

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 (*elpisas*) 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 (*kai . . . horōn*) 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 [= *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 Theoretikos." Thucydides' political viewpoint is far from transparent. The loci classici are 2.65 (praise of Pericles, see below, 2.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. De Romilly, *Thucydides*, 350–51, and "Alcibiade," 93–105: Thucydides sought to defend a principled democracy against the oligarchs of 404 and was an advocate of a "mixed constitution." Grene, *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: 335–39: 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. Connor, *Thucydides*, 237–42 (with review of literature): Thucydides was neither a simple antidemocrat nor a proponent of oligarchy. Pope, "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.² 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 (*heurein*) 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 tekmēriōn*) 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 (*abasanistōs*).³ His case in point is the belief, held by "the majority (*to plēthos*) 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 Athe-

tributing 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 now seems very sterile, see Dover in *HCT* 5: 361–444; Rawlings, *Structure*, 250–54; Hornblower, *Commentary*, 2: 15–16, 119–22.

² On the opening sentence, and Thucydides' willful creation of the Peloponnesian War as an object of analysis accessible only through the writer's text, see Loraux, "Thucydide a écrit la guerre"; with Edmunds, "Thucydides in the Act"; Crane, *Blinded Eye*, 28–29.

³ The term *abasanistōs* 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 *basanos*: 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 (ergo 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."⁴ The word used by Thucydides for the ignorant Athenians who supposed Hipparchus to have been tyrant—*plēthos*—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.⁵

The general (and specifically popular Athenian) unwillingness to test the truth is, Thucydides has implied, 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 *lochos*." Thucydides sums up: "Such is the degree of carelessness among the many (*hoi polloi*) in the search for truth (*alētheia*) 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 Athenian masses, who are implied by the sociologically loaded term *hoi polloi*. 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

⁴ Thucydides returns 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 tyranny is directly associated by Thucydides with the demotic hysteria over the affair of the Herms (6.60.1; below, 2.E.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. Euben ("Battle," 361) argues that Thucydides' Tyrannicide story "reveals human beings as creators of meaning in the context of political struggle."

⁵ *Plēthos* as a term for the mass of ordinary citizens: Ruzé, "Plethos," 259–63. Note that *plēthos* could, in the mid-fifth century, be used in official documents as a synonym for *dēmos*: ML 40 lines 22–23 (= IG I³ 14: Erythrai decree).

the Athenian masses: to *plēthos* and *hoi polloi*. 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.⁶

Having chastised 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 (*ek epiphanestaton sēmeiōn*). In any event, Thucydides' compressed ancient history is, he says, more reliable than the accounts of either the poets or the writers of prose (*logographoi*)—I take the latter term as potentially including other historians (especially Herodotus) and writers of prose essays like Ps.-Xenophon, but also certain of Athens' public orators.⁷ 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 (*tēi akroasei*) than with hewing close to the truth. The events the *logographoi* relate cannot be checked (*anexelenkta*) because they are too distant in time, and indeed, they "have won their way into the realm of the fabulous" (*epi to muthōdes eknenikēkota*). This last phrase, along with the charge that poets overinflate the greatness of their own subjects, hints at a contest; this becomes explicit when Thucydides refuses to engage in the

⁶ Edmunds ("Thucydides in the Act," 846–47) points out the criticism of democracy implicit in 1.20.1–3 and notes (849) that "the authority of Thucydides rests on the assumption that his readership shares [his] aristocratic political ideology." Criticism aimed at Herodotus: Hornblower, *Commentary*, ad loc. Thucydides' determination to distance himself from Herodotus and other fifth-century writers of histories (on whom, see Fowler, "Herodotus"): Crane, *Blinded Eye*, 1–9 and passim; Bowie, "Beginnings," 146–47. Although I do not treat Herodotus as a member of the Athenian critical community, his text has much to say on a subject Thucydides intended to make his own: the historical relationship between Athenian foreign-policy success and democracy; see, recently, Georges, *Barbarian Asia*, 115–206, and Metcalfe, "Herodotus and Athens," each arguing that Herodotus is systematically critical of democracy.

⁷ *Logographos* is not used again in Thucydides' text, but I see no reason to suppose that it meant something to Thucydides that was radically different from what it meant to fourth-century philosophers and orators. Plato (*Phdr.* 257c) claims that the orator Lysias was accused by an Athenian politician of being a *logographos*; here the term clearly means speechwriter. It had the same meaning when used by the Attic orators: Lavency, *Aspects*; Yunis, *Taming*, 175 n. 3. Connor (*Thucydides*, 28) translates *logographoi* as "speechwriters" in the Thucydides passage and notes Thucydides' concern with rhetoric. As Aristotle points out (*Rhet.* 1418a21–29), speeches presented in Assembly deal with the affairs of the future, and speeches were the basis of decision-making in the democracy. Speeches (including occasional Assembly speeches) were, by the end of the fifth century, certainly being written down by Gorgias, Isocrates, Lysias, and Andocides. Carlidge ("Fowl Play," 49–50) suggests that Antiphon was the first Athenian *logographos* to publish speeches, probably in the 420s. The simplistic depiction of history in Athenian Assembly debates: Thomas, *Oral Tradition*, 197–206. On Thucydides' crowd-pleasing poets (including Homer and Simonides, who wrote a narrative elegy commemorating the battle of Plataea), see C. J. Mackie, "Homer and Thucydides," esp. 112–13; Boedeker, "Simonides." Cole (*Origins*, 62–63), argues (on the basis of Aristophanes' *Frogs*) that criticism of poets as implausible and poor educators was a sophistic commonplace. Nagy (*Pindar's Homer*, 215–338) regards Herodotus as an example of a prose writer whose text was produced in self-conscious competition with the song-master (*aïodos*).

"contest (*agōnisma*) 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.⁸

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 (*kaiper tōn anthrōpōn*) 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 naive wonderment at the glories of the distant past—this war will demonstrate to anyone who is willing to pay attention to the facts themselves (*ho polemos houtos . . . ap' autōn tōn ergōn skopousi dēlōsei*) 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*).⁹ 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.¹⁰

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 hotly debated among modern scholars: "And as to the things expressed in speech (*logos*)," 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 (*edokoun emoi*) to be especially necessary to say in regard to the general circumstances involved

⁸ Cf. Flory, "Meaning," 200–201; Hornblower, *Commentary*, 2: 26–27.

⁹ See esp. 1.22.2: *ta erga tōn prachthentōn*. *Ergon* as "fact": Parry, "Logos," 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 *logos/ergon* antithesis." As Parry points out (loc. cit.), the two meanings of *ergon* as fact and as deed are quite close and are often conjoined 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.

¹⁰ Cf. 1.1.1, with its implied connection and distinction between observation and interpretation. Thucydides' "disappearance" into his text: Loraux, "Thucydide a écrit la guerre." Connor (*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.n.114.

in each case,¹¹ 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 (*oud' hōs emoi edokei*); 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 (*epexelthōn*) each one as vigorously as possible in regard to accuracy (*akribeia*).¹² (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.¹³

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 collec-

¹¹ 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.

¹² 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 *epexelthōn* should be taken with both the reports of others and what Thucydides personally saw, or only with the reports of others. I take it with both because it seems logically entailed by "not just as seemed right to myself." There is (as long recognized: opp. 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 (alone) or his informants be completely trusted. But in the latter case, *akribeia* is implicitly considered possible; in the former, it is said to be *chalepon*. 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 *akribeia* if accounts are put to the test. *Logoi* probably cannot be known with *akribeia*, 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); Yunis, *Taming*, 61–66 (the speeches were free inventions by Thucydides himself) Flory, "Thucydides' Hypotheses"; Hornblower, *Commentary*, ad loc. Cogan (*Human Thing*, esp. x–xiv) seems to miss the force of the antithesis and claims that the speeches were accurately reported by Thucydides. Luschkat, "Thukyides," 1167–79, surveys earlier literature.

¹³ The *logos/ergon* 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, "Logos," remains seminal on the antithesis and Thucydides' use of it; cf. Swain, "Thucydides 1.22.1," esp. 35–36.

tives) who attempt to impose their own speech-dependent meanings on brute facts come to bad ends. This pattern in the text is significant from the perspective of reading Thucydides as a critic of democracy: Most Athenians, like other Hellenes, as Thucydides has explained, believe silly things about their own past and about the institutional practices of their opponents. They came to believe these errors through listening to pleasing poetry and equally pleasing accounts of *logographoi*; poetry and *logoi* are full of mistakes because they are composed by contestants who seek to win the applause of an uncritical and pleasure-seeking audience. Erroneous beliefs will lead to making practical errors in the real world if they are employed in decision-making; they will lead to potentially disastrous policy mistakes when used as the basis for national policy. In democratic Athens, it was the ordinary people, sitting in public Assembly, who made policy decisions. Since they had no special education or knowledge, they made these decisions on the basis of the information they picked up from the general culture (generically from "poetry") and from what they heard from speakers in the Assembly (*logoi*). If the decision-making Assemblymen learn wrong things about the past from their culture and in the speeches they hear, how is it possible for them consistently to decide rightly in regard to the future? Thucydides' narrative suggests that under these conditions, a consistent national policy over the long term was simply not possible. If it could be sustained by the empirical evidence of an objective historical narrative (which is what Thucydides' text is often taken to be), this chain of reasoning would be a devastating criticism of Athenian democracy.¹⁴

The *logos/ergon* contrast is underlined by an implied contrast in the passages cited above: in the historiographical approach that "seemed right" to Thucydides in regard to *logoi* and "did not seem right" to him in regard to *erga*. The comment "not just as appeared right to me" (*oud' hōs emoi edokei*) in the last passage (on how to report *erga*) contrasts not only with the "as seemed right to me" (*edokoun emoi*) of the previous sentence (on the construction of *logoi*), but also with a string of similar *edokei moi* constructions earlier in the text. Thucydides' earlier uses of *edokei moi* and the like were in reference to the historian's inferences about ancient history, which, as we have seen, is not regarded by him as fully and accurately recoverable. Thus, through the phrase

¹⁴ True historical objectivity, if defined as the absence of perspective, the "view from nowhere," is of course simply impossible; see, for example, Novick, *Noble Dream*. 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 attempt) 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 Rankean standards (cf. below, 2.n.19). Objectivity is, I believe, a rhetorical stance for Thucydides, one that offered him a needed point d'appui for his critical project; cf. White, *Metahistory*, with Kramer, "Literature," 104–5, on modern historians' employment of the "trope of irony," which situates the historian in a realm of realism denied the historical actors he or she studies. Hornblower (*Thucydides*, 155–90) points out Thucydides' authorial self-certainty and the rarity of this stance in ancient historiography.

"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.¹⁵ As we have seen (1.B.2), the enactment formula of the Athenian Assembly was "It appeared right to the Assembly that . . ." (*edoxe tōi dēmoi* . . .). 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 interpretative 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.¹⁶ 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 ergois*) did not relate the same things about these things, but rather [each spoke] according to his individual partiality (*eunoia*) 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 *logoi* 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

¹⁵ Cf. Edmunds, *Chance*, 166–67. *Edokei moi* passages from earlier in the text: 1.3.2, 1.3.3, 1.9.1, 1.9.3, 1.10.4. Later examples: Pope, "Thucydides and Democracy" 281. For the contrasts in 1.22.1–3, see Wille, "Stil," with the comments of Cole, *Origins*, 104–5. The assertion of the authority to speak "as seems best to me" is a topos dating back to Homer (e.g., *Il.* 13.735: Poulydamas will advise *hōs moi dokei einai arista*; cf. *Il.* 9.103 [Nestor], 9.314 [Achilles]), and we are reminded, therefore, of Thucydides' *agōn* with the poets.

¹⁶ Cf. Parry, "Logos," 48, 83–88.

that these *logoi* 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 *logoi*.

The reader is now set for the grand revelation: How did Thucydides extract the pure gold of objective historical truth (*alētheia*) about events from the base alloys of multiple, tendentious verbal accounts? What is the skillful method—in fifth-century Greek terms, the *technē*—that elevates the current writer's record of the past above the error-ridden accounts of poets and *logographoi*?¹⁷ 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" (*abasanistōs*) and that the reports of the *logographoi* are "not capable of being tested" (*anexelenkta*). By contrast, he claims to have checked out (*epexelthōn*) 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 (*kai es . . . akroasin*) my account, the very lack of fables (*muthōdes*) will probably make it appear rather unpleasant (*aterpesteron*)" (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.¹⁸ 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 skopein*) 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 to anthrōpinon*), 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 (*agōnisma*) for current listening pleasure that I wrote.¹⁹ (1.22.4)

¹⁷ Cole, *Origins*, offers a highly original history of the concept of *technē* in Greek literature; I cannot, however, accept his argument (104–12) that Thucydides intended the speeches in his text as practical examples of persuasive rhetoric, to be mastered and adapted as necessary by prospective rhetors.

¹⁸ Cf. Flory, "Meaning," 198–200; Edmunds, "Thucydides in the Act," 847–48, noting (with de Romilly, "Condamnation du plaisir," 142–48) the political implications: it is democracy that is associated with "the pleasures of the moment."

¹⁹ For the claim that history should be in some sense useful, see Edmunds, *Chance*, 149–55;

This is a heady claim: those willing to do the hard work of reading this text with the care it demands will be rewarded with genuine understanding (*to saphes skopein*) of both the past and (at least in its general lines) the future. Thus, Thucydides' readers may legitimately hope to achieve a position similar to that which the author claimed for himself in the text's opening sentence: they will have learned how to recognize the significance of great things still in the offing. Readers will not gain this skill by means of a methodological lesson of the sort that other contemporary Athenian teacher-intellectuals might offer them. Rather, it is through being confronted with Thucydides' text itself—which presents itself as a disinterested narrative and analysis of great political events, written without concern for the amusement of an audience—that they will come to an understanding of two great and complex phenomena that conspire to create future tendencies.²⁰ As the previous narrative on ancient history has already hinted, these phenomena are human nature (*to anthrōpinon*) and the nature of power (*dunamis, archē, kratos*).

The text's claim to offer an accurate understanding of both past and future underwrites the reader's conviction that, despite the historian's statement that he began his work because he realized that the war would be "most worthy of recording" (*axiologōtatos*), Thucydides' account is emphatically not merely "history for its own sake." Its illocutionary force is more than the construction of a verbal monument intended to assure that great deeds do not pass into undeserved oblivion—the explicit justification for Herodotus' *Histories*.²¹ Thucydides' text is intended as a thoroughly tested, trustworthy, useful, empirically derived critical theory of political affairs in the form of a precise chronological

Rawlings, *Structure*, 254–63; Connor, *Thucydides*, 243–48; Flory, "Meaning." Gomme, in *HCT* 1: 149–50, argues that "the future things" are future still to 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, *Origins*, 30–33. For Thucydides qua "modern, scientific" historian, see Abbot, *Thucydides*, esp. 10–42; Cochrane, *Thucydides*. The other side of the "modernist Thucydides" coin is to view Thucydides as a dishonest historian, who knew that historians should be objective, but willfully decided not to be: e.g., Wallace, "Thucydides"; Hunter, *Thucydides*, esp. 177–84; Badian, "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 *HCT* 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; Connor, "Post Modernist" (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.

²⁰ Methodological lessons: see below, Chapters 4–6; cf. Cole, *Origins*, 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 metalanguage which explains how those samples are arrived at." Thucydides' didactic techniques are discussed by Hunter, *Thucydides*, 179–83; Connor, *Thucydides*; Farrar, *Origins*, esp. 131–32; Edmunds, "Thucydides in the Act"; Arnold, "Persuasive Style."

²¹ Hdt. 1.1. Lateiner (*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-polis 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 (sunegrapse ton polemon; 1.1.1)* that encompassed the total period in the past that is accurately knowable through the process of historical testing.²² 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 (*aitiai*) of the war (1.23.5), Thucydides states that he will run through them so that “no one need ever again search for (*zētēsai*) the sources of this war that fell upon the Hellenes.”²³

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 “exclusivist” 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

²² Thucydides’ history is political history: Hornblower, *Thucydides*, 30–32. Crane, *Blinded Eye*, 75–146, details Thucydides’ self-conscious exclusion of matters and language of the *oikos* in favor of the polis. The obvious contrast is Herodotus’ history, which was very concerned with politics but much less narrowly construed. Thucydides’ history as unitary: Loraux, “Thucydide a écrit la guerre.” Like Foucault (*Power/Knowledge*, 114–15) who inverts Clausewitz’s (*On War*, 69) dictum and argues that politics is the continuation of war by other means, Thucydides saw violence as encompassing a broad spectrum of political relationships. Thus he felt justified in including superficially peaceful interludes within the compass of a single violent event. Thucydides rejects the simple idea of war as a time just before, during, and after battle; he refuses to link the signifier *polemos* to the referent “men in armor killing one another.” And thus, he redefined (in a very influential way) the content of the concept “war.”

²³ On the striking originality of Thucydides’ conception of history, see, e.g., Jaeger, *Paideia*, 2: 380–81; Connor, *Thucydides*, 20, 31–32. Contrast Hunter, *Thucydides*, 184, and *Past and Process* (Herodotus and Thucydides as similar “scientific” or “pre-Socratic” thinkers); Scanlon, “Echoes of Herodotus.” No other history of the period ever needed: cf. Homer *Od.* 12.452–53: Odysseus remarks to Alcinous, after a four-book narrative, that “once properly told, a tale should not be repeated.”

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.²⁴ In the early period, the Greek peoples wandered here and there, unable to settle down for long because of raiders (*lēistai*) who attacked them by land and sea. When people did settle for a while on good land, some became greater and more powerful (*dunameis . . . meizous*) than others. This resulted in internecine conflicts (*staseis*) 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) identified 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.

²⁴ On the Archaeology and its discussion of power, see Hunter, *Past and Process*, 17–49; Connor, *Thucydides*, 20–32, 246–48, describing the Archaeology as (26–27) “an anatomy of power” that is also “a demonstration of Thucydides’ techniques of historical analysis,” yet noting (246) how this analysis is transformed by the end of the text: great navies and financial reserves have led to expansionism and therefore vulnerability; walls have come to symbolize siege and defeat. On the “material triad” of capital, fortifications, and navy, and their relationship to the “conceptual triad” of empire, security, and instrumental power, see Ober, “Thucydides Theoretikos.” Barber’s (*Strong Democracy*, 58) description of the linkage of political realism with empiricism neatly sums up the Thucydides of the Archaeology: “Politics is the application of science—sense perception organised as systematic, nomological principles—to human calculations; power is the chief concomitant of scientific politics.”

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 next was 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 (*kōlumata*, 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 state power—a central concern of Ps.-Xenophon and other fifth-century political writers.²⁵ 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 powerfulness 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 poleis, 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 Athe-

²⁵ Notably, Herodotus, who makes much of the contrast between Greek law-abiding freedom and Persian despotism, and the effect of these governmental systems on Greek and Persian characters and on the outcome of the Persian Wars. See, for example, Georges, *Barbarian Asia*, 115–206; King, "Herodotus."

nian 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.²⁶ 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 (*auxēthēnai*) 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 (*chrēmata*) and empire (*archē*). By contrast, there were no wars by land that resulted in the acquisition of real power (*dunamis*, 1.15.1–2).²⁷

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 poleis. 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 Lacedaemon (presumably a reference to the struggles attending the creation of the subject helot class), 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 (*to nun tropon*) of moderation (*metria*), which meant that those individuals who possessed more property (*hoi ta meizō kektēmenoi*) than others willingly acquiesced to a style of life that was identical to that of *hoi polloi* (1.6.4). The conflicts that destroyed the early landlocked societies were, we remember (1.2.4), caused by some people becoming greater (*meizonēs*) than others; the Spartans apparently avoided *stasis* because citizens who possessed more (*meizō*) 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-

²⁶ Athenian imperialism and its problematic association with Persia: Georges, *Barbarian Asia*; Rosenbloom, "Tragedy of Power"; Metcalfe, "Herodotus and Athens."

²⁷ On the sociopolitical ramifications of successful imperialism, in terms of limiting the class conflicts that elsewhere led to *stasis*, see Finley, "Fifth-Century Athenian Empire," and *Politics*, esp. 111; Meiggs, *Athenian Empire*, 255–72, discusses the mechanics of imperial revenue.

stitutional stability. Social stability is maintained by appearances (a moderate style of life), rather than by realities. Inequalities in wealth persist in fact, but they are rendered less noxious by a strict code of social behavior.

Thucydides specifically states that it was their stable *politeia* that made the Spartans powerful (*dunamēnoi*, 1.18.1). Indeed, they were "preeminent in respect to *dunamis*" at the time of the Persian Wars, (1.18.2). But shortly after the Persian Wars it became apparent that there were two Greek states that were "self-evidently greatest in respect to *dunamis*": Athens, the state that commanded each of the prerequisites of a great Greek coastal power (men, fortifications, capital, navy), was strongest at sea. Sparta, with its stable constitutional and internal social order, was strongest by land (1.18.2). Furthermore, these two powers spent most of the half-century after the Persian Wars fighting minor engagements against one another and their respective proxies. As a result, at the time of the outbreak of the great Peloponnesian War, both sides were highly prepared for war and well experienced in its dangers (1.18.3). Thucydides' premises about the several sources of power and its relationship to expansionism lead the reader to expect that the conflict will be not only great but potentially destructive to the internal stability of powerful states and to the autonomy of weaker ones.²⁸

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 *dunamis* (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 *dēmokratia*, 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 *dunamis*: either raw military might, or the forceful measures by which control over others is gained.²⁹ 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 contributes to civil strife, the implication must be that, for Thucydides, *dēmokratia* implied the potential power of

²⁸ 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"; Pouncey, *Necessities*; Flory, "Thucydides' Hypotheses." Connor (*Thucydides*, 29–31) points out that at 1.23.1–3, the greatness of the war is redefined in terms of the greatness of suffering.

²⁹ The positive, demotic, marking of *kratos* as a middle ground between despotism and anarchy is well expressed by Aeschylus *Eumenides* 526–30; cf. Meier, *Discovery*, 112–13. *Kratos* (in Thucydides) as domination: 1.143.4, 4.98.2, 8.46.1, 8.76.4; the strength to carry out a war: 3.13.7; violent means used to take a city: 1.64.3. For other examples, see Bétant, *Lexicon*, s.v. On other terms for power and empire in Thucydides, esp. *hēgemonia*, *archē*, *dunamis*, see Immerwahr, "Pathology," 18–21; Wickersham, *Hegemony*, 31–79.

the demos to destroy the freedom of others. *Dēmokratia* therefore embodied an innate capacity to degenerate into *stasis*. Under what circumstances might that capacity be realized?

As a "model 2" great state, Athens' power was predicated upon overseas expansionism conjoined 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 *dēmokratia* entailed the simultaneous consolidation of the internal power of the demos qua "non-elite citizens" over the traditional Athenian elites (e.g., by 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.³⁰

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.³¹ 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—per 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 anthrōpinon*, 1.22.4).³² Thucydides assumes throughout that humans will, by nature, act according to perceived self-interest. This may,

³⁰ For an account of how the institution of democracy facilitates this quick rise to power, see Ober, *Athenian Revolution*, 62–69, and "Revolution Matters."

³¹ See further Connor, *Thucydides*, 33–34; Ober, "Thucydides Theoretikos."

³² See, e.g., Reinhold, "Human Nature as a Cause"; Pouncey, *Necessities of War*, xi; Thucydides' "assumption is that human nature remains relatively constant." But contrast Flory, "Thucydides' Hypotheses," 43–56; Farrar, *Origins*, 135–37, 139, claiming that Thucydides' view of human nature is not static or rigid.

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 (*phusis*) asserted itself in a condition free of the artificial restraints of law and social custom (*nomos*).³³ But Thucydides claims that the effect of the plague on individuals was "scarcely possible for human nature (*chalepōterōs ē kata tēn anthrōpeian phusin*) to endure" (2.50.1).³⁴ 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: poleis or groups within the polis.³⁵ 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

³³ Late-fifth- and fourth-century Athenian political writers were very interested in the distinction between that which is "natural" (*phusis*) and that which is a product of human society (*nomos*); the distinction was particularly important to the so-called Sophists. See Ostwald, *From Popular Sovereignty*, 260–73, and "Nomos and phusis"; 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., *stasis*), human nature is "tracked to its proper ground in the human individual."

³⁴ On this passage, see esp. Farrar, *Origins*, 136–37.

³⁵ 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 Pope, "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 (*oikos*, faction, polis) advantage; see below, esp. 2.E.1.

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 *politai* and polis, citizenry and state, is implied by much of the ordinary political language used by classical Greeks.³⁶ 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.³⁷ 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 Athēnaioi*) 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 stood in the place of the whole polis. For the Athenians, a decree enacted in Assembly represented the collective will of Demos.³⁸ 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 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.

³⁶ Pope, "Thucydides and Democracy."

³⁷ Athenian ideal of consensus (*homonoia*): Funke, *Homonoia*; Ober, *Mass*, 295–99. Thucydides uses *homonoia* and its verbal form (*homonoiein*) only once each (8.93.3, 8.75.2, respectively), both times in highly charged political contexts associated with the reestablishment of democracy.

³⁸ "Capital-D Demos": above, 1.B.4.

A.4. *Stasis at Epidamnus*

When used by Thucydides in a "factional" sense, *ho dēmos* is contrasted with *hoi dunatoi* (the chief, influential, or powerful men).³⁹ 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, the *stasis* in the "great and populous *dunamis*" of Epidamnus, is highly privileged in that it begins Thucydides' historical narrative proper. 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" [*hōs legetai*], 1.24.4). But he is clear enough on the central event: "Just before the [Peloponnesian] war" (thus 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 (*aitiai*). 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, *aitia* of the war.⁴⁰ 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).⁴¹ 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 conduce to the maintenance of state greatness. Pressed by the raids of "the powerful," the Epidamnian *demos* called

³⁹ Other examples of *dēmos* vs. *dunatoi* in Thucydides: 2.65.2, 3.47.3, 5.4.3, 8.21, 8.73.2, 8.90.1.

⁴⁰ Cf. 1.146: the war arose immediately (*arxamenai euthus*) from the affairs of Epidamnus and Corcyra. Bowie ("Beginnings," 142–46) demonstrates that the Epidamnian narrative not only "provided a paradigmatic case of historical processes outlined in the 'Archaeology,'" but also manifests strong structural similarities to the opening scene of Homer's *Iliad*.

⁴¹ The leaders of these early pirates are described as *ou tōn adunatōtātōn*, 1.5.1.

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 possession of power. The *dunamis* 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, seek 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 Corcyra, 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 poleis 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 *dunamis*, ruled by the *demos* but with a significant population of "powerful men." For an ordinary Athenian, the term *dēmokratia* 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 *to plēthos* and *hoi polloi*.⁴² This sociological definition had ultimately led Ps.-Xenophon to *aporia*, but within Thucydides' historical vision *dēmokratia* 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 *dunamis* 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 Corcyraeans—whose island-polis occupied a highly strategic location off Greece's northwestern coast and on the route to southern Italy—were wealthy and powerful (*ouk adunatoi*) as a result of having a large navy (1.25.4). It was their naval victory over Corinth at Epidamnus that led the Corcyraeans 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 Corcyraeans 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 Corcyraeans and Corinthians each sent ambassadors to Athens, and consequently "an Assembly was called, and the parties to the dis-

pute came forward" (*katastasēs de ekklēsiās es antilogian ēlthon*, 1.31.4). Thucydides presents their respective speeches.⁴³

The paired orations of the Corcyraeans 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 Corcyraeans 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, *antilogia*, 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 Corcyraeans," 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 *logoi* were twisted by the influence of preference (*eunoia*) for one side or the other (1.22.3).

The first word in the Corcyraeans' speech is the abstraction "the just" (*dikaion*), but their appeal is explicitly aimed at Athenian self-interest: the Corcyraeans state that they know that they will fail in their goal if they do not clearly establish (*saphes katastēsousi*) that the alliance will be advantageous (*xumphora*) for Athens and that the reciprocal gratitude (*charis*) of the Corcyraeans will be secure (*bebaion*, 1.32.1). The linchpin of the Corcyraean argument is that the addition of Corcyra's *dunamis* (specifically the naval force) to

⁴² Sealey ("Origins," 283–90) unsuccessfully (in my view) attempts to show that "demos" in Thucydides has no class meaning.

⁴³ The speeches of the ambassadors would have been preceded by an authorizing decree of the Assembly (Aeschin. 2.58). Cogan, *Human Thing*, 8–20, and Crane, "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" (*saphestatē pistis*). 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 "err in their reasoning" (*gnōmēs hamartanei*) since they fail to realize, first, that the Spartans "are being impelled to war by fear of you" (*phobōi tōi humeterōi polemēseiontas*), 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 phobēsan*) and correspondingly less eager to launch an attack. You Athenians "will not be showing much forethought" (*ou ta kratista autais pronoōn*) if, "while on the lookout for a war that is surely coming, indeed is virtually upon you" (*es ton mellonta kai hoson ou paronta polemon to autika periskopōn*), 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 "genuinely to 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 history raises immediate doubts about 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 (*hē dokousa hēmōn proteron sōphrosunē . . . nun aboulia kai astheneia phainomenē*, 1.32.4). And thus, they intend to change their policy, since it seems that their stance of neutrality was in error (*doxēs de mallon hamartiai tēi proteron apragmosunēi*, 1.32.5). The Corcyraeans were caught in this tangle of error, appearance, and false assumption because they failed to see that their *dunamis*, which seemed truly great when they went against the Corinthians one-on-one, was only relatively great, and that they would become relatively powerless (*adunatoi*: 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 (*phobos*) 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 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 (*prophasis*: growth of Athenian power leading to Spartan fear, 1.23.6) and the "apparent" causes (*aitiai*), among which the Corcyraean alliance itself is the most important (1.146).⁴⁵ 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 makes 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 substantially to Athenian strength "without risk or expense" (*aneu kindunōn kai dapanēs*: 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*.⁴⁶

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" (*anankaion*, 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" (*ouk adunatoi*), 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 (*Origins*) remains fundamental, although he occasionally stretches credulity 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 *aitia* from blame/responsibility to "scientific cause."

⁴⁶ The irrelevance of the Corcyraean navy in the rest of the narrative: Gomme, 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 coloration in the Corinthian speech.⁴⁷ A notable example is the Corinthian response to the Corcyraeans' 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 (*ton es ison ta te erga homoiōs kai tous logous prin diagōnizesthai 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 Corcyraeans, claim to instruct their Athenian audience in general principles of international relations: an overmastering 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 Corcyraeans, 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 (1.40.6). If the Athenians look at the matter from a sober and serious perspective (*sōphronousi*), they will see that the alliance with Corcyra will bring war, not peace (1.40.2). The Corcyraeans are just trying to scare you Athenians about the coming war, and it is unclear (*aphanēs*) 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 Corcyraeans, 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 Corcyraeans: 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

⁴⁷ E.g., 1.38.5, where the verb *hamartanō* means something like "to act unjustly" rather than (as it is usually used by both Thucydides and the Corcyraeans) "to err." The Corinthian perspective is absurd if one imagines (with, 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, Sheets ("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 propria persona states (1.23.6) that it was Spartan fear at the growth of Athenian power that necessarily led to (*anankasai*) the outbreak of the 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.⁴⁸ In attempting to weigh the relative merits of the Corcyraean 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 Corcyraean affair) would become incoherent, and his long excursus (1.89–117) on the Pentecontaetia would be mere antiquarianism. Thus, it appears that, assuming Thucydides' difficult text, with its intermixture of methodological principles and historical description, is a good teacher about "the past and future," then the Corinthians, like the Corcyraeans, are inadequate instructors, at least when it comes to the key issue of the probability of war.

Yet both the Corcyraean and the Corinthian 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.⁴⁹ 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 *logographoi*, 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

⁴⁸ 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.

⁴⁹ E.g., *saphes*, *skopeō*, *dokeō*, *phainetai*, *sōphrōn*, *tekmērion*, *sēmeion*, *hamartanō*, *katastasis* (and its verbal forms), *logos* vs. *ergon*, *dunamis*, *xumphereon*, *mellonta*, *bebaios*.

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 realities 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 *hoi polloi*, 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 underrate the force of the Corinthian *logoi*; but at a second meeting, the Assemblymen's mood changed (*metegnōsan*). 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 (*ephaineto*) advantage of the geographic position of Corcyra on the route to Italy and Sicily, since "it appeared to them (*edokei . . . autois*) 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-speaker, the *rhētōr*.

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

wars. Here Thucydides describes how, after the Persian Wars, Themistocles contrived to rebuild Athens' city walls in the face of Spartan opposition and then to complete the long walls to Piraeus that had been begun, on his initiative, before the war.⁵⁰ Thucydides states that it was Themistocles who first dared to tell (*etolmēsen eipein*) the Athenians that their future greatness lay on the sea and that he thereby helped lay the foundation (*xunkateskeuazen*) of the Athenian empire (1.89–93).

The second passage is a remarkable and rhetorically elegant eulogy in which the historian expresses the strongest admiration of Themistocles' political abilities (1.138.3):⁵¹ Themistocles displayed a natural (*phuseōs*) genius, which distinguished him from others and made him most worthy of admiration. He possessed a "native acuteness" (*oikeiai gar xunesei*) that enabled him to be most potent (*kratistos*) at quickly forming conclusions without the need of detailed study either in advance or at the time, and his forecasts regarding future events were invariably the best (*aristos*). He had the capacity to explain any subject on which he was expert, and even on matters in which he remained an amateur (*apeiros*) he could form an adequate (*hikanōs*) judgment. He was particularly adept at assessing the hidden (*aphanēs*) opportunities and dangers of future circumstances. It was "by natural power of mind" (*phuseōs . . . dunamei*) and rapidity of action that he was supreme (*kratistos*) at doing exactly what needed to be accomplished.

Thucydides' Themistocles seems to possess the primary virtues that Thucydides' reader may hope to gain from a careful reading of the text—foresight, analytical acuity, ability to explain one's own reasoning—along with the capacity to act quickly and decisively on the basis of well-reasoned conclusions. Themistocles, however, possesses these capacities by innate talent. His "natural" (by *phusis*) and "native" (*oikeia*) gifts allowed him to avoid the arduous "study in advance [and] at the time" that Thucydides' methodological introduction suggests will be the prerequisite for gaining the ability to understand the meaning of past events and the general trends to be expected in a probable future. As Thucydides' account of Themistocles' activities in the Pentecontaetia makes clear, Themistocles was a major force in Athenian politics in the years after the Persian Wars, the very era in which, as Thucydides has previously explained, Athens rose to the position of being one of the two great Hellenic powers. The reader is thus led to suppose that Athens' precipitous rise to great power status was (at least in large measure) the fortuitous result of the presence of a leader who happened, apparently by a fluke of nature, to possess the necessary political skills. Those skills were not sufficient to allow Themistocles to retain his leadership position in Athens indefinitely; he was eventually ostracized (i.e., constitutionally expelled by popular vote without being legally

⁵⁰ 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.

⁵¹ On the language of this passage, see Hornblower, *Thucydides*, 26–27.

convicted of a particular crime, 1.135.3) by the Athenians.⁵² 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.⁵³ 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], Euboea [1.114], and Samos [1.116–17]), is introduced to Thucydides's readers as a consistent opponent of the Spartans: "The most able man (*dunatōtatos*) of his era and leading figure of the *politeia*" (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 reiterated: 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 (*anēr*) who was at that time the foremost among the Athenians (*protos Athēnaiōn*), the most forceful (*dunatōtatos*) in speaking and 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.⁵⁴ 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-

⁵² The bibliography on ostracism is huge; see Thomsen, *Origin of Ostracism*; Forsdyke, "Exile," emphasizes its salient democratic features.

⁵³ On Themistocles as a proto-Pericles: Edmunds, *Chance*, 9–10; Hornblower, *Commentary*, 1: 223; Forde, *Ambition*, 69–70.

⁵⁴ Edmunds, *Chance*, 7–36, offers a detailed analysis of the speech.

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 resources that (as we have seen) undergirded Athenian-style (imperial-naval) *dunamis* 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 instrumentalities of imperial treasure and sea power. Pericles' strategy for the war entailed withdrawing Athens' population from rural Attica (Athens' 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 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" (*mallon gar pephobēmai tas oikeias hēmōn hamartias ē tas tōn enantiōn dianōias*, 1.144.1). The exposition of what this means is deferred: Pericles announces that this matter will be clarified (*dēlōthēsetai*) 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 she 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.⁵⁵ 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 Athe-

⁵⁵ The term, with its root *oikos*, has associations of that which is the private property of a family/kinship group: MacDowell, "Oikos"; Foxhall, "Household"; use of *oikeios* in Thucydides: Bétant, *Lexicon*, s.v.

nians 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 (*arista*), voted as he recommended" (1.145). The contrast between Thucydides' presentation of this meeting of the Assembly and the Corcyraean 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 Corcyraean 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 431.⁵⁶ 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.⁵⁷ 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 encampment (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.⁵⁸ 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-

⁵⁶ The policy of refusing battle was perhaps politically more difficult for Pericles to achieve than Thucydides leads us to suppose; see Ober, *Athenian Revolution*, 72–85. Farrar (*Origins*, 105) rightly notes that the unwillingness of rural Athenians to move into the fortified city (Thuc. 2.16.1–2) suggests a disjunction between the good of each citizen and the good of the polis.

⁵⁷ Thuc. 2.18–23. The deme of Oinoe and its walls: Ober, *Fortress Attica*, 154–55. On the limited capacity of classical Greek siegecraft to deal with well-built fortifications, see Ober, "National Ideology," and "Hoplites and Obstacles."

⁵⁸ For the use of cavalry in Attica, see Ober, *Athenian Revolution*, 72–85, with literature cited.

nized as an idealizing portrait of the democratic polis.⁵⁹ 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 *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.⁶⁰ 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 (*hoi polloi*) 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 (*ergōi*), so it should be enough to honor them by the action (*ergon*) of erecting the public grave monument that you see (*horate*) before you. As in Thucydides' methodological preface, Pericles' opening words establish a hierarchy of value in which *erga* and the faculty of sight are elevated above *logos*. By this initial focus on the sufficiency of *erga* performed and witnessed, and by reminding his listeners at the beginning and again the end of the speech that he is delivering a *logos* only because it is customary (*nomōi, kata nomon*, 2.35.1, 35.3, 46.1), Pericles subverts the "actuality" of his own expressed sentiments.⁶¹ By pointing out that his *logos* is not an *ergon*, Thucydides' Pericles alerts his audience to the element of idealization in his portrait of Athens.

The *logos/ergon* contrast is reiterated throughout the oration,⁶² but two passages are particularly noteworthy:

Furthermore, the power (*dunamis*) of the polis itself, [a power] we established by those [Athens'] very qualities, demonstrates (*sēmainei*) that this [Pericles' statement regarding Athenian excellence] is the truth (*alētheia*)—and not a product of words (*logoi*) produced for the present occasion rather than [a product] of fact (*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 *might* not be true in all particulars. But, he claims, the

⁵⁹ See especially Loraux, *Invention*; cf. Edmunds, *Chance*, 44–70; Thomas, *Oral Tradition*, 196–237, esp. 213, 217–21, 235–37; contrast Strasburger, "Thucydides," esp. 34–35, which argues (against de Romilly, *Thucydides*, 136ff.) that the Funeral Oration should not be read as simple praise.

⁶⁰ Greatness of the polis' *dunamis*: 2.36.2–3, 2.36.4, 2.38.2, 2.41.2–4, 2.43.1.

⁶¹ Cf. Cole (*Origins*, 53), who points out that the claim that the speech/text is superfluous in the face of the greatness of the deeds is a topos, found, e.g., in Pindar.

⁶² E.g., 2.43.1. Cf. also 2.40.1, 2.42.2.

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 (*eunoia*). The issue of greatness and proof arises again a few lines later:

Our power (*dunamis*) is not without the witness of great demonstrations (*megalōn sēmeiōn*), 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 (*alētheia*) will show that in comparison with the facts (*erga*), [the verbal depiction] is an underestimate.⁶³ (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, *megala sēmeia*, that future generations will be amazed at Athens. But what are these *sēmeia*? The *sēmeia* will survive to convince "those yet to come." In light of the attack on Homer, the *sēmeia* 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.⁶⁴

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 *sēmeion* 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 *dunamis* of

⁶³ Cf. Gomme, in *HCT*, ad loc.: the challenge to those who write "fine words" implicitly includes the *logopoioi*. On Thucydides' use of *sēmeion* (and the related *tekmēron*), see Immerwahr, "Ergon," 277–78; Connor, *Thucydides*, 28; Hornblower, *Thucydides*, 100–107. Nagy (*Pindar's Homer*, 234) discusses the use of *sēmainei* in earlier Greek literature to "indicate" rather than state explicitly. Hornblower (*Thucydides*, 118–22) 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.

⁶⁴ Pericles' audience might call to mind the temples 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 ("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 *megala sēmeia* 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-subversive 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 *poleis* within the empire of their freedom.⁶⁵ 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.⁶⁶ Even the bravery and self-sacrifice of the dead will inspire not only desire for emulation, but jealousy and disbelief.⁶⁷ 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 propinquity 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 rule of the demos as a simple good.

Early in the oration, Pericles defines democracy:

And it [our *politeia*] is called by the name (*onoma*) *dēmokratia* because government (*to oikein*) is not oriented toward the few (*es oligous*) but toward the majority (*es pleionas*). 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 (*ouk 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 *dēmokratia* is the name (or signifier) used for the reality (or referent) "the *politeia* of Athens" because government (*to oikein*) is oriented toward the majority (*es pleionas*) rather than the few (*es 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 *dēmokratia* is the rule of the many in their own interest *over* and

⁶⁵ Freedom praised: 2.37.2, 2.40.5, 2.41.1, 2.43.4. Athens deprives *poleis* of freedom: implied at 1.139.3; explicit at 2.8.5.

⁶⁶ 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 (*apragmōn*) is not respected among us.

⁶⁷ Their self-sacrifice: 2.41.5, 2.42.3–4, 2.43.2; this may provoke jealousy: 2.35.2, 2.45.1.

against the interests of the few, but neither does he say that it is the collective rule of all citizens in the common interest of all.⁶⁸ 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 *dēmokratia*, but contrasts to it (*onoma men . . . metesti 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 grouping 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 (*ouk apo merous*), and gives priority to individual good reputation (*en tōi eudokimeī*).⁶⁹

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

⁶⁸ As he might have: contrast 6.39.1, in which Athenagoras of Syracuse defines *dēmokratia* as the rule (*archein*) of the "entire citizenship" (*dēmos xumpas*), *oligarchia* as the rule of a part (*meros*). See the comments of Gomme, in *HCT* 2: 107–10, arguing against the idea that Pericles' use of *dēmokratia* was defensive or that the word was coined by opponents of democracy; Thomas, *Oral Tradition*, 234. Sealey ("Origins," 280–82) reads Pericles' remark as apologizing for democracy. In an argument that inverts that of Sealey, Derderian ("Leaving Words," ch. 4) suggests that Pericles' *dēmokratia keklētai* recalls the traditional language of the funerary epigram (e.g., *kore keklesomai aiei*, *CEG* 24), and thus "alludes to a new collective *kleos* attached to the name *dēmokratia*." See also E. Harris, "Pericles' Praise."

⁶⁹ Edmunds (*Chance*, 47–56) offers a close and insightful analysis of the force of the antitheses, suggesting that in the end the passage leads to the conclusion of 2.65.9: *dēmokratia* existed in *logos*, whereas in fact Athens was ruled by its intelligent, insightful leader.

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.⁷⁰

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 (*prodidachthēnai*) by speech (*logōi*) before embarking on necessary actions (*ergōi*). We are peculiar also in that we hold that we are simultaneously persons who are daring and who vigorously debate (*eklogizesthai*) what they will put their hands to. Among other men, ignorance (*amathia*) leads to rashness, while reasoned debate (*logismos*) 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.⁷¹ 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 *logos/ergon* contrast and has described his own *logos* as strictly unnecessary in the face of the self-evident *erga* 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.⁷² But the reader must remember Thucydides' own rejection of Athenian exceptionalism in regard to intellectual attainments in the methodological introduction (above, 2.A.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

⁷⁰ 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 *xunkrasis*) is a moderate oligarchy that excluded the majority of free adult males from participatory citizenship: 8.97.2.

⁷¹ Cf. Immerwahr, "Ergon," 285: the "central ideal of the [Funeral] Oration is the definition of democratic courage as a kind of knowledge."

⁷² Pericles is presumably referring, *imprimis*, 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.

ideal of a politics based, first, on seamlessly blending 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.⁷³ 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 Corcyraean 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).⁷⁴ 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.⁷⁵ 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

⁷³ See esp. 2.36.4: Athenian *politeia* and *tropoi* were what made Athens *megalē*. Cogan (*Human Thing*, 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 propria 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.

⁷⁴ Scholarship on the speech: de Romilly, *Thucydides*, 120–30; Edmunds, *Chance*, 70–76; Hornblower, *Commentary*, ad loc.; Yunis, *Taming*, 83–85.

⁷⁵ Cf. Parry, "Logos," 87.

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.⁷⁶

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.⁷⁷ 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 empire (*archē*) 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 entailed 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

⁷⁶ 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.

⁷⁷ On Athenian *dunamis* as a radical departure from traditional forms of Greek power, see Crane, "Fear and Pursuit," and "Power, Prestige."

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.⁷⁸ 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 propria 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 (*dēmosiai*), the Athenians did accept Pericles' words. They did not send a peace embassy to Sparta,

⁷⁸ The ironically close relationship between democracy and empire in fifth-century Athens: Finley, "Fifth-Century Athenian Empire"; Raaflaub, *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 (*idiai*), they still felt aggrieved (2.65.1). Taken as individuals, the Athenians are further broken out by Thucydides into classes: the ordinary people (*ho dēmos*) were angry since they had lost what little they had, while the powerful elite (*hoi dunatoi*) had lost their landed estates in the country. This sociological terminology is ominously familiar to the reader: the conflict of “demos versus *dunatoi*” had sparked the Epidamnian *stasis* narrative. Potentially dangerous internal divisions, obliquely signaled in the Funeral Oration, have now begun to haunt the Athenians.⁷⁹

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 (*homilos*),” he was reelected 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.⁸⁰

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 successes brought advantage and reputation only to themselves, while their failures weakened the ability

⁷⁹ Pouncey (*Necessities of War*) regards the degeneration of Athenian capacity for collective action and the growth of a malicious devotion to individualistic selfishness to be Thucydides’ main, pessimistic, theme.

⁸⁰ Thucydides on the stabilizing factor of Periclean leadership: Connor, *Thucydides*, 62; Farrar, *Origins*, 158–77; Yunis, *Taming*, 64–67, 85. On the complex question of the accuracy of Thucydides’ depiction of Pericles’ financial preparations, see Meiggs, *Athenian Empire*, 324–39; Kallet-Marx, *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.

of the state as a whole to conduct the war: Pericles, by contrast, with his inherent distinction (*axiōma*) and capacity to reason (*gnōmē*), 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 ēgeto . . . autos ēge*). 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 hēdonēn ti legein*); rather, he had the capacity to contradict and speak angrily to his audience. Thus he was able both to deflate 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 Archaeology 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).⁸¹ Pericles’ successors, more or less equal to one another but each eager to become first man, sought to please the demos (*etra-ponto kath’ hēdonas tōi dēmoī*). Which is to say, based on the narrative so far, they looked 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 (*hēmartēthē*, 2.65.10–11). 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 diaphorai*). “So overwhelmingly

⁸¹ Ste. Croix (*Origins*, 73) argues, on the basis of the imperfect *ēgeto*, 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, *dēmokratia* 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, *dēmokratia* 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.⁸² 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 *dēmokratia* that led to Athens' loss in the Peloponnesian War. We will revisit Thucydides' summation of Periclean and post-Periclean politics (below, 2.E.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.⁸³ Thucydides points out that the revolt of Mytilene 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'

⁸² For the unsatisfactory nature of the analysis of 2.65, see O. Murray, "Greek Historians," 196; with discussion of Hornblower, *Commentary*, ad loc.

⁸³ Scholarship on the debate: Woodhead, "Thucydides' Portrait"; Andrewes, "Mytilene Debate"; Bodin, "Diodote"; Kagan, "Speeches"; Macleod, "Reason and Necessity"; Cogan, *Human Thing*, 50–65; Hornblower, *Commentary*, 1: 420–22; Andrews, "Cleon's Ethopoetics"; Yunis, *Taming*, 87–101. Mytilene was not a tribute-paying ally, but a contributor of ships, and so in the small, privileged category of quasi-free states within the empire.

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 demotic intransigence 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 *dunamis* had stood the test. Athenian financial reserves, 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 (*hupo orgēs edoxen autois*) 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).⁸⁴

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

⁸⁴ I point out, in passing, that focusing on Athenian Assembly speeches necessarily leaves out many of the nuances of Thucydides' text. While Thucydides surely intends to criticize the behavior of the Assembly and its leaders, he does not regard Athens as uniquely immoral. The behavior of the Assembly in the Mytilenean Debate is meant to be read against the brutal treatment of the prisoners of war from Athens' ally Plataea by the Thebans and Spartans (3.52–68).

says, represent the most starkly opposed positions (3.49.1). The first of the pair is spoken by Cleon, son of Kleainetos, the citizen who had been "victorious" (*enenikēkei*, 3.36.6) in advocating 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 Diodotus, 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. Together they offer Thucydides' reader her first detailed insight into the environment and tenor of post-Periclean 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 *dēmokratia* 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 (*sōphrosunē*) is more useful (*ōphelimōteron*) [to the polis] than cleverness mixed with insubordination. Ordinary men, when compared with the more gifted, actually administer (*oikousi*) poleis 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 poleis. But the former [ordinary men], not trusting overmuch in their own sharp wits (*xunesis*), 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 (*agōnistai*), and so things go well. It would be best for us [politicians] to do likewise and avoid being so swept away by cleverness and the competition in intelligence (*deinotēti kai xuneseōs agōni*) that we contradict our own true opinions when we advise you, the masses (*to plēthos*). (3.37.3–5)

Thus, if there must be politicians, Cleon suggests that they should act and speak more like ordinary Athenians. Thucydides in propria persona had praised Themistocles' "mental acuteness" (*xunesis*), 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 (*logoi*) 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" (*ōphelima*) 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" (*ōphelimōteron*) 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.⁸⁵

Cleon's meta-rhetoric results in his anti-Periclean claim that political speech is an impediment to action and that strong-felt emotion is a more appropriate wellspring 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 (*euboulia*, 3.42.1).

But if someone argues that speeches (*logoi*) are not teachers in regard to affairs (*pragmata*), either he is a fool (*axunetos*) or he is on the lookout for some private (*idiai*) 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 slandering 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 meta-rhetoric: 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 orators 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.⁸⁶

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-

⁸⁵ 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 (*blepete*) the thing (*ergon*) that is done"; for other parallels, from Homer and archaic poetry, see Levine, "Symposium and the Polis," 186–89. Andrews ("Cleon's Ethopoetics," 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 *orgē*" (28). This seems to me to overstate the case; see below, 2.n.109.

⁸⁶ *monēn te polin dia tas perinoias eu poiēsai ek tou prophanous mē exapatēsanta adunaton* (3.43.1–3). On this passage, contrast Yunis, *Taming*, 99–101 (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 Liar" 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 encomium 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 (*peraiterō pronoountas*) 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 mendacious public speakers is particularly convincing. Our sense of unease 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 tortuous 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—claims (3.45.2–3, 45.6) that the collective behavior of poleis closely mimics the private behavior of individuals.⁸⁷ 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" (*hamartēin anthrōpinōs*, 3.40.1). Diodotus disagrees: it *is* in fact the natural tendency of all men, both in private and in public, to make mistakes (*hapantes kai idiai kai dēmosiai 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 wellsprings 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: 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

⁸⁷ On Cleon's use of maxims, cf. Andrews, "Cleon's Ethopoetics." Pericles (1.144.3, 2.64.6) had also suggested strong links between the individual and the polis, but in the highly privileged Athenian context; cf. Balot, "Genealogy of Greed," ch. 2.

thought they knew about their own past history.⁸⁸ 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 (*eunoia*, 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" (*hoi oligoi*) who were the cause of the revolt and let the Mytilenean demos 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 (*eunous*) 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 *plēthos* as an ally (3.47.2). Obviously, if the Athenians treat Mytilene juridically as a single political unit, that is, punish demos and *oligois* identically, they will lose this valuable ally. Notably, both speakers use the term "demos" in its sociological/factional sense ("lower class," not "citizenry"), and thus they reveal what Pericles' Funeral Oration attempts to conceal, the "fact" (recalling Ps.-Xenophon) that *dēmokratia* 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, whom 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 polis populations.⁸⁹

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

⁸⁸ For example, the well-known tradition that the early Athenian law code of Dracon entailed the death penalty for all categories of crime: Aristotle *Pol.* 1274b15–19; Plut., *Sol.* 17; cf. Gagarin, *Early Greek Law*.

⁸⁹ In books 3–5, the reader is confronted with a growing tendency for sociological distinctions between many and few, *dēmos* and *dunatoi*, 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 *dēmokratia* 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.-Herodes *Peri politeias* 30–31. Yet Athens did not consistently impose democracies on states within the empire, even after 427: Miletus and Chios 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 autochthony 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 Corcyraeans): 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 have acted 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).⁹⁰

So what is the audience—either the original audience of Assemblymen or Thucydides' audience of readers—to make of all of this? The contestants in the Mytilenean 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 state? What is the relationship between an individual speaker's personal interests and the public interest? 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 *Archaeology* 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 subjects. 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 Di-

⁹⁰ Note, however, that Diodotus is not actually true to his own ban on arguments based on justice; see 3.47.3: if you kill the demos of Mytilene, you will act unjustly toward your benefactors. In rejecting justice/law arguments, Diodotus claims that in order to guard the state, the Athenians should not look to harsh laws (*nomoi*) but to realistic administration (*erga*, 3.46.4); the contrast between *nomoi* and *erga* is a variation on the familiar *logos/ergon* antithesis. Diodotus' argument for limiting punishment to as few of the defeated enemy as possible is recapitulated by Plato (*Rep.* 471a–b).

odotus 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 (*ekratēse*, 3.49.1), but, Thucydides points out, the vote was very close.⁹¹

The Mytilenean Debate exposes the reality of self-interest that lies beneath the idealism 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.E).

The Mytilenean Debate is clearly a contest (*agōn*) of words; this is implied by Thucydides' introductory and concluding comments (*Kleōn . . . enenikēkei*, 3.36.6; *ēlthēn . . . es agōna*, 3.49.1) and is underlined by Cleon's terminology.⁹² The contest of words is reduplicated in the vivid narrative description of its material result: the race 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).⁹³ The nature of the debate as a contest 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 Mytilenean 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'

⁹¹ Compare Macleod, "Reason and Necessity," 99–102: "In the last analysis Diodotus, no more than Cleon, offers any protection to Athens" (100). Contrast the much more positive readings of Diodotus' speech by, e.g., Yunis (*Taming*, 99–101) and Saxonhouse (*Athenian Democracy*, 72–86).

⁹² Note the lexical similarity of *enenikēkei* to the criticism of *logographoi*: *epi to muthōdes enenikēkota* (above, 2.A.1). Agonal language in Cleon's speech: *agonistai*, 3.37.4; *ek tōn toiōnde agōnōn ta men athla*, 38.3; *agōnothetountes*, 38.4; *antagōnizomenoi*, 38.6.

⁹³ This desperately serious race is recapitulated in the purely agonistic trireme race as far as Aegina that launches the Sicilian Expedition: 6.32.2.

actual good than were the more honestly self-seeking Corcyraean and Corinthian ambassadors. Hence, the rhetoric of the citizen-politicians inclines in the direction of the ideal-type *antilogia* of the Corcyraean Debate. And thus, the decision-making processes of the post-Periclean 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. Ps.-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 redescription 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 Corcyraean 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 bested 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 cruder expressions of the pleonectic 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 redescription, 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 (*saphestera*) than that which is before your eyes, and you view uncertainties (*ta aphanē*) as realities (*gignomena*), simply because you wish them to be so" (5.113). This sort of misguided hopefulness is the polar opposite of Periclean decision-making, but, as Thucydides' reader soon learns, the Melian oligarchs and the post-Periclean 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 "*hoi polloi* [of the Athenians] were ignorant (*apeiroi*) of the great size of the island, of the numerousness of its Greek and barbarian population, and that they were undertaking a war not much smaller than that against the Peloponnesians" (6.1.1).⁹⁴

Thucydides' narrative then digresses onto "Sicilian Antiquities"—a detailed

⁹⁴ Connor (*Thucydides*, 158–60) emphasizes the key foreshadowings of the first sentence of book 6. Mackie ("Homer 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 Hudson-Williams, "Conventional Forms"; Macleod, "Form and Meaning."

description of the island's precise size, its population, and its early history (6.1.2–6.5). As in the case of the Archaeology, Thucydides' language makes it clear that not all particulars of Sicily's early history can reliably be known.⁹⁵ But, remembering Thucydides' comments on his reconstruction of early Greek history, the reader is left with the impression that his account of early Sicily is a serviceable one. As the long excursuses of the Archaeology and on Themistocles make clear, Thucydidean digressions always bear on the main argument. In this case, the digression demonstrates the true nature of the object of Athenian cupidity: "It was against such an island that the Athenians were eager (*hōr-mēnto*) to make war." Their genuine motive (*alēthestatē prophasis*), we are told, was to rule (*arxai*) the entire island, although they wanted to make it appear that they were offering aid to allies and kinsmen (6.6.1). Thucydides' sober and detailed description of Sicily contrasts sharply with the transparent duplicity and amateurish ignorance he attributes to the Athenian citizen masses.⁹⁶ Thucydides' reader now knows enough to judge the probable difficulties of a Sicilian invasion, but, as before, the source of the Athenians' knowledge about the outside world is the mix of information and misinformation offered by speakers in Assembly. By presenting the three speeches on Sicilian policy delivered by Nicias and Alcibiades in the context established by the Melian Debate and the Sicilian Antiquities, Thucydides sharpens the contrast (established in earlier Assembly-speech scenes) between his historical way of knowing the world and democratic knowledge, between his text and public speeches, between his ideal reader and the Athenian Assemblymen.

Paralleling the case of Corcyra, the origin of the trouble leading to an Assembly debate is a state (in this case, Sicilian Egesta) that has launched an attack on a neighboring polis; the neighbor has responded by allying with other states; the original aggressor in turn seeks a more powerful ally in Athens.⁹⁷ The Egestan envoys to Athens and their Athenian supporters attempted to stir up popular interest in an alliance with Egesta by raising the specter of growing Syracusan power in Sicily. The Athenians eventually dispatched a fact-finding mission (6.6.3). The Athenian envoys to Sicily returned with sixty talents of silver—enough cash, Thucydides tells his reader, to keep sixty warships afloat for a month—and with accounts of Sicilian resources that were "both encouraging and untrue" (*ouk alēthē*, 6.8.2).⁹⁸ On the basis of the cash donation and

⁹⁵ Language of uncertainty: *legontai* (6.2.1); *egō . . . oute echō eipein* (6.2.1); *hōs men eikos kai legetai* (6.2.4); *engutata* (6.4.4). Although some things do seem to be certain; on the origins of the Sikanoi: *hē alētheia heurisketai* (6.2.2).

⁹⁶ Cf. Stahl, "Speeches," 70–71. Connor (*Thucydides*, 159) points out that Athens had high hopes of dominating Sicily earlier in the war (citing 4.65.4).

⁹⁷ Rawlings (*Structure*, 58–125) notes the self-conscious similarities of the narratives in books 1 and 6.

⁹⁸ According to Thucydides' account (6.46.3–5), the envoys were fooled into supposing Egesta had vast wealth by what appears at first blush to be a remarkably silly ploy: the Egestans passed the same set of fancy tableware along to each of the houses at which the Athenian envoys were entertained. The reader may conclude that the envoys were either fools or (despite Thucydides' assurance that they had been fooled themselves) corrupt.

misinformation about the likelihood of much more to come, the Assemblymen of Athens voted to send a force of sixty ships to Sicily (6.8.2–3). Five days later, a second Assembly was held to vote on any additional material the generals appointed by the Assembly to lead the expedition felt might be necessary (6.8.2–3). Thus, as in the two earlier scenes of Assembly debate (Corcyra-Corinth and Mytilene), two meetings are involved; and once again the speakers themselves raise the key issue of democratic decisiveness.⁹⁹

E.1. Speeches of Nicias and Alcibiades

Thucydides' first speaker, Nicias, is in a peculiar situation; he had been named as one of the leaders of the expedition, but he has come to feel that the polis did not decide rightly (*orthōs*) and that the slight and specious pretext of the alliance with Egesta is inadequate to the monumental reality (*megalou ergou*) of attempting to conquer the entire island of Sicily (6.8.4). Nicias' rhetorical goal is thus similar to Diodotus': to persuade the Athenians to rescind the decree authorizing the expedition, in effect to "undo" the speech act performed at the previous meeting of the Assembly, to choose inaction over action (6.9.1). This is a tall order in light of the Archaeology's establishment of the naturalness of the impulse toward imperial expansion on the part of any state possessing the material requisites: security from attack, a naval striking force, and capital reserves. Having recovered from the effects of the plague (6.26), Athens once again seems an ideal type of the expansionist power. According to Thucydides, Pericles had been able to restrain the Athenians from untimely imperial adventures, but it is not at all clear that Nicias will be up to the Periclean standard in terms of moral authority or rhetorical finesse. Moreover, as Nicias twice acknowledges (6.9.1, 6.14), his speech is technically out of order—the agenda item under debate is the material necessities for an expedition the Assembly had already voted to dispatch, not whether or not to send an expedition in the first place.

Nicias himself is not sanguine. He admits that his *logos* is unlikely to prevail against the Athenian character (*tropoi*) and that it will be difficult to dissuade his audience from taking risks in regard to "the still-obscure future." But he nonetheless tries to teach (*didaxō*) his audience that this is not the right time for risk-taking, and that it will not be easy to accomplish that which they are eager to do (*hōrmēsthe*; 6.9.3). Nicias' language recalls Pericles' comments on speech and action in the Funeral Oration, but Nicias hopes that, "instructed by speech," the Athenians will be willing *not* to act in their accustomed dashing and daring manner.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Insightful analyses of the Sicilian Debate include Stahl, "Speeches"; Tompkins, "Stylistic Characterization"; Yunis, *Taming*, 103–9; Connor, *Thucydides*, 162–68, drawing attention (162 n. 11) to the fact that in the Corinth/Corcyra, Mytilenean, and Sicilian debates alike, two meetings of the Assembly are involved in a single decision.

¹⁰⁰ Edmunds (*Chance*, 109–42) argues that Nicias is depicted as having a fatalistic "Spartan character," in contrast with Alcibiades' Athenian (and Periclean) character. While Nicias does in-

Nicias (like Cleon and Diodotus) establishes his political credentials with a claim never to have spoken in public "against his own opinion" (*para gnōmēn*, 6.9.2); rather, he has always openly advocated what he thought best for the state. He points out that he has no *personal* interest in blocking the expedition (6.9.2)—quite the contrary, since he stands to win honor as its commander, and he is personally fearless. The intended force of this statement is quite clear when the reader recalls Cleon's and Diodotus' comments on the potentially invidious role of personal interest in public affairs. Moreover, Nicias has set up a contrast between his own disinterested stance and his opponent Alcibiades' intense personal interest in having the expedition sail. But ever-moderate Nicias qualifies his statement: I do, however, believe that a good citizen takes forethought for his own body and goods because this man will sincerely wish that the affairs of the polis should prosper so that his own will, too (6.9.2). This "stake in society" argument seems to be an appeal to the less overtly public-spirited men obliquely alluded to in the Funeral Oration. Like Pericles and Diodotus, Nicias hopes to show that there is no *necessary* gap between personal and public interests; but his comment undercuts the all-important contrast between himself and Alcibiades, and leaves his opponent with a deadly rhetorical counter.¹⁰¹

Much of Nicias' speech is, by the standards set by the two previous Assembly debates, quite dry and factual, although its prose style is extraordinarily complex.¹⁰² Nicias attempts to show the Athenians that the expedition is dangerous in light of the continued antagonism of the Spartans; the plots of certain Athenians and our enemies have made the peace treaty into "merely a name" (*onoma*, 6.10.2). He correctly predicts that the treaty will not stop the Peloponnesians from attacking should Athens suffer a defeat abroad (6.10.1–4), and he echoes Pericles in urging his countrymen to avoid trying for a new empire before securing what they now hold. But, like other Assembly speakers in Thucydides' history, Nicias also resorts to dubious arguments from probability and vague maxims: we should not fear the creation of a Syracusan empire, since it is hardly likely (*ouk eikos*) that an empire would attack another empire (6.11.3); it will impress our enemies more if we do not sail since "we all know" that people are most impressed by that which is most distant and least testable

deed resist Athenian pleonectic tendencies, this reading seems to me to slight important aspects of Thucydides' depiction of both men. Cf. H. A. Murray, "Two Notes," 34–35, 45, focusing on Nicias' lack of *xunesis* and overreliance on *eutuchia*. By referring to the revoking of a decree as "undoing a performed speech act," I am consciously casting the political process of the Assembly in terms of Austin's theory; see above, 1.B.3. The relationship between persuasive public speech and collective action is of key importance in Pericles' Funeral Oration (2.40.2–3) and in the Mytilenean Debate (3.38.1–4, 3.42.2).

¹⁰¹ On personal and public interests, cf. 2.37.1–3 (Funeral Oration) and 3.38.2–3, 3.40.3, 3.42.3–6 (Mytilenean Debate). The attentive reader is no more sanguine about Nicias' chances, since Nicias had blundered rhetorically in his previous appearance in the Assembly: 4.28, with Yunis, *Taming*, 102–3.

¹⁰² See especially Tompkins, "Stylistic Characterization"; Stahl, "Speeches."

(6.11.4).¹⁰³ Unlike Diodotus and Cleon, who abjured historical examples, Nicias attempts to buttress this last maxim by reference to Athens' own recent experience with Sparta (6.11.5). Yet he also appeals to Athenian fear of antidemocratic conspiracies: if we are soberly realistic (*sōphronoumen*), we will realize that the contest (*agōn*) is not against the barbarous Sicilians, but against Spartan plots to impose an oligarchy upon Athens (6.11.7). Thucydides' forthcoming description of Athenian hysteria over the affair of the Herm-smashers, which led to wild accusations of antidemocratic plots and resulted in the Sicilian Expedition losing its best commander, will show his readers how very dangerous this last line of argument could be.

Like the Corcyraeans, Cleon, and Diodotus, Nicias emphasizes the need to concentrate on national interests.¹⁰⁴ He argues against expending Athenian resources to help the Egestans, pointing out that their state interests lie in telling plausible untruths; they have nothing to contribute but *logoi* and will not be truly grateful for Athenian aid in any case (6.12.1). This line of argument leads naturally to his attack on Alcibiades' narrowly *personal* and *selfish* motivations (*to heautou monon skopōn*): Alcibiades hopes to profit personally from the command, but the Athenians must not endanger the polis in order that Alcibiades may appear brilliant in his private life (*idiai*). His type cheats at public administration (*ta dēmosia*) in order to squander his private goods (*ta idia*, 6.12.2). Nicias claims to fear those he sees sitting near his opponent in the Assembly; he calls upon older citizens to counter the malicious claim of Alcibiades' supporters that voting against the expedition is a sign of cowardice (6.13.1). Nicias appeals again and again to polis and *patris* (6.13–14), and in a key passage argues that forethought (*pronoia*) is the best thing for the state, intense desire (*epithumia*) the worst (6.13.1).

If Nicias' cardinal virtue (like Themistocles' and Pericles') is *pronoia*, Alcibiades is *epithumia* personified.¹⁰⁵ In Thucydides' one-paragraph introduction (6.15), Alcibiades is first called "most ardent" (*prothumotata*) for the expedition and desirous (*epithumōn*) of the generalship. His desires were greater (*epithumiais meizosin*) than his means, and eventually the demos came to believe that he lusted after (*epithumounti*) tyranny. Moreover, Thucydides confirms at least part of Nicias' accusation, by claiming that Alcibiades in fact hoped to gain personal wealth and fame from leading the expedition. But Thucydides does not seem to feel that this personal interest was necessarily bad for the state; he

¹⁰³ Other Athenian Assembly speakers' maxims: Corcyraeans (1.33.4, 1.34.3, 1.35.5), Corinthians (1.41.2–3, 1.42.2, 1.42.4), Cleon (3.37.2, 3.39.2, 3.39.5, 3.40.1), Diodotus (3.45.3–6). On the "everybody knows" topos in Athenian public rhetoric, see Ober, *Mass*, 149–50.

¹⁰⁴ National interests: Corcyraeans, 1.32.1; Cleon, 3.40.4; Diodotus 3.44.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Hunter (*Thucydides*, 180) who seems to me to go too far (8–9) in arguing that "Thucydides' characters . . . are not real people at all but mere [my emphasis] personifications of one quality or another." Edmunds (*Chance*, 124–28) points out the ways in which Alcibiades resembles Pericles, but if so, he is a Pericles stripped of the all-important capacity for restraint of self and others. Macleod ("Rhetoric and History") and Forde (*Ambition*, 75–95, 166–69) point out some of the key distinctions between Periclean and Alcibiadean leadership and analyze Alcibiades' speech in detail.

describes Alcibiades as "in his public life the most effective (*dēmosiai kratista*) at undertaking military action." It was, we are told, because of the affairs of his *private* life (*idiai*) that the Athenians came to fear some overweening quality in him. Thus they turned the conduct of the war over to others, and before long the polis was ruined (6.15.4). This comment, to the effect that an investigation into a citizen's *private* life led to a disastrous rejection of his fitness for *public* duty, and with its hint that Alcibiades was simply too outstanding for the egalitarian Athenians, cuts to the heart of the Funeral Oration's (2.37.2–3) fragile ideal of Athens' *politeia* as a meritocracy that had no need for inquiries into the private lives of citizens.¹⁰⁶

Alcibiades begins his speech with a spirited defense of the magnificence of his private life. Grabbing the thread of Nicias' linking of private and public interest, he unravels his opponent's argument by evoking an Athens in which the successful risk-taker is freed from the constraints of egalitarian mores. Alcibiades trumpets the propaganda effect of his recent triple chariot-racing victory at Olympia: previously the Hellenes thought we had been ruined by the war, but as a result of my victory, the other Greeks have come to believe our *dunamis* is even greater than before. The reference to Olympia underlines the agonistic nature of the current speech competition in the Assembly, and Alcibiades confronts Nicias' charge of self-interest head on: "It is a useful sort of folly if, by expending private means, someone profits not only himself, but also the polis" (6.16.3). Alcibiades then claims that it is not unjust (*adikon*) if someone like himself, thinking himself great, refuses to be equal (*ison*). This quite shocking (by demotic Athenian standards) demand for a status of generalized superiority is justified by an appeal to the inequality that pertained in private life: One who undergoes misfortune is not expected to share his disasters equally with others; when we're out of luck, we don't go out in public. So, in the same spirit, why should anyone mind being looked down on by others who are doing well? Those who disagree must be willing to give equal honor to success and failure (6.16.4), a clear absurdity. Here, like Aristophanes in the *Ecclesiazusae*, Alcibiades conflates categories usually kept carefully separate in Athenian ideology, the political (equal) and social (unequal) standing of the citizens. Yet in Alcibiades' speech, the result, a general claim for the justice of inequality, is the diametrical opposite of the hyperegalitarian women's regime of Aristophanes' play. Alcibiades' public/private conflation continues: Great men are often unpopular during their lives, but once they are dead, private citizens are eager to claim kinship with them, and the *patris* honors their memory (6.16.5).

The speaker then inserts himself in the picture. Because I desire this sort of fame, I am criticized in regard to my private affairs (*ta idia*), but look around and see if there is anyone better than myself at public administration (*ta dē-*

¹⁰⁶ The terminology of the two passages is quite similar: both use the terms *dēmosia*, *idia*, *paranomia* (*paranomoumen*), and *epitēdeumata*.

mosia).¹⁰⁷ The proof? I brought about a useful anti-Spartan alliance in the Peloponnesus that "entailed no significant danger or expense for you" (*aneu . . . kindunou kai dapanēs*, 6.16.6). This sounds good, but is it true? That will depend on how one defines a complex sequence of events. What Alcibiades describes as an "alliance" is the "plot" that Nicias claims rendered the peace treaty a mere name, too insubstantial to restrain Spartan aggression. Here is a clear example of accounts of past events being construed "according to [an] individual preference for one side or the other" (1.22.3, above, A.1); yet the Assemblyman has no way to sort out the truth of the matter, to perceive the referent behind the competing descriptions.¹⁰⁸ The careful reader will also recall the Corcyraeans' confident and erroneous prediction that their proffered alliance would make Athens stronger "without dangers or expense" (*aneu kindunōn kai dapanēs*, 1.33.2). Yet Thucydides' reader by now hardly needs to be prodded by the verbal echo; she should already have extracted from historical examples (e.g., Epidamnus and Corcyra) the rule that every alliance is a potential source of danger and expense, since every alliance redirects the flow of power.

Readers may be even more dubious when they come to Alcibiades' follow-up: it was by means of appropriate *logoi* that I found a way of dealing with the *dunamis* of the Peloponnesians and, by stirring up passion (*orgē*), I won their trust (*pistis*, 6.17.1). Alcibiades' naive confidence that *logoi* could tame *dunamis* is unlikely to persuade the reader who has gotten this far in Thucydides' narrative, and who has learned Thucydides' core lesson: the all-important difference between mere words and brute fact. She no longer doubts that clever speakers can stir passions in their audiences. But the blithe expectation that *logos*-inspired *orgē* could be the basis for a sound policy, especially in the context of an appeal to trust, smacks of Cleon ("most trusted" by the demos) and his demagogic appeals to righteous anger in the Mytilenean Debate (3.40.7).¹⁰⁹ However competent Alcibiades may be at military affairs, Thucydides depicts him as engaging in an extremely dangerous game in the Assembly; his military competence will be of use to the polis only if he keeps private and public interests closely aligned and channels the emotions he stirs in his listeners into sound policy over time. This will certainly not be easy.

Alcibiades then turns to "facts," arguing "on the basis of what I hear from my informants" (*ex hōn egō akoēi aisthanomai*, 6.17.6) that the Sicilians are lightweights who will not put up much resistance: the Athenians will not be facing a big *dunamis* in Sicily (6.17.2); like all Greeks, the Sicilians falsify their numerical strength (6.17.5). Each Sicilian is just out to get what he can for himself by making clever speeches, or by stirring up a *stasis* so that he can take

¹⁰⁷ This claim is supported by Thucydides' narrative comments on Alcibiades, 6.15.4.

¹⁰⁸ For an attempt to sort out Thucydides' own discussion of Alcibiades' complex diplomatic maneuvers, indicating just how hard it was to grasp the reality of those maneuvers, see Liebeschutz, "Thucydides and the Sicilian Expedition," 303.

¹⁰⁹ In Pericles' first Assembly speech (1.140.1) and elsewhere (2.22.1), *orgē* is explicitly contrasted with *gnōmē* (qua "intelligent policy"); see Edmunds, *Chance*, 7–10, 13–14.

from the common store; if unsuccessful, he will simply move to some other land (6.17.3). This general description badly misrepresents the real Sicilians the Athenians will encounter in the actual invasion, but it could arguably be taken as a succinct (if hostile) post-eventum description of Alcibiades' own career: he is just now making a clever speech, he will soon defect to Sparta, and he will benefit by the Athenian *stasis* of 411.¹¹⁰ His current listeners are, however, blissfully ignorant of what the future holds, and foolishly willing to accept Alcibiades' words as an adequate representation of the men they will soon be fighting. Alcibiades sums up his portrayal of Sicilians by suggesting that it is hardly likely (*ouk eikos*) that such a mob (*homilos*), unable to listen to a *logos* as if with a single mind (*mia gnōmē*), will be able to engage in communal *erga* (6.17.4). By implication, if the Athenians *do* listen to him with "a single mind," if they ignore or forbid opposition, they will be able to initiate a great project in common. The dangers entailed by this line of argument will soon become apparent.

Alcibiades brushes aside the charge that the expedition will be risky, offering a specious historical analogy with the Persian Wars (6.17.7), and then fires off a string of highly questionable maxims, predictions, and arguments from history and probability (6.18.2–7): All empires were gained by helping those in need; inactivity is more risky than action; if we do not expand, we risk being conquered ourselves. Don't worry about the Peloponnesians, our sailing to Sicily will befuddle them; anyway, the expedition can have only two possible outcomes: either we conquer Hellas, or we'll hurt Syracuse and help our allies. He concludes with appeals to national unity and to Athens' innate nature: Don't be fooled by Nicias' attempt to create social unrest (*diastasis*) by appealing to the elders; let's do as our fathers did and stand united, young and old. Keep in mind that, like all things, a polis can wear out if it is inactive, but if it engages in contests (*agōnizomenēn*), it will gain experience and will be able to defend itself, not just in speech (*logōi*) but in fact (*ergōi*). A polis active by nature will ruin itself if it becomes passive, so it is better to stick to our active ways, even if they are imperfect.

The sentiment, the context, and the vocabulary all vividly recall Cleon's call for the Athenians to stick by their customs, whether they be good or bad.¹¹¹ Thucydides' readers have by now learned that one must be skeptical of this sort of oration. Not so the Athenian Assemblymen. Having heard Alcibiades' speech, they were much more eager (*hōrmēnto*) than before for the expedition (6.19.1). Nicias now made a momentous decision: since his previous argument had failed to deter the Assemblymen, he would attempt to alter their resolution

¹¹⁰ Alcibiades' defection to Sparta: 6.61, 88–93; benefits from *stasis* of 411: 8.47ff. But note that Alcibiades' comment about the tendency to falsify troop strengths echoes Thucydides in propria persona (5.68). Liebeschutz ("Thucydides and the Sicilian Expedition," 296–98) suggests that Alcibiades' analysis is fairly accurate; contrast, however, Stahl ("Speeches," 72), who notes how Alcibiades' speech "creates new facts," and so the unreal becomes real and vice versa.

¹¹¹ Vocabulary: Alcibiades (6.18.7), *gignōskō* . . . *nomois* . . . *cheirō*. Cleon (3.37.3), *gnōsometha* . . . *cheiroi nomois*.

by grossly overestimating the size of the force that would be needed (6.19.2, cf. 6.24.1). By embarking on a deceitful rhetorical strategy, Nicias implicitly accepts Diodotus' "Cretan Liar" Paradox—the claim that even the best democratic politician will be unable to accomplish anything good for the polis except by deception. But in the event, Nicias' deception results in evil outcomes for Athens.¹¹²

Nicias begins his second speech by acknowledging that it is the will of the Assemblymen to sail, and he claims that he will now inform them of what is needed (6.20.1). Thucydides' readers know that this acknowledgment is insincere, and that Nicias is drifting perilously close to saying one thing in public while believing another—a form of political dishonesty, castigated by the aristocratic tradition (as well as by Cleon at 3.37.5, above 2.D), that he had proudly renounced in his previous speech. Nicias contradicts Alcibiades' overconfident assessment of the Sicilian situation: "According to what I hear from my informants (*hōs egō akoēi aisthanomai*), we will be going against poleis, many of them Greek, which are large, not at odds with one another, not likely to want a new government, nor willing to give up their freedom in order to be ruled by us" (6.20.2). By mimicking his opponent's words, Nicias initiates a contest of facts: Alcibiades' information about Sicily versus his own. Nicias supposes that he can win this contest, and thereby deflate Athenian enthusiasm.

Much of the speech (6.20.2–23.3) details the tactical difficulties the Athenian expeditionary force will encounter, an assessment that Thucydides' subsequent narrative confirms as factually correct: Sicilian cavalry will be a big factor; the Athenians cannot expect to recruit cavalry in Sicily; they might need to send home for more supplies. The money promised by the Egestans exists only in *logos*; if the Athenians don't conquer the whole island quickly, they will be surrounded by enemies. So far, this sober, fact-oriented presentation of material realia seems a model speech by Thucydidean standards. But then, at the end of the speech, comes the rhetorical kicker that Thucydides' prior discussion of Nicias' rhetorical intentions had prepared the reader to expect: the invading forces will have to be immense, but if [only if!] we do all this, I believe that there will be maximum security (*bebaiotata*) for the polis, and safety (*sōtēria*) for our soldiers (6.23.3).

E.2. Aftermath and Assessment

Nicias' seemingly clever rhetorical plan, to deter enthusiasm by means of hyperbole, backfired badly: the Assemblymen's desire (*to epithumoun*) for sailing was in no way dampened by the magnitude of the necessary preparations; the Athenians, now convinced that the expedition would be completely safe if they voted for all that Nicias demanded, became much more eager (*polu de mallon hormento*; 6.24.2). And so "a passionate lust (*erōs*) to sail burst upon everyone

¹¹² Nicias' acceptance of the "Cretan Liar" paradox: Balot, "Genealogy of Greed," ch. 4. Connor (*Thucydides*, 166–67, 237) notes the irony of Nicias' rhetorical strategy: intended to stop the dangerous expedition, it results in a larger and more vulnerable expedition.

equally" (6.24.3): the old men thought such a great *dunamis* was likely to succeed, or at least to be invulnerable; the young wanted to see wonders and felt they could do so safely; the mob (*homilos*) looked forward to military pay for the foreseeable future.¹¹³ In the feverish atmosphere, opposition was impossible; because of the intense desire (*epithumia*) of the great majority, those few who still harbored doubts dared not speak out against the expedition lest they appear traitors to the polis, and so they kept quiet (6.24.4). Born of selfish and factional interests, midwived by clever public rhetoric and ignorance, the myth of perfect unity possessed the Athenians.

The results of this erotic possession are, by turns, magnificent and horrific. The huge expedition was duly voted (6.26). The preparations completed, the entire population of Athens went down to Piraeus to witness the launching (6.30.2). There was a moment of fear, when the true riskiness of what they were doing impressed itself upon the throng, but unease gave way to confidence as the Athenians feasted their eyes upon the sight of the huge fleet (6.31.1).¹¹⁴ Thucydides lavishes superlatives on the expeditionary force, which was not only big but splendid (6.31.1–32.2). He emphasizes the moment of unity by stating that its splendor was the result of great expenditure from both public funds (*dēmosia*) and private contributions (*idia*, 6.31.5). Yet he also points out that to the other Hellenes, it seemed more a display (*epideixis*) of *dunamis* than a military expedition (6.31.4; cf. 3.16.1), and that on it rested all the hopes of the polis (6.31.6). The eventual outcome, the utter destruction of the Athenian naval and land forces in Sicily in 413 B.C., was equally great: "This accomplishment [*ergon* = the Syracusan defeat of Athens] was the greatest of the war, indeed, in my opinion (*dokein d'emoige*), the greatest in the known history of the Greeks" (7.87.5).¹¹⁵

If the destruction of the expedition is the greatest *ergon* of the war, then the decree that launched it, enacted by a collectivity possessed and artificially unified by desire, was commensurately wrongheaded.¹¹⁶ The Assembly that voted

¹¹³ On the role of *erōs* in the Sicilian Debate and its aftermath, Cornford, *Thucydides Mythistoricus*, 201–20, remains fundamental. Cf. Immerwahr, "Pathology," 27–28; and (on *erōs* in Thucydides generally) Monson, "Citizen as *Erastes*."

¹¹⁴ *dia to plēthos hekastōn hōn heōrōn, tēi opsei anetharsoun*. This example of the masses' false confidence resulting from *seeing* demonstrates that (contrary to the traditional assumption of poets and *logopoioi*: e.g., *Od.* 8.491; Hdt. 1.40, with Steiner, *Tyrant's Writ*, 105) visual perception can be just as misleading as verbal persuasion. Cf. Stahl, "Speeches," 73–74; Immerwahr, "Ergon"; Brittan, "History, Testimony." The inability of visual perception alone to overcome the illusions of speech within the context of the democratic regime is an important issue for the Athenian critical community; it recurs in Aristophanes, and in Plato's epistemology.

¹¹⁵ The location of this *edokei moi*-type construction in the sentence fits the methodological scheme Thucydides laid out in the proem. It was, according to Thucydides' categories, a demonstrable *fact* that the defeat was the greatest *ergon* of the war. But since ancient history is knowable only by inference, it can only be his (informed) *opinion* that this was the greatest *ergon* of all Greek history.

¹¹⁶ Cf., however, 6.47–50: victory in Sicily seems possible; 2.65.11: Thucydides' claim that the Athenian error was not so much ignorance about what to expect in Sicily (*ou tosouon gnōmēs harmatēma ēn pros hous epēisan*) as a failure by those at home in Athens to support the expedition.

for the expedition not only fulfilled what everyone believed about the Athenian character (daring and active), it came to resemble Alcibiades himself. If Alcibiades embodies *erōs* and *epithumia*, at the vital Assembly the Athenians became a collectivity whose decision-making process was driven by desire and lust. There is a strong sexual undertone to Thucydides' language in this scene, and Alcibiades was (to his contemporaries and to subsequent Greek literature) a sexy character. But Thucydides' reader is not encouraged to suppose that it was simply a case of the seduction of an innocent *demos* by a conniving Alcibiades. Thucydides has described Alcibiades as the most capable man of his era in regard to military affairs, but he depicts Alcibiades himself as caught up by and ultimately a victim of the passions aroused by Assembly debate. It is the *demos*' volatile reactions to what they heard, not the speakers' actual intentions, that ultimately determined Athenian policy.

The incapacity of the speaker's intention to determine outcomes in post-Periclean democratic Athens is underlined by Thucydides' clear implication that Nicias' speeches were responsible for much of the general lust. The verb that traces the upward spiral of Athenian enthusiasm is *hormaō*, "to be eager to initiate an affair."¹¹⁷ The Athenians do not seem especially mad for the expedition before the speech contest of the second Assembly, a meeting that was called simply to iron out the administrative details of sending out a moderate-sized sixty-ship mission. It is Nicias who willfully rekindled the general debate (6.14). It is Nicias, in his first speech, who describes the Athenians as "eager to initiate" (6.9.3) the expedition; after his second speech, they are "much more eager" (6.24.2). By his violent personal attack on Alcibiades, Nicias ensured (6.15.2) that his opponent would make the reply that made the Assemblymen "much more eager than before" (6.19.1). Rather than cutting his losses after the success of his opponent's speech, Nicias decided to act against both the general will and his own character, by challenging his enemy directly in a rhetorical contest. In his second speech, Nicias abandons "his own genuine opinion" in favor of an overclever rhetorical strategy that feeds the flames of popular enthusiasm.

The construction of the scene suggests that Nicias, an excellent and moral man (as Thucydides informs his readers in an uncharacteristically explicit judgment, 7.86.5),¹¹⁸ was deluded by the agonistic context of the democratic deci-

This latter claim is contradicted by Thucydides' narrative; see Gomme, in *HCT*, ad loc. Liebeschütz ("Thucydides and the Sicilian Expedition," 299–306) and Bloedow ("Alcibiades: A Review," 22–24, with literature cited) conclude, I think rightly, that Thucydides leads the reader to suppose the expedition was a major error. Contrast Pope, "Thucydides and Democracy," 287–88.

¹¹⁷ See above: 6.6.1, 6.9.3, 6.19.1, 6.24.2. The chronological context of 6.6.1 (*hoi Athēnaioi strateuein hōrmento*) seems to be after the second Assembly, but before the launching of the expedition.

¹¹⁸ Westlake (*Individuals*, 209–22) points out the uniqueness of Thucydides' tribute to Nicias and regards Nicias as the most tragic character in the *History*. Contrast Edmunds (*Chance*, 140–42) arguing that Thucydides' "opinion of Nicias was negative" and that the judgment of 7.86.5 "bears on the sort of death that Nicias met and is not a reflection on the goodness or badness of this career." H. A. Murray ("Two Notes") sums up earlier literature on the passage, opting for an ironic

sion-making process into the self-betrayal that would destroy both himself and Athens' power. Nicias' strategy in his second speech was based on the assumption that the Assemblymen recognized a distinction between words and facts. His rhetorical bluff required that his own words call to mind an external reality of expensive material necessities. He imagined that the overeager Athenians would be sobered by a confrontation with the facts (huge expense, tactical difficulties) to which his words referred. But he thereby neglected to take into account the factor that is central to Thucydides' critical narrative: in the context of the Assembly, language was less referential than performative; the Assembly was a battleground of speech in which words were, through felicitous speech performances (i.e., the enactment of decrees), transmuted into social and political realities. In their passion, the Athenians were quite willing to call Nicias' bluff by performing the speech act that would create the great *dunamis* he demanded. The Funeral Oration ideal, which elides the difficulty of moving from political speech in a democracy to effective action, here reaches its telos: speech becomes more than just a spur to action; with the enactment of the decree authorizing the great expedition, speech is isomorphic with action. The distinction between words and facts melts away with predictably (in Thucydides' realm) bad results. Neither lucky Nicias nor capable Alcibiades is able to control the course of events.

Thucydides' explanation of why Alcibiades' appeal to unity and Nicias' hyperbole fanned the fires of public desire is implicit in his depiction of how the Assembly "processed" the knowledge presented in verbal arguments. In the debates over Corcyra and Mytilene, the Assemblymen were forced to choose between two positions. Thucydides' text suggests that in neither case was the final choice completely rational, since the Assemblymen had no independent means of judging or testing the accuracy of each speaker's factual statements. But Thucydides also showed that even self-interested speeches contained some truth, and so the decisions made by the Assembly did not necessarily result in bad outcomes.¹¹⁹ The Sicilian Debate might have followed the same scenario. Nicias tries to refute Alcibiades' facts with his own better facts, but in this case, the Athenians refuse to choose between the two competing descriptions of external reality. They solve the political/epistemological dilemma posed by Thucydides—democratic decision-making as typically based on misinformation because of the agonistic nature of Assembly debate—by rejecting contradiction and combining Alcibiades' argument that there must be an expedition with Nicias' argument that it must be almost impossibly huge. They are still, as Thucydides told us at the beginning of the scene, ignorant of the realities of Sicily, but through their speech act, they have created an imaginary Sicily as an

reading, which need not preclude either negative or positive assessments of Nicias' career as a whole. Allison ("Homeric Allusions," 514) points out that "strong Homeric echoes at the close of the Sicilian narrative underline the tragic lesson." Cf. above, 2.n.94.

¹¹⁹ Truth, that is, as judged by conformity to the *erga*, or to Thucydides' own interpretation: e.g., the Corcyraeans predict the coming war and identify Spartan fear (*phobos*) of Athenian power as the prime cause (1.33.3); Corinthians predict that Athens' allies will revolt (1.40.6).

opponent for the imagined Demos. This imaginary Sicily is not big enough or strong enough to threaten the great *dunamis* that the Assemblymen have called into being by the authorizing decree. As Thucydides' analysis of empire formation in the Archaeology has already suggested, in a condition of perfect security, imperialistic expansionism may seem the only realistic policy. There is no insightful and rhetorically authoritative Pericles on the scene to deflate Athenian overconfidence with carefully chosen words. Instead, in Alcibiades' dangerously optimistic and exclusionary formulation, the only outcomes the Athenians can foresee are the conquest of Hellas, or helping their friends and hurting their enemies.

The result of this false solution to the problem of *logos* and *ergon* is that the Athenians become (in Alcibiades' words) a being with a single mind (*mia gnōmē*) and a single purpose, a being that embodies the ideological dream of an end to all the complex contradictions, distinctions, and uncertainties that led to political friction. The idealizing discourse of Pericles' Funeral Oration is actualized: the *agōn* of politics becomes a love feast where "everybody wins."¹²⁰ Individual self-interest and desire to excel unites with the public good. Social unequals and political equals, the many and the few, old and young, dissolve into an ideological "all." The future is no longer unknown because the huge *dunamis* called into existence by the Assembly's decree has transmuted uncertainty into a sure thing. Justice and expediency go hand in hand because the Athenians will help their Sicilian allies through the self-serving act of conquering Sicily. The demos, freed from the braking tendency of sociopolitical friction, driven by desire, impatient with delay, is angered by any hint that contradictions or impediments remain. This unity is of course false. But it is highly dangerous to oppose the consensus in public, and so all critics of unanimity are gagged; political dissent loses its voice when faced by the hegemonic will of the mass of citizens.

The tragic outcome is practically foreordained. Given the context of lust, misinformation, selfish individual interest, false pretexts, outright lies, corrupt rhetoric, and suppression of dissent in which the decision was made, it would be a great stroke of luck (*eutuchia*, invoked by both Alcibiades, 6.17.1, and Nicias, 6.23.3) for all to go well. But Athenian luck has run out. The expedition, constructed out of false words and personal interests, crashes into the complex and harsh realities of war in the real world, and sinks. Fragile consensus, predicated on misleading speech, devolves into the terrible reality of the *stasis* described in book 8.¹²¹ Books 6 and 7, with their detailed and vivid descriptions of the initial successes, subsequent crumbling, and final collapse of the Athenian expeditionary force in Sicily, present Thucydides' strongest case

¹²⁰ Athenian ideal of consensus: above, n. 37. *Mia gnōmē*, vel sim. in (later) Athenian rhetoric: Demosthenes 19.298; Dinarchus 1.99; Andocides 2.1; Lysias 2.13, 17, 24; Aeschines 3.208.

¹²¹ As in the case of the Mytilenean revolt, the Athenians initially refused to believe the reports of disaster in Sicily, and they subsequently turned against the orators, as Thucydides drily notes, as if they themselves had not voted for the expedition: 8.1.1, with Stahl, "Speeches," 76. Cf. Eco, *Theory of Semiotics*, 66: death, having occurred, is the one thing that cannot be semiotized.

for the priority of *erga* over *logoi* and for the instability of error-prone democracy when it is reenvisioned as government by competing speeches.

Thucydides' presentation of the Sicilian Expedition Debate and his narrative of the launching of the expedition suggest that unity of purpose, resulting from the collapse of the distinctions celebrated in the Funeral Oration, made possible the unleashing of Athens' full *dunamis* in the post-Periclean polis. But that *dunamis* would be effective in the real world only if unity could be preserved. A great military force could be called into being by a democratic speech act performed at a moment of erotic union of opposites. But the effective deployment of military force depended on the close control of power and its projection against suitable objects. In democratic Athens, that in turn required the maintenance of genuine political unity over a long span of time. For the great expedition to succeed, political unity must exist in fact, not just in name.

As it happened, sociofactional disunity and political friction resurfaced soon after the Sicilian expedition vote. Immediately following his description of the second Assembly, Thucydides states that one night, while preparations for the expedition were well under way, most of the sacred Herms of the city were defaced—both those located outside private houses and those in sacred places (6.27.1). The discovery of the vandalism led to a huge outcry. The Assembly passed a decree offering rewards for any information regarding this or any other sacrilegious act. The whole affair was taken as a bad omen for the expedition, and it was irrationally regarded as part of a plot to overthrow the democracy (6.27.2–3). Meanwhile, in a separate incident, quickly related in the popular imagination with the first, Alcibiades was accused of sacrilege (in this case, profaning the Eleusinian Mysteries) by various scheming politicians who regarded him as an impediment to their own leadership of the demos. His enemies claimed that Alcibiades was a participant in a general plot to overthrow the democracy; to back up their charges, they attacked the excesses of his private life as being incompatible with demotic values (*ta epitēdeumata ou dēmotikēn paranomian*, 6.28.1–2). Although the charges were not brought before a magistrate at the time, they were revived after the departure of the expedition. The result was Alcibiades' conviction in absentia on legal charges of impiety, his defection to Sparta, and the drift into leaderless chaos of the expedition he had advocated so persuasively.¹²²

The affair of the Herms and its aftermath marked the quick transition from the false unity of the Sicilian Expedition Debate to the intensification of now-familiar factional and personal-interest-oriented political contests within Athens. Moreover, the reader now realizes just how destructive to the state interest those contests actually were. This time it is not only imperial subjects or would-be neutrals who will suffer as a consequence of the Athenian lust for power and the democratic inability to control that power. The hapless Athenian citizen-soldiers sailed to their deaths in Sicily, and the survivors at home were

¹²² Murray, "Affair of the Mysteries," and Furley, *Andokides and the Herms*, offer detailed analyses of the affair in its cultural and political contexts.

catapulted into *stasis* by the news of the disaster. Athenian factionalism and inability to exert power in consistently rational ways are the context for Thucydides' summing-up of why Athens lost the war (2.65.10–12; discussed above, 2.C.4): Pericles' political successors, eager to please the demos, lost control of affairs. In a great imperial polis, this loss of control naturally led to mistakes like the Sicilian Expedition. Because the politicians were too busy with their personal disputes over leadership of the demos, they allowed the expedition to lose impetus, and through their quarrels with one another, they introduced confusion into the affairs of the polis.

As we have seen, in his summation of why Athens lost the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides states that during the era of Pericles' leadership, Athens was a democracy only in *logos*, but in *ergon* it tended to be the rule of the first man (2.65.9). In light of the prior and subsequent narrative, this amounts to a straightforward denial of the ability of a genuine democracy either to become or to stay truly great. The reader is led to suppose that Pericles (and Themistocles before him), as sole true decision-maker, was able to direct the flow of Athenian power, and that he successfully merged its various aspects—*kratos*, *archē*, and *dunamis*—just as he balanced internal policy and international relations. Power, in the days of Pericles, was potentially destructive, but it was channeled to rational pro-Athenian ends. Moreover, under this schema, the material base of Athenian *dunamis* can be divorced from genuinely democratic political processes. Since under his regime Athens was not fully democratic in reality, Pericles was able to build up the huge resources that helped sustain Athenian *dunamis* even after his death. These resources were shamefully squandered once democracy came to exist in fact; the impotent magnificence of the Sicilian Expedition is the proof. Without Periclean foresight and a firm guiding hand, Athenian power could no longer be aimed at the proper targets, could not be controlled or channeled, and so destroyed its possessors.

The implied inverse of Pericles as sole ruler, then, is that after Pericles' death, *dēmokratia* existed as an *ergon*, and that this led to disaster. Having read this far in the narrative, Thucydides' reader now understands what that implies. Real *dēmokratia* meant that it was democratic knowledge, rather than the wise council of the statesman, that undergirded decisions about state policy. As a result, decisions were predicated on speech contests rather than on fact and foresight. Speech contests were not just sparked by bad politicians, they were the result of, and in turn exacerbated, the selfishness and social factionalism that remained latent under the Periclean regime.¹²³ As the contests became fiercer, there was a growing tendency for speaker and audience alike to confuse political enactment with reality. In Thucydides' text, the public performance of a speech act in the democratic polity does not felicitously call into being socio-political realities, it evokes a false and fragile simulacrum of reality that is

¹²³ For an explanation of why Athenian greed did not disturb the internal Athenian social order in the period between the Persian Wars and the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War, see Balot, "Genealogy of Greed."

shattered by its inevitable collision with the brute facts that lurk "out there" in the world. Pericles' inferior successors, whether good (Nicias) or bad (Cleon), necessarily competed through public speech for the "leadership" of the demos—a leadership that the text reveals as the spurious privilege of using lies in order to persuade the demos to enact fictions. These fictions were dangerous, both because the contests reflected and inflamed the selfish ambitions of individuals and social factions, and because they involved a mighty *dunamis* and the communal *kratos* wielded by a numerous and increasingly willful demos, a demos that tended to confuse ideology with truth and political speech with reality. When this *kratos* was unleashed by a speech contest that resulted in a brief but intense sense of unity, Athens' *dunamis* was misdirected and lost in Sicily, and Athens fell into the *stasis* of 411/10.

Here, with the apparent demise of *dēmokratia* as a stable and confident political culture for a great imperial state, Thucydides' text abruptly ends. His critical argument, if not his intended historical narrative of the twenty-seven-year war (5.26.1), is complete. The text as we have it seemingly empirically demonstrates the validity of his critical method, by showing how and why the linkage between democratic knowledge and imperial power led to the destruction of both Athenian political life and Athenian *dunamis*. It is, however, worth noting that Thucydides' critical project, deeply compelling and chilling as a *logos*,¹²⁴ was not fully sustained by the *erga*. *Dēmokratia* bounced back after 411 and again after 404; Athens rebuilt its military power both times; and the conflict with Sparta lasted a good deal longer than twenty-seven years. Thucydides certainly knew a good deal of this history; he lived to see the Athenian surrender of 404 B.C. and returned to Athens from exile shortly thereafter (5.26.5). Unless he died during the reign of the Thirty, he also must have known of the democratic restoration of 403, with its startling denouement in the *stasis*-halting Amnesty Decree.¹²⁵

In any event, Thucydides' critical history of Athenian popular rule was quickly confronted by an apparent contradiction. The text as we have it demonstrates brilliantly why and how a democracy can degenerate under conditions of stress, but it offers the reader few resources for explaining a subsequent period

¹²⁴ The Thucydidean account of Periclean (pseudo-) democratic leadership is quite frequently taken as a model for the actual relationship between speaker and audience in the Athenian Assembly; see, recently, Kallet-Marx, "Money Talks." This equation leads, in my view, to a distorted understanding of the historical democracy at work.

¹²⁵ The last years of the twenty-seven-year war, and the ongoing conflict between Sparta and Athens in the 390s and 380s, are recounted by Xenophon (*Hellenica*); cf. Strauss, *Athens*; Cartledge, *Agisilaos*. Reign of the Thirty: Krentz, *Thirty*. Amnesty decree: Loening, *Reconciliation*. Chronology of Thucydides' return from exile: Gomme and Andrewes, in *HCT* 4: 11–14. I offer no opinion on the extent of Thucydides' postwar revisions of his text, a major issue for those concerned with composition; see, for example, de Romilly, *Thucydides*, 349–54. On the question of whether Thucydides survived into the 390s, see the contrasting views of Pouilloux and Salviat, "Thucydide," with Flory, "Death of Thucydides"; Cartledge, "New Lease" (disposing of the major epigraphical prop for the thesis that he did).

of rapid internal democratic amelioration. If, having completed her study of the history, Thucydides' fourth-century reader now believes that she understands the processes by which Athens shook itself apart, she remains at a loss to explain how the shattered fragments of a polis were so quickly reassembled under the apparently discredited aegis of *dēmokratia*, and in the absence of a leader in the Periclean mold. In sum, the historical facts of democratic Athenian resilience after the crises of 411 and 404 cannot easily be accommodated within the critical/theoretical framework that the author introduced at the beginning of the text and developed in his presentation and analysis of Athenian Assembly speeches.

Because of its vulnerability to challenges on the empirical basis of subsequent historical realities, a political theory that claimed to explain the probable future on the basis of accurate knowledge about the recent past was, at least in the middle term of the fourth century B.C., a flawed vehicle for literary resistance to Athenian democratic ideology. As a definitive criticism of democratic practice, Thucydides' text, for all its brilliance, fell short of the mark for a dissident Athenian readership confronted by a restored democratic order. Thucydides offered a masterful demonstration of why, given its public deliberative and decision-making practices, Athenian-style democracy should have suicided in a protracted Corcyra-like *stasis* in the long aftermath of the Sicilian disaster. Yet in the real world—the phenomenal world of facts that Thucydides had chosen as his playing field and tried to make his own through a carefully constructed *logos*—democratic practice seemed (at least for some eighty years after the end of the Peloponnesian War) triumphant.

It is important to keep in mind that criticism of Athenian democracy was not the sum of Thucydides' ambition or accomplishment. Thucydides' historical vision remained very influential in the fourth century and beyond; Xenophon, for example, wrote a political narrative that began just at the point Thucydides' own narrative had broken off.¹²⁶ Yet other Athenian critical writers saw that the solution to the political *aporia* defined by Ps.-Xenophon's *Political Regime of the Athenians* was not to be found in the evolving practices of Greek historiography, and they turned to literary genres less firmly grounded in accurate descriptions of the phenomenal world. But a key Thucydidean insight, that the "social facts" established by the felicitous performance of democratic speech acts were not constitutive of reality properly so understood, continued to motivate Athenian critical literature. Aristophanic comedy offers a striking example of how that insight might be reconfigured within a very different genre and presented to a much broader Athenian audience.

¹²⁶ For Thucydides' continuators and his influence on fourth-century thought, see Dillery, *Xenophon*, 9–11; and summaries in Gomme, "Thucydides and Fourth-Century Thought"; Hornblower, "Fourth-Century and Hellenistic Reception," 50–51.

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