But that only sets in relief Alcibiades' individualism; moreover, *αὔχῃσιν* ('hollow boast') and *προσποίησιν . . . καὶ μὴ οὖσαν*³ suggest to the reader that the glory of Alcibiades' great man is sterile and empty, nothing of the order of the 'eternal fame' Pericles promises his city. And once again, for Alcibiades the city's good proceeds from the individual's, not the other way round, as Pericles would have it (2. 60. 5). This supports the doubts about his motivation which have already arisen from his own words. Alcibiades' *sententia* has also another purpose, to cast aspersions on his opponent; for *τοῖς ὁμοίοις* alludes to Nicias, with whom he is to couple himself as an equal in 17. 1. That envy comes from our peers is a proverb found in Hesiod (*Op.* 28) and a notion recorded by Plato (*Lysis* 215 c-d) and Aristotle (*Rhet.* 1387 b 23 ff.); and it suits Alcibiades' purpose very well. For he can thus implicitly ascribe Nicias' accusations to mere envy without having to make the slur openly and seem partisan.

The account of the Mantinean campaign and its background contains some colourful repainting of the facts as Thucydides recounts them in Book 5 (cf. Dover ad loc.), and 17. 1 which sums up Alcibiades' achievements confirms the reader's doubts. The syntax of the sentence points to its *tendance*. *ταῦτα* is separated by a large gap from the verbs

¹ Cf. Eur. *Supp.* 404 ff.; Plat. *Menex.* 238 d ff.; Dem. 3. 25 f.; Isocr. 7. 32.

² Cf. *TAI* 210. 16. 5 also recalls 2. 45. 1 (envy attacks only the living, not the dead). But for Pericles that notion forms part of an incitement to excellence; for Alcibiades it is an excuse for arrogance.

³ The *prima facie* function of this phrase is to make a contrast with *λυπηροῦς . . . ξυνόντας*: i.e. 'when he really is there in their company . . . an unreal claim of consanguinity'. By forcing the antithesis Alcibiades constructs an argument *a fortiori* (cf. Arist. *Rhet.* 1397 b 12 ff.).

which govern it, *ὠμίλησε* and *ἔπεισε*; this tends to stress the delayed verbs. Alcibiades cannot say 'I did such-and-such', for there is nothing concrete he has done; he can only say 'I dealt with them . . . and persuaded them'. That his success was above all diplomatic is brought out by his use of concepts which belong to rhetorical theory. *πίστιν παρασχέσθαι*, like Latin *fidem facere*, is the orator's aim; Plato (*Gorg.* 454 e) uses the same phrase to denote rhetorical, as opposed to philosophical, persuasion. *ὠμίλησε* recalls Plato's definition of rhetoric as *ἐπιτήδευμα . . . ψυχῆς . . . φύσει δεινῆς προσομιλεῖν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις* (*Gorg.* 463 a; cf. 484 d, 504 e). *λόγοις πρέπουσι* is the rhetorical notion of aptitude, similar to *τὰ δέοντα*; so Isocrates 15. 74, announcing an intention of saying 'what is proper to the present situation' (*πρέπον τῷ παρόντι καιρῷ*). *ὄργη* is what the rhetoricians call, in one sense of that term, *ῥήθος*:¹ i.e. that impression of his character, whether true or feigned, which an orator needs to convey in order to convince his audience.² The implications of Alcibiades' words are confirmed by the narrative of Book 5. He plays a considerable part as a diplomat, but Athens' actual intervention in the Peloponnese is treated as incompetent and inconclusive.³

At this point he turns his attention to the present and to Nicias. His insinuation of envy against his senior was designedly oblique; and so here he mentions him, with an air of generosity, as a colleague and an equal. 'If Nicias bore me a grudge', he seems to say, 'I bear him none.' (He excludes the other general, Lamachus, because no such rhetorical point can be made out of him.) The factors on which Alcibiades bases his hopes are his own 'youth and folly' and Nicias' 'good fortune'. Just as before he engulfed patriotism in self-seeking, so here the other qualities of the Thucydidean statesman, political intelligence and foresight (2. 60. 5; 65. 6), are conspicuously absent.⁴ It is disturbing that *ἡ ἐμὴ νεότης καὶ ἄνοια*, originally a polemical and sarcastic echo of Nicias' accusations, is now seriously presented as something to rely on. For it is one thing to say 'my (so-called) youth and folly achieved x', i.e. 'I, though he claims I am young and foolish, achieved x', it is another to say 'with that youthful folly we shall achieve y'. In the first case the speaker

¹ See esp. Arist. *Rhet.* 1356 a 1 ff.; Isocr. 15. 278 ff.

² Cf. comic fragment quoted at Plut. *Mor.* 33 f, 801c (= Menander fr. 407 l. 7 K) *τρόπος ἐστ' ὁ πείθων τοῦ λέγοντος, οὐ λόγος*; also Arist. *Rhet.* 1356 a 12.

³ Cf. H. D. Westlake, 'Thucydides and the uneasy peace. A study in political incompetence', *CQ* 21 (1971), 321-5.

⁴ *Rhet. ad Alex.* 1425 a 21 includes *τὴν τῶν θεῶν εὐνοίαν ἣν εὐτυχίαν προσαγορεύομεν* among factors conducive to success in war. Contrast Pericles' last speech (esp. 2. 62. 4) which aims to instil an indifference to fortune good or bad. In general on *τύχη* and the Thucydidean statesman, see H. Herter, 'Freiheit und Gebundenheit des Staatsmannes bei Thukydides', *RhM* 93 (1950), 133-53 (= *Thukydides*, hrsg. von H. Herter, *Wege der Forschung* 98 (Darmstadt, 1968), 260-81).

implies that he has virtues, ignored by his opponent, which have brought him success; but in the second (we may recall too that Alcibiades' own words have shown that he achieved nothing solid) we are bound to conclude that he is really recommending youth and folly. The words *ἔως . . . ἔτι ἀκμάζω* support this conclusion, because youth is indeed a transitory thing, a 'peak' from which a man in time declines. Further, the personification *ἡ ἐμὴ νεότης καὶ ἄνοια* emphasized by *αὐτῇ* just afterwards (rather than *ἐμέ*) and the superfluous *μετ' αὐτῆς* tend to identify Alcibiades with those qualities.¹ So his elegant polemic, satisfying perhaps to an audience, must give the reader pause.

The epithet *εὐτυχῆς* attached to Nicias is also worth attention. In Nicias' own mouth a reference to his good fortune would naturally be taken as a form of modesty, a manner of praising himself which would not offend gods or men; in fact Plutarch (*Nic.* 6. 2) says that he used to speak in that way, and Demosthenes does so when in praising his own foresight he ascribes it in part to *εὐτυχία* (5. 11). But in another's mouth it can be a veiled sneer which implies the lack of more substantial merit. At the same time it is a sneer which can masquerade as a compliment and seem to back up Nicias' own modest words *τιμῶμαι ἐκ τοῦ τοιούτου* (9. 2). For if a man can be condemned for his bad luck as Aeschines condemns Demosthenes (3. 157), then he can be praised for his good luck. That seems to be implicit in the words used of Brasidas: *διὰ τὸ εὐτυχεῖν τε καὶ τιμᾶσθαι ἐκ τοῦ πολεμεῖν* (5. 16. 1).² It is illuminating that Demosthenes in reply to his accuser (18. 252; cf. 192 f.; 300) views *δυστυχία* as out of man's control; for Alcibiades is exploiting an ambiguity in Greek notions about *τύχη* which comes out in the fourth-century debate: it belongs to a man casually and/or intrinsically.³ Dover's note is, I suspect, too rigorously logical to do justice to the rhetoric of our passage; for rhetoric is, to a great extent, playing on contradictions or tensions in the audience's thinking. 'Alcibiades' argument', he remarks, 'only makes sense if *εὐτυχία* is treated as an abiding characteristic, and that is irreconcilable with its treatment as a pure chance.' In fact, Alcibiades is also exploiting the notion Demosthenes invokes, that *εὐτυχία* is transitory, because the whole phrase is dependent on *ἔως . . . ἔτι*: he can appeal the more urgently for the campaign by making its success depend on things which do not last, fortune and youth. In the event Nicias' good fortune does not hold, as

¹ Cf. Soph. *Ant.* 95 and Jebb ad loc.; Lys. 32. 23; R. S. Radford, *Personification and the use of abstract subjects in the Attic orators and Thucydides* (Baltimore, 1901), 46 f.; K.-G. ii (2), § 601. 7.

² Cf. c.g. Plat. *Euthyd.* 279 d ff., where *εὐτυχία* and *σοφία* are linked (cf. Arist. *Phys.* 197 b 2-6).

³ Cf. Arist. *EE* 1246 b 37 ff. on the problem.

he himself brings out, with pathetic irony, in his last speech (7. 77. 2). And whereas Pericles steadies the city by calmly envisaging unexpected misfortune (1. 140. 1; 2. 64. 1–2) and even the end of the empire (2. 64. 3), Alcibiades, by refusing to do so, puts her at fortune's mercy: this applies even where it is her security he claims to be considering (see below on 18. 1–3).

He now turns to policy. 17. 2–6 (τὰ ἐκεῖ) try to show that Sicily is not a power to be feared. This does not correspond closely to anything in Nicias' first speech, though 11. 1–2 are in a sense τὰ ἐκεῖ, but his second is largely devoted to this point. Alcibiades tries to divert attention from the risks of the campaign and of success in it to the general possibility—and later necessity—of conquest.

His opening words (17. 2: ὄχλους . . . ἐπιδοχάς) allude to the transplantations of population by Sicilian tyrants early in the fifth century; the case of Leontini, whose δυνάτοί the Syracusans incorporated in 423 BC expelling the rest of the people, justifies to some degree his treating this as a contemporary phenomenon, though the basis for the generalization is not very large. But what is more dubious is the conclusion he draws from it, that the Sicilians will lack patriotism. There is indeed faction in Syracuse, as is to emerge in the debate Thucydides recounts (6. 32–41); and there are traitors there as late as summer 413 (7. 48. 2), who, as Dover suggests, may be some of the wealthy Leontinians. But Alcibiades ignores a point which both Nicias and Hermocrates make and is confirmed in the narrative,¹ that nothing unites like a common enemy. The counterpart—perhaps indeed the basis—of his view of Syracuse is Athens' conventional boast of autochthony² and the picture of its democracy as a harmonious blend of classes,³ both of which occur in the Funeral Speech (2. 36. 1; 37. 1) and in democratic oratory in general; Alcibiades' words are seductive to his audience because he implicitly holds up to them, by contrast with Sicilian political life, an ideal image of their own. But subsequent events show up far more disunity in Athens, the city and its forces, than in Syracuse. Nicias later describes the dissolution of the Athenian troops (7. 13. 2), and it comes about largely because they are, to borrow Alcibiades' phrase, an ὄχλος ἑξυμμεικτος, a mixture of classes and peoples who have not the same interest in victory as their opponents (cf. 6. 69. 3). Thucydides himself stresses the internal dissension in dealing with the Hermocopid affair and in 2. 65 where he sees it as the principal cause of Athens' defeat.

Now in his account of the Sicilian politicians (17. 3: ὅτι δὲ ἕκαστος

¹ Cf. *TAI* 206; also 6. 79. 3; 7. 15. 1.

² e.g. Eur. *Heraclea* 69; Lys. 2. 17; Plat. *Menex.* 237 b.

³ Cf. Lys. 2. 18; Dem. 20. 110. Both themes are combined in Plat. *Menex.* 238 c–239 a.

. . . ταῦτα ἐτοιμάζεται) Alcibiades means to make a complete contrast to himself: the Sicilians are self-interested hoarders, he is a public-spirited spender (16. 3); and both points are arguments for the policy he is now advocating. But as Nicias observes (20. 4), the Syracusans have their own corn and many hoplites: this for a start falsifies Alcibiades' assertion that they do not invest in arms or farm-buildings. What is more, his words are painfully applicable to himself. The syntax of the sentence, whose accumulation of participles delays the main verb, places heavy stress on ἐς ἄλλην γῆν οἰκήσειν. The speaker means that phrase to echo τῶν πολιτῶν τὰς μεταβολάς above: the Sicilians' whole behaviour, he implies, is determined by the continual threat of exile. But at the same time these words describe what Alcibiades himself is to do in the end, make for Sparta; and he will then be, if he was not before, a στασιάζων. Further, he is now the persuasive orator and he is also suspected of wanting the generalship for profit, a charge Thucydides allows to stick. And in general both Alcibiades and Athenian politicians are the ones whose self-seeking Thucydides sets in relief (2. 65) and their behaviour is for him the main cause of the expedition's failure. The next sentence (τάχυν δ' αὖν . . . ὥσπερ πυνθανόμεθα) has a corresponding irony; for it is the Athenian people who are about to succumb to 'pleasing words'. The desire which seizes them (6. 24. 3) is correlative to the ἡδονή of Alcibiades' proposals;¹ he is clearly one of those who 'speak sweetly' (2. 65. 8: πρὸς ἡδονήν τι λέγειν) to give themselves an authority they would otherwise lack. It is true that by contrast with the Sicilians as he paints them, Alcibiades' persuasiveness creates a kind of unity among the people, young and old and soldiers all alike; but it is a unity which, as Thucydides makes clear, rests on a delusion. It is true too that the Syracusan debate reveals division in the city; and Athenagoras' speech in its blind confidence and championship of democratic unity corresponds to Alcibiades'. But he does not, unlike Alcibiades, carry the day; and the Syracusan generals have begun in time to take the necessary action (6. 41). So despite the conflicts among the Syracusans, they are less deceived than the Athenians; nor do those conflicts cripple them.

καὶ μὴν οὐδ' . . . ὠπλίσθη (17. 5), which clearly excepts Athens from the charge of exaggerating her strength, recalls again a Periclean dictum: μόνη γὰρ τῶν νῦν ἀκοῆς κρείσσω ἐς πείραν ἔρχεται (2. 41. 3); and in 5. 68. 2 Thucydides himself alludes to men's habit of overstating their numbers in battle. But the historian, in saying this, is simply suspending judgement; and Pericles was far from basing a policy on his assertion—quite the reverse, in fact, since his strategy was defensive. Alcibiades, however, boldly extends what may or may not have proved true of

¹ Cf. the 'Delian epigram': πάντων δ' ἡδιστον ὧν τις ἐρᾷ τὸ τυχεῖν (Arist. *Eth. Eud.* 1214 a 5; cf. *Eth. Nic.* 1099 a 25; *Theognis* 256).

Greece to Sicily, but it is plain that he does so in ignorance of the enemy's real numbers. The reader's doubts are reinforced when he comes to Nicias' counter-assertions (20. 4); but Alcibiades ingeniously appeals to the spirit of conquest, based on ignorance, which Thucydides points to at the very beginning of Book 6. The final argument in this section, that many Sikeli tribes will join Athens, does come true (6. 88. 4; 103. 2) and shows, like 17. 4 (*ὥσπερ πυνθανόμεθα*), that the speaker at least has some information. But the whole line of thought is unsatisfactory for two reasons: it uses some scraps of knowledge to make rash generalizations and predictions about Sicilian weakness; and it implies an unreal rosy vision of Athens by contrast with her enemy-to-be. These very defects are also what commend it to the audience: it is clearly just what they want to hear.

17. 6-8 now turn to the security of Athens (*τὰ ἐνθάδε*), replying to the arguments of chapter 10; 17. 7 (*πολεμίους ὑπολείποντας*) echoes 10. 1 (*πολεμίους πολλούς . . . ὑπολείποντας*). The invocation of the ancestors is a stock-in-trade of Attic rhetoric,¹ which in Thucydides is associated with Pericles (1. 144. 4; 2. 36. 1 ff.; 2. 62. 3); Pericles too uses them as examples of strenuous boldness. Also Periclean themes are the reliance on naval superiority (1. 141. 3-4) and the disregard for the invasion of Attica (1. 143. 3-5; 2. 62. 2-3). But Alcibiades' argument is shaky. Partly because it distorts the facts of the past (see Dover ad loc.); but worse than this is that Athens risks facing two large wars at once. Thucydides shows the gravity of this double war in 7. 28. 3 (cf. 6. 10. 1; 34. 3; 36. 4); and his narrative follows carefully the steps by which Athens is brought to this predicament (6. 93. 2; 105). It is in fact Alcibiades who makes it possible by proposing to the Spartans that they fortify Decelea and reinforce Syracuse. This brings out the unscrupulous one-sidedness of his argument here. And Pericles' reliance on the navy was part of a cautious and relatively economical strategy: Thucydides makes the contrast in the narrative which follows (6. 31. 2) by recalling the naval activities of 430 BC, which employed as many ships, but for a 'short voyage' with 'modest equipment'. So too Pericles tones down his praise of boldness by also commending calculation,² the quality most evident in his strategy. But Alcibiades' use of these themes from Periclean oratory is, in a sense, fatally logical. 'If our navy is so powerful, and if we have nothing serious to fear at home,' he says in effect, 'let us exploit that power and conquer abroad: if our ancestors won the empire by taking risks, and if they are

¹ Cf. K. Jost, *Das Beispiel und Vorbild der Vorfahren bei den attischen Rednern* (Paderborn, 1936). Here it serves also to reverse Nicias' appeal to the older men: cf. D. P. Tompkins, 'Stylistic characterization in Thucydides. Nicias and Alcibiades', *YCLS* 22 (1972), 210 ff.; cf. Radermacher, op. cit. C 50, on the argument from past to future.

² Cf. 1. 144. 4; 2. 40. 3; 43. 1; 62. 5.

an example to us, then we too should take risks.' This logic makes his words very persuasive; it also reveals how difficult was the position of Pericles or anyone who followed his defensive policies. For the themes of his oratory, attractive because they appeal to Athens' glorious traditions (cf. Plat. *Gorg.* 513 b-c; Arist. *Rhet.* 1365 b 21 ff.), lead all too easily to a strategy quite opposed to his.

The next section of the speech (18. 1) slips in a moral argument, the appeal to an oath: 'we must hold to our pact with our allies since we swore it'; it then goes on to a prudential argument: 'it will favour the security of our empire and ourselves'. It is all to the good for an orator if he can invoke both justice and expediency; this for example is what Cleon does in the Mytilenean Debate. But there is a snag here, as there, in this combination of arguments. The moral point provokes the objection Nicias made: 'they have not helped us, so why should we help them?' (13. 2). To which Alcibiades retorts: 'our purpose in making the alliance was to protect ourselves'. But this shows that the original moral argument was quite hollow; and it confirms the fact Thucydides repeatedly brings out, that the real aim of Athens' intervention in Sicily was conquest.¹ It also shows, like many other passages in Thucydides, the fraudulence of moral arguments in politics. At the same time, Alcibiades can appear to have proved in two distinct ways that Athens must take action and cast a brief gleam of righteousness on his audience's ambitions.

What follows (18. 1-2: *οὐ γὰρ ἴνα . . . προκαταλαμβάνει*) reverses Nicias' argument in 10. 1 and develops the line of 17. 6-8. Both speakers discuss the supposed threat from Syracuse; and both are concerned with Athens' safety. Alcibiades' words seem the more persuasive because he accepts the leading idea of his opponent, the need for security, but shows that it leads to different conclusions.² A question the reader may well ask is: 'How much of a threat was Syracuse to Athens?' The belief that it was may rest partly on the notion that Ionians and Dorians are natural enemies, which finds expression in the mouths of both Hermocrates and Euphemus (6. 80. 3; 82. 2); but both are exploiting the idea to make their own case, and Thucydides is at pains to point out that the allies of the two sides, Syracuse and Athens, were by no means all of the same race (7. 57-59. 1). And clearly rivalry between the races would not alone be a sufficient motive for making war. Nor is there any suggestion that Athens' activities in Sicily in 427-4 B.C. might move them to retaliate; rather, 'the Peloponnesians, after losing sixty ships at Pylos (4. 16. 3 and 23. 1), could no longer hope to challenge the Athenians at sea even

¹ Cf. *TAI* 200 n. 1.

² On this technique ('rétorsion') see J. de Romilly, *Histoire et raison chez Thucydide* (Paris, 1956), 202 ff.; cf. Hermogenes, p. 50. 20 ff. (Rabe) on ἀναστροφή.

if they were to receive substantial assistance from the west'.¹ All the passages which refer to a Syracusan threat come from speeches which have an interest in presupposing it;² and Nicias rejects the idea (11. 2). What emerges then from Alcibiades' reasoning is something about Athens' empire—or his view of it—not something about Syracuse's intentions. And in fact his thoughts in 18. 2 are devoted to empire and its consequences. Once again they recall, but with a difference, Pericles. When Alcibiades says that Athens won her empire by coming to others' rescue and invokes Athens' *ἐπιτηδεύματα*, that echoes the Funeral Speech (2. 36. 4; 40. 1; cf. 2. 61. 4; 64. 2). He also echoes Pericles' last speech, when he brings to mind, as he did before, how Athens won her empire (cf. 2. 62. 3), when he warns against 'letting go' of any of her subjects because an imperial power must rule or be ruled (cf. 2. 63. 1–2), and when he attacks the 'quiet life' (*τὸ ἥσυχον*; cf. 2. 63. 2–3).³ Again, Alcibiades' strategy is in sharp contrast to Pericles'; but again, it grows easily out of the Periclean dicta. *τὸ ἥσυχον* is applied not only to persons within the city, but to the policy of the whole city; it can thus seem necessary for the Athenians not merely to share their commitment to the empire as it stands, but constantly to enlarge it. So too the empire is thought to be threatened not only by its subjects, but by anyone less powerful than itself. This principle extends beyond the allied cities what both the Mytileneans (3. 12. 3) and Cleon (3. 37. 2) say only of them; and it requires Athens not merely to rule firmly or even harshly, but to attack, and as far away as Sicily. Thus *ἐπιβουλεύειν* becomes not, as for Cleon, what Athens' allies do, but what she herself must do. Hence when Alcibiades assumes that Syracuse is a threat to Athens, he is not arguing from any specific observations about the western city but propounding the logic of imperialism as he sees it. The flaw in such reasoning, quite apart from its indifference to facts, is clear. Even assuming that Athens conquer Sicily, that means only that she antagonizes still more peoples and puts herself at still greater risk: thus Nicias has just warned against the consequences of victory (11. 1; cf. 6. 86. 3), as Pericles had against enlarging the empire (1. 144. 1; 2. 65. 7). And whereas Pericles had pointed out that she could, if she wished, extend her rule of the seas (2. 62. 2), Alcibiades urges that she has no choice but to do what his predecessor rejected, extend her empire. So to recall Athens' need for security, so far from protecting her, endangers her: the fear which governs the behaviour of empires (1. 76. 2; 5. 97; 6. 83. 4) is in the end

¹ H. D. Westlake, *Essays on the Greek Historians and Greek History* (Manchester, 1969), 115f. (= *Historia* 9 (1960), 395f.).

² See Westlake, *op. cit.* 114f.

³ On Periclean echoes in Alcibiades' speech, see A. W. Gomme, *More Essays in Greek History and Literature* (Oxford, 1962), 108f. (= *JHS* 71 (1951), 78f.) and *TAI* 210–12.

self-defeating. At the same time Alcibiades' reasoning is persuasive not only because he again appeals to the city's traditions and character in exalting her *πολυπραγμοσύνη*, but because he makes aggression seem no less than a necessity for the imperial power.¹ This double line of argument is subtly introduced when, again echoing Pericles (2. 64. 5), he links 'us' with 'all other empires'. His law has hardly the same claim to validity as Pericles': no one would deny that all empires are to some degree hated, but to say that they were all acquired by 'helping others' is no more than a projection from the ideal history of Athens. But it strengthens his argument by presenting his policy as a universal imperative, not merely as typically Athenian.

The structure of this sentence is complex. When we meet *πάντες* in the conditional clause we naturally take it after what precedes to mean 'all imperial powers'; but in the light of what follows it means 'everyone in the city'. This shift is accompanied by two others. From a generalization about past empires, and the Athenian empire in the past, we move to a hypothesis about the present Athenian empire in the *ἐπεὶ*-clause (*βραχὺ ἂν τι . . . κινδυνεύοιμεν*); and from a third person plural in the protasis of the conditional we move to a first person plural in the apodosis. In short, the protasis points forwards and backwards at the same time. All this has a distinct purpose, which emendation would destroy. The tendency of the syntax is to link 'us' and 'them' ('they' meaning 'other empires') and 'us in the past' with 'us in the present', by obscuring the transition from one to the other. This serves to conceal from the hearer one of the cruces in Alcibiades' argument from 17. 7 onwards: that the policies for gaining an empire need not be the same as the policies for maintaining it. At the same time it tends to confuse what 'we, like all other empires and ourselves in the past', must do with what 'we all in the city' must do: thus the appeal to history, with its implication that Athens must enlarge her conquest, is identified with the democratic ideal of unity. There was the same force, as we just saw, in the 'Periclean' attack on *τὸ ἥσυχον*. Once again, to observe the rhetorical subtleties is to question the thought they insinuate.

At 18. 4 begins the peroration which sums up and intensifies Alcibiades' previous words. It culminates in a cluster of *sententiae* which neatly illustrates Quintilian's observation: 'Quid quod interim quae per se leuia sunt et infirma, turba ualent, ideoque congerenda sunt potius, et uelut eruptione pugnandum?' (4. 5. 7).² His brief remarks about the expedition are light-headedly confident; the possibility of total defeat—what in fact happens—is never considered. He also chooses to forget

¹ In general compare the prescriptions of Hermogenes, p. 144. 15–155. 17 Rabe (also p. 133. 4–14).

² Cf. Tompkins, *op. cit.* 204–14, on Alcibiades' use of parataxis.

that in the Sicilian campaign of 427-4 BC there was 'little trace of the marked superiority in seamanship that Athens expected to enjoy over all the Greeks'.¹ But he now turns swiftly away from military details and against Nicias.

Openly to criticize Nicias might be risky, because he could seem to be pursuing a private squabble rather than the public good. But he side-steps this danger by representing his opponent's words as fostering dissension in the city and betraying its principle of tireless action.² So he himself appears once again as the spokesman of the whole city, rather than of its youth alone. He achieves this above all because he has given voice, like Pericles, to Athenian ideals as Nicias has quite failed to do. So too here his claim to be the leader of the united people is immediately followed by yet another appeal to the forefathers, which again echoes Pericles (I. 144. 4). (*ἅμα νέοι γεραῖτέροις βουλευόντες* is Alcibiades' own contribution, tailored to the needs of the present argument.) As in 18. 2 one element in Alcibiades' reasoning is its assimilation of past and present; and that strengthens its other main element, the call for unity.

A curious feature in the expression of this thought is the shift from a distinction between youth and age to a distinction between *τὸ φαῦλον*, *τὸ μέσον*, and *τὸ πάνν ἀκριβές*. How are the two related? *τὸ πάνν ἀκριβές* is a quality of old age, 'precision'; as Aristotle puts it (*Rhet.* 1390 a 15), *καὶ μᾶλλον ζῶσι κατὰ λογισμόν ἢ κατὰ τὸ ἦθος*. By contrast with *τὸ πάνν ἀκριβές*, *τὸ φαῦλον* naturally means 'casual, thoughtless' and refers to the easy-going ways of the young. So whereas Nicias has seen a black-and-white contrast between 'desire' and 'forethought' (13. 1), Alcibiades resolves that distinction into two apparent extremes, 'casualness' and 'thorough-going precision', with a mean between them and suggests that a blend of all three will make the best recipe. This thought is a comforting compromise; but it hardly bears examination. The meaning of *τὸ πάνν ἀκριβές* is hard to pin down and is no doubt meant to be so. It might be a seemingly generous concession to Nicias (cf. Classen-Steup ad loc.), i.e. it might be saying that older men indeed have the valuable quality of 'precision', but that that needs to be mixed with other qualities. In that case we might justly recall the story Bertrand Russell³ tells against Aristotle's doctrine of the mean: 'There was once a mayor who had adopted Aristotle's doctrine; at the end of his turn of office he made a speech saying that he had endeavoured to steer the narrow line between partiality and impartiality.' For *τὸ πάνν ἀκριβές* corresponds

¹ Westlake, op. cit. 116.

² *τῶν λόγων* serves to imply that Nicias is himself a suitable general (cf. 17.1); it is only his words which encourage inactivity and disunity (similarly Hermogenes, p. 349. 24 ff. Rabe).

³ *History of Western Philosophy* (London, 1946), 196.

to Nicias' word, *πρόνοια*; therefore it is something good and should not be combined with *τὸ φαῦλον* which is 'simply bad'. At the same time, *τὸ πάνν ἀκριβές* could be an attempt to discredit Nicias' *πρόνοια*; it would then carry the unfavourable connotation of 'pedantry'¹ and would genuinely supply an opposite extreme to *τὸ φαῦλον*. There is a further attempt to discredit the old and their characteristics just below in the word *ἐγγηράσσεσθαι*; for in that context age is associated with weakness and decline, and this strengthens Alcibiades' covert preference for youth.² But even then the result of the imagined compromise must still be *πρόνοια*, thinking which avoids both fussiness and vagueness. In either case—and no doubt Alcibiades is trying to have his cake and eat it, to be polemical and seem magnanimous—he fails to show his opponent wrong, and the inclusion of *τὸ φαῦλον* is as suspect as his praise of 'youth and folly' in 17. 1. But his argument is seductive, as recommendations of a middle way commonly are. It also has another attraction, that it proposes to blend not only different qualities, but divergent social groups; for *τὸ φαῦλον*, *τὸ μέσον*, and *τὸ πάνν ἀκριβές*, like *νεότης* and *γῆρας*, are also categories of people. It thus reinforces his repeated claim to stand for national unity.

Alcibiades now renews his warnings against inactivity. He strengthens them by combining them with fresh arguments. The first is Athens' need to refresh and improve her skills in war. The need to keep the navy in practice is a motive which Thucydides records for Athens' reinforcing the earlier Sicilian expedition (3. 115. 4) and a fact which Pericles too sees (1. 142. 9),³ but that does not—nor did it for Pericles—require a campaign like this one. Alcibiades' words conflate two ideas: that a skill, to be mastered, must be constantly practised or developed and that an empire, to be controlled, must be constantly expanded (cf. 18. 2-3); so the second is apparently supported by the first. In the event the Syracusans reveal themselves more ingenious and adaptable sailors than their adversaries. It is they who make the technical innovations which bring victory in the narrow waters of the harbour (7. 36)⁴ and lead to Athens' final defeat.

The second argument (18. 7) harks back to 17. 7; 18. 2-3; 18. 6: once again a rash strategy is paradoxically praised as the safest. The appeal to 'customs and laws' speciously supports this point, because maintaining the Athenian 'way of life' at home is equated with aggression in war. Further, *νόμοις* intensifies *ἡθεσι* and echoes 6. 14 (*λύειν τοὺς νόμους*): Alcibiades' parting shaft is to suggest that his opponent

¹ Cf. Dodds on Plat. *Gorg.* 487 c 6.

² Cf. Tompkins, op. cit. 212.

³ Cf., more generally, 1. 18. 3.

⁴ 'Prepared' by 6. 72, 7. 21; echoed at 7. 56. 3. See further Kitto, *Poesis* (Berkeley 1966), 303 ff., and see p. 143 below.

lacks respect for the laws (his disingenuousness in this is revealed by 6. 89. 6). Darius' victorious speech in Herodotus 3. 82 ends in the same way.

In conclusion I attempt a broad, but not comprehensive, characterization of Alcibiades' reasoning.

A distinction which he exploits widely is that between appearance and reality. His policy is one of tireless action, τὸ ἀμύνεσθαι οὐ λόγῳ ἀλλ' ἔργῳ; and he tries to show that now and in the past his aim is to increase the city's strength. But his past achievements belong to the realm of impressions, and his present policy is based on more impressions: above all an ideal image of Athens, together with a distorted view of Sicily and a faith in the impolitic qualities of youth and fortune. We may contrast Pericles' acute and cautious assessment of the Peloponnesians' weakness and the Athenians' strength (1. 141. 2-143).

Alcibiades seeks, like Pericles, to represent the ideals of democracy, above all those of unity and equality. But these conflict with his own behaviour, which is revealed as egoistic, because as a politician he seeks his own advantage and as a private citizen he indulges his own pride; and this egoism leads indeed to catastrophe for Athens when he defects to Sparta. Pericles enjoyed a supremacy in the city which made its democracy little more than a name (2. 65. 9); but it was based on a public-spirited statesmanship Alcibiades did not show.

These are contradictions which Alcibiades' speech lets slip and which set him in contrast with Pericles. But perhaps the most striking feature of his reasoning is a kind of logic and a kind of homage he pays to his predecessor. Pericles' strategy is in contrast with his ideals;¹ and so as an orator he is marked by his ability to do two contrary things: ὁπότε γοῦν αἰσθοιτό τι αὐτοὺς παρὰ καιρὸν ὑβρεῖ θαρσοῦντας, λέγων κατέπλησεν ἐπὶ τὸ φοβεῖσθαι, καὶ δεδιότας αὐτὸν ἀλόγως ἀντικαθίστη πάλιν ἐς τὸ θαρσεῖν (2. 65. 9).² His skill as an orator lies in balancing caution against confidence, defensive and even passive policies against imperialist ideals. So he can present those policies as a demonstration of the city's power and an act of heroism in the manner of the generation that won the empire (1. 143-4; 2. 63-4). Nicias retains of Pericles only the caution; he fails to stand for the democratic empire. But Alcibiades' rhetoric reduces the tension in Pericles' thinking to one idea: conquest. Thus both the pride in Athenian manners and traditions and the warnings

¹ Cf. Gomme on 2. 65. 5 and 7.

² The power to arouse and calm or reverse emotions belongs to the rhetorical art: cf. Plat. *Phaedr.* 267 c; Cic. *Orat.* 131 and Kroll ad loc. Characteristic of Pericles is that he uses this power not as forensic virtuoso but as a public-spirited statesman, and to induce in his audience a *rational* fear or confidence.

or calculations of the older man find a dangerous harmony in his successor's words. This reflects not only on Alcibiades and the Athens of his time, but on Pericles; for it reveals the greatness, but also the precariousness, of his achievement as a politician and an orator and the easy progress of empire to the inevitable end he had foreseen and delayed.¹

¹ This paper was completed when I read Stahl in *The Speeches in Thucydides* (ed. Stadter, 1973), 60 ff., on Thuc. 6. 16-18, an illuminating essay with which I am happy to find myself in agreement. I wish also to thank Professor A. Andrewes and Dr D. C. Innes for helpful comments on an earlier draft.



Colin Macleod with his nephew, Australia, November 1981

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