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Heroic Democracy: Thucydides, Pericles, and the Tragic Science of Athenian Greatness

By

Mark Douglas Fisher

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

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in the

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of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Kinch Hoekstra, chair

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Summer 2017

Heroic Democracy: Thucydides, Pericles, and the Tragic Science of Athenian Greatness

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Mark Douglas Fisher

## Abstract

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Mark Douglas Fisher

Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science

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Professor Kinch Hoekstra, Chair

Employing the tools of both textual and contextual analysis, this dissertation demonstrates that a central project of Thucydides' work was to reexamine and radically reinterpret the essential features of Athenian democracy, its relationship to other regime types, and the conditions for its success by considering it as a type of collective hero. It argues that, against the grain of fifth-century democratic ideology, Thucydides developed an account of the imperial democracy that placed it within the tradition of Greek heroism and autocracy, thereby contesting the belief that democracy should be characterized primarily as a form of egalitarian rule antithetically related to kingship and tyranny. In undertaking this project, however, this dissertation shows that Thucydides was less a critic of Athenian democracy than of Athenian democratic ideology. He conceived of his city as a collective autocrat not in an effort to denigrate it, but to better understand the apex that it achieved.

This dissertation further demonstrates that, in redescribing Athenian democracy as a heroic autocrat, Thucydides also set out to reinvent the Greek tradition of heroic autocracy. His commitment to a rationalistic and naturalistic mode of inquiry practiced by fellow fifth-century thinkers such as the Hippocratic medical writers appears to have provided some of the impetus for this ambition. However, this dissertation shows that it also stems from Thucydides' deep and careful contemplation of the Athenian experience of the war itself. Recognizing that many of the central fixtures of the heroic worldview offered a helpful frame for thinking about the causes and pitfalls of democratic greatness, Thucydides nevertheless perceived that these could get him only so far. This dissertation tracks the crucial differences between a collective, democratic autocrat and an individual hero that had to be accounted for if the rise and fall of Athens was to be made fully intelligible. Many of these flowed from the democratic hero's ability to selectively incorporate egalitarian practices into its domestic organization. At the most basic level, some degree of equality allowed for greater inclusivity, cooperation, and collective action in the heroic project, which translated directly into greater power. This was an unambiguous good, but the same cannot be said of all manifestations of equality within the democracy. In the deliberative sphere, the possession of an equal vote by all citizens created a variable dynamic between people and leaders, resulting in either excellent or catastrophic policy depending on the relative merit of those who vied for popular leadership. For Thucydides, this dissertation shows, the success of the democratic hero depended on the maintenance of a delicate balance between egalitarian and autocratic relationships among citizens, and the eventual tragic fall of the democratic hero could be traced to the overextension of equality in the deliberative sphere, which led to untrammelled autocratic ambitions abroad and ruinous civil war at home.

## Table of Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	ii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
<b>Part I: Athens as a Hero</b>	
Chapter 2: Equality, Autocracy, and Athens: The Archaeology	11
Chapter 3: Between Heroism and Tyranny: Athenian Character and Policy	39
<b>Part II: The Hero as a Democracy</b>	
Chapter 4: Equality, Autocracy, and Democracy: The Funeral Oration	68
Chapter 5: The Tragic Science of Democratic Defeat	96
Chapter 6: Conclusion	124
<i>Bibliography</i>	135

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

As the Funeral Oration approaches its rhetorical climax, Pericles forecasts the legacy of the imperial democracy: “We will be a source of wonder for present and future generations, needing neither a Homer to sing our praises nor any other poet to gratify us momentarily with words that truth will later reveal as a distortion of deeds, rather we have forced every sea and land to oblige us by our daring and have together established everywhere eternal memorials of our capacity for good and evil.”<sup>1</sup> With these words, Pericles grandiloquently draws his audience’s attention to the greatness of Athens. More subtly, he also encourages the reader to reflect on Thucydides’ role in memorializing this greatness, as well as his relationship to the epic past. Early in his work, Thucydides distinguishes himself from the poets by stating that he will prioritize accuracy over embellishment and adulation.<sup>2</sup> He thus establishes himself as the sort of documentarian that Pericles desires, and a distinctly new kind of epic writer. Thucydides and his Pericles dismissively reject poetic embellishment, but this does not negate the extent to which Thucydides was engaged in a parallel project to that of Homer’s *Iliad*, and the extent to which his Pericles sought to praise Athens in heroic terms. If the *Iliad* secured for Achilles imperishable fame (*kleos aphthiton*), Thucydides’ text immortalizes its own hero, democratic Athens, by creating from their deeds a “possession for all time” (*ktêma es aiei*).<sup>3</sup> Thucydides agreed with his Pericles, however, that the creation of such a possession did not require the poetical attribution of supernatural strength to the Athenians, only an accurate accounting of its power.

To account for Athenian power meant more than simply to catalogue its accomplishments for posterity. As Thucydides states in his opening sentence, he chose to write about the war between the Athenians and the Peloponnesians because he “expect[ed] it to be great and most worthy of a *logos*.”<sup>4</sup> The use of *logos* in place of the epic *kleos* (“fame”) signals to Thucydides’ reader the modernizing ambitions of his project. The greatness of the Peloponnesian War deserved not simply to be talked about or set in verse; it needed to be analyzed and explained, to be measured and made understandable, in a manner that satisfied the demands of fifth-century rationalism.<sup>5</sup> Like Homer, Thucydides was preoccupied by greatness and sought to describe it artfully. Thucydides parted ways from the poet, however, in his commitment to creating an account that would serve as science as well as art.

Thucydides’ attempt to deliver a *logos* of greatness, and specifically his account of how the Athenian imperial democracy achieved the unprecedented height that it did, is the subject of this dissertation. So too is the complex engagement with the Greek tradition of heroism out of which this account grew. Employing the tools of both textual and contextual analysis, this

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<sup>1</sup> 2.41.4. All translations in this dissertation are my own unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. 1.21.1.

<sup>3</sup> *Iliad* 9.413; Thucydides 1.22.4.

<sup>4</sup> 1.1.1.

<sup>5</sup> See Ferrari (1997: esp. 2) on the usage of *logos* in classical Greece and its basic sense of evaluating or “taking the measure of something.”



dissertation demonstrates that a central project of Thucydides' work was to reexamine and radically reinterpret the essential features of Athenian democracy, its relationship to other regime types, and the conditions for its success and failure by considering it as a type of collective hero. Against the grain of fifth-century democratic ideology, Thucydides developed an account of the imperial democracy that placed it within the tradition of Greek heroism and autocracy, thereby contesting the belief that democracy should be characterized primarily as a form of egalitarian rule antithetically related to kingship and tyranny. In undertaking this project, however, Thucydides was less a critic of Athenian democracy than of Athenian democratic ideology. He conceived of his city as a collective autocrat not in an effort to denigrate it, but to better understand the apex that it achieved. In Thucydides' analysis, the nature and fate of Athens could best be explained by recognizing that it was both a democracy and an unrivaled successor of the heroic autocrats that continued to animate and disturb the minds of his fellow Athenians.

In redescribing Athenian democracy as a heroic autocrat, Thucydides also set out to reinvent the Greek tradition of heroic autocracy. His commitment to a rationalistic and naturalistic mode of inquiry practiced by fellow fifth-century thinkers such as the Hippocratic medical writers appears to have provided some of the impetus for this ambition. However, it also stems from Thucydides' deep and careful contemplation of the Athenian experience of the war itself. Recognizing that many of the central fixtures of the heroic worldview offered a helpful frame for thinking about the causes and pitfalls of democratic greatness, he nevertheless perceived that these could get him only so far. There were crucial differences between a collective, democratic autocrat and an individual hero that had to be accounted for if the rise and fall of Athens was to be made fully intelligible. Many of these differences flowed from the democratic hero's ability to selectively incorporate egalitarian practices into its domestic organization despite its larger autocratic orientation. At the most basic level, some degree of equality allowed for greater inclusivity, cooperation, and collective action in the heroic project, which translated directly into greater power. This was an unambiguous good, but the same cannot be said of all manifestations of equality within the democracy. In the deliberative sphere, the possession of an equal vote by all citizens created a variable dynamic between people and leaders, resulting in either excellent or catastrophic policy depending on the relative merit of those who vied for popular leadership. For Thucydides, the success of the democratic hero depended on the maintenance of a delicate balance between egalitarian and autocratic relationships among citizens, and the eventual tragic fall of the democratic hero could be traced to the overextension of equality in the deliberative sphere, which led to untrammelled autocratic ambitions abroad and ruinous civil war at home.

In developing a contextualist reading of Thucydidean political thought, this dissertation attempts to acknowledge and account for the heterogeneity of fifth-century Athenian intellectual life, recognizing at the same time the limitations and biases of the sources available to us. Heuristically, however, it considers Thucydides' text as primarily negotiating between two contemporary traditions of thought: the heroic and the political. Both of these traditions are capacious and difficult to characterize definitively in the abstract, and it is perhaps easiest to

delineate them chronologically.<sup>6</sup> The heroic tradition is manifest in Greek epic and predominates in the body of legends that surround the order of Zeus. We can characterize it as an archaic tradition that predates the establishment of egalitarian political relations and instead assumes a hierarchical political and cosmological order. Of utmost value within this order were honor, power, and fame. The political tradition, on the other hand, arises with the secure establishment of egalitarian political communities. In the place of a hierarchical cosmology, this tradition envisions the natural and political world as organized according to principles of balance and equality, and it elevates the capacity of the human to organize and stabilize his world. Within such an order, the virtues of moderation, self-awareness, and justice become cardinal.

This crude diachronic account suggests that Thucydides' Athens was firmly located on the political side of this intellectual dichotomy. To an extent this is true, as democratic ideology did lean heavily in this direction. But the reality of intellectual life in fifth-century Athens was far more complicated and contentious than this suggests. The heroic tradition continued to flourish even in the democratic city, and the tensions that it presented with the political worldview were a constant source of social friction, creative inspiration, and intellectual innovation. The conflict between the autocratic hero and the collective chorus, for instance, was fundamental to the dramatic and ideological force of Athenian tragedy.<sup>7</sup> Negotiation between the heroic and the political can also be detected in many of the greatest monuments of fifth-century Athenian art: the Parthenon friezes, the Poikilê Stoa, the Athenian Treasury at Delphi. In each of these, the grandeur of the Athenian *polis* is set into conversation with the great deeds of the heroic past.

Thucydides was not unique in trying to make sense of fifth-century Athenian life by working between heroic and political patterns of thought. Indeed, in this preoccupation he perhaps resembled his compatriots more than if he had strictly followed the official, political line of democratic ideology. Thucydides nevertheless stands alone in the systematicity and originality of his vision of Athens as a democratic hero. If dramatists often hinted at this possibility by explicitly or implicitly depicting the *dêmos* on stage as an autocrat, or if visual artists suggested the heroic grandeur of the Athenians by juxtaposing the Persian Wars with the Amazonomachy, Thucydides applies a supremely powerful and careful mind directly to the question of what it would mean for the democratic community to be a heroic autocrat.

This dissertation, offering as it does a reinterpretation of fundamental elements of Thucydidean political thought, intervenes in more scholarly debates than can be adequately accounted for in an introduction. It will nevertheless be fruitful to isolate three prominent discussions to which this dissertation seeks to make a significant contribution. The first concerns the content of Thucydides' democratic theory. For much of the modern era, this was a neglected aspect of Thucydidean political thought, as many commentators adhered to a caricatured version of Thucydides either as a realist international relations theorist or as a conventional fifth-century elitist critic of Athenian democracy. The past three decades, however, have seen numerous

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<sup>6</sup> For the classic statement of this diachronic framework, see Vernant 1982.

<sup>7</sup> Vernant 1988.

scholars expose the severe limitations of these interpretations and begin to mine the rich vein of democratic theory in Thucydides' text. A diverse body of work has grappled with Thucydides' thinking about deliberative judgment, citizenship, and the dissolution of political community within a democratic context, as well as other subjects of democratic importance.<sup>8</sup> Many of these studies continue to find in Thucydides some form of critic of democratic rule, but one who was more engaged, subtle, and original than many of his elite contemporaries and who may continue to shed light on fundamental issues facing democratic theorists and citizens today.

This dissertation builds on the momentum created by these works even as it challenges a basic assumption underlying many of the conclusions that they have generated. The chapters to follow reaffirm that Thucydides was indeed a deeply attentive and original analyst of Athenian democracy. It also demonstrates, however, that the upshot of this analysis was to fundamentally challenge the conventional understanding, both then and now, of what democracy means. Democracy is, of course, a notoriously ambiguous term and one that does not abide any precise trans-historical definition.<sup>9</sup> Whatever continuity exists in the use of the concept over time, however, would seem to stem from the primary association of democracy with some sort of equality and opposition to autocratic rule.<sup>10</sup> Thucydides contests the elemental importance of both of these relationships in his analysis of Athenian democracy. He does so not in an attempt to demonstrate that Athens was undemocratic, but to offer a radically new vision of what Athenian democracy was. Thucydides accepted democracy as the name of the Athenian regime, but he denied that this regime's power could be adequately explained as the product of equality and non-domination.<sup>11</sup> While it is now common to note the systematic domination of women, metics and slaves within Athenian democracy, Thucydides located the foundation of Athenian greatness in a different set of reinforcing hierarchical relations: Athens' rule over its empire, the city's dominance over rural Attica, and Periclean supremacy in the deliberative assembly.

Thucydides' unorthodox redescription of Athenian democracy challenges not only our understanding of democracy's conceptual contestability in fifth-century political thought, it also proves to be problematic for those works that have sought to draw conclusions about modern democracy from a reading of Thucydides' text. The ability to move seamlessly between Thucydides' presentation of Athenian democracy and modern democratic theory relies on the

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<sup>8</sup> On deliberative judgment: Farrar 1988: Ch. 5; Saxonhouse 1996: Ch. 3; 2004; 2006: Ch. 7; Ober 1998: Ch. 2; Mara 2008: 113-24. On citizenship: Monoson 1994. On the dissolution of political community: Euben 1990: Ch. 6; Balot 2001: Ch.5. See also Pope (1988) on Thucydides' normative evaluation of democracy and its relationship to other regimes; Wohl (2002: Ch. 1) on *erôs* and democracy; Zumbrunnen (2008) on silence and democracy; and Balot (2014: esp. Ch. 2) on democratic courage.

<sup>9</sup> Nor, indeed, does it abide such a definition when viewed from a synchronic, contemporary perspective. John Dunn (1979: Ch. 1; 2005), for instance, has repeatedly argued that the emergence of a (near-)global consensus on the normative superiority of "democracy" accompanied the word's use to describe an impossibly heterogeneous set of political practices.

<sup>10</sup> It bears noting in this context that even that theory of democracy which Amy Gutmann (2007: 522) calls "least inclusive" and "least inspiring," and which Robert Dahl (1989: 121-22) criticizes as "conceptually, morally, and empirically indistinguishable from autocracy"—the democratic theory of Joseph Schumpeter—incorporates these ideas, however thinly. For Schumpeter (1976: 270-72), all democratic citizens possess the ability to vote and run for office, and the ability of the electorate to get rid of unpopular leadership clearly distinguishes it from autocratic rule.

<sup>11</sup> Such, for instance, was the contention of Herodotus (5.78.1).

assumption that, at a basic conceptual level, we are talking about the same thing. It is this that allows scholars, journalists, and pundits alike to draw a timeless ideal of democracy from the Funeral Oration, and it is perhaps a factor encouraging international relations theorists and foreign policy analysts to see the US and China in danger of falling into the “Thucydides trap.”<sup>12</sup> By recognizing the idiosyncratic character of Thucydidean democratic theory, however, we are given good reason to worry that direct transpositions of Thucydidean insights into modern discussions of democratic rule depend on a fallacy of equivocation; we may be using the same word, but we appear to mean something different by it. Moreover, it seems that such attempts miss the very point of Thucydides’ project as a democratic theorist: to challenge the sense that we already know what democracy is and what it needs to thrive.

This is not to say that a historically attentive reading of Thucydides has nothing to offer modern democratic thinkers, nor does this dissertation advocate that we hermetically seal Thucydidean democratic theory in its fifth-century context. On the contrary, we stand to gain significantly by wrestling with Thucydides’ analysis of democracy and democratic greatness, but these benefits are not to be had by merely refurbishing Thucydidean passages and applying them directly to contemporary debates. The value of Thucydidean democratic theory lies instead in the challenges that it poses for contemporary ways of thinking; in being “untimely” (*unzeitgemäß*), to use Nietzsche’s notable formulation.<sup>13</sup> Thucydides offers us a vision of democracy that does not make sense in a modern context, that we may not even accept as democracy, and that may make us deeply uneasy as a result. It is not a vision that we would (or could) adopt as our own. And yet, nor can we simply dismiss it as objectionable or nonsensical. His text asks us to learn to think what we previously thought unthinkable, so to speak, and challenges us with questions concerning the relationship between democracy, equality, autocracy, power, and greatness that simply do not arise in modern philosophic debate. A careful, contextualized engagement with Thucydidean political thought thus demands that we reexamine the ossified assumptions latent in our thinking about democracy and find answers to questions that we didn’t realize we needed to ask.

In addition to challenging conventional perceptions of how Thucydides understood democracy, this dissertation seeks to intervene in a second debate surrounding how he evaluated democratic greatness. A recent trend in the critical literature, much of it drawing on the excellent work of W. R. Connor, finds in Thucydides’ text a damning indictment of the pursuit and preservation of greatness.<sup>14</sup> For Connor, Thucydides’ text transforms the reader’s understanding of greatness as he or she witnesses the best laid plans of the Athenians result not in glorious victory but in unintended misery. From an analytical and celebratory start, greatness

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<sup>12</sup> Strictly speaking, the logic of the Thucydides Trap takes no account of whether a particular power is a democracy or not. The concern is rather of a hegemonic power being challenged by another, rising power. However, it seems very plausible that the tendency of IR theorists to look towards ancient Athens for contemporary parallels is rooted in the fact that Athens was a democracy. We find no such effort to find parallels from ancient Persia, for instance, or from pharaonic Egypt.

<sup>13</sup> Nietzsche 1997 [1874]: 60. Cf. Williams 1993: 4.

<sup>14</sup> Connor 1984. An important forerunner to Connor in this regard is Stahl (2003 [1966]). Cf. Orwin 1994; Ober 2001; Lebow 2003; Foster 2010; Hawthorn 2014.

“comes to describe suffering, not accomplishment” as the reader proceeds through Corycrean *stasis*, the butchery of the Melians, and the pathetic end of the Sicilian Expedition.<sup>15</sup> Connor is reticent to draw any conclusions concerning Thucydides’ own beliefs from this metamorphosis, finding instead in Thucydidean political thought “constant transformation” and a “resistance to paraphrase and summation.”<sup>16</sup> But those who have followed his lead are bolder in their conclusions. Edith Foster, for example, denies that even the early books of Thucydides’ text show sympathy for Pericles’ understanding and pursuit of democratic greatness. Instead, she argues, the text evinces an author determined to reveal and contest Pericles’ “mistaken confidence in the power, significance, and glory of the instruments of war.”<sup>17</sup> In her estimation, Thucydides wrote to expose the pursuit of great power as self-undermining and to warn his readers away from following any leader willing to destroy his city for the glory of its name.

It may well be that, for a twenty-first century reader, the violence, suffering, and instability associated with greatness in Thucydides’ text exposes it as an unjustifiable end for any democratic policy we would aspire to. Foster and others, however, are perhaps too quick to assume that Thucydides shared in this judgment. It is taken as self-evident that Thucydides’ recognition of the tremendous human costs demanded by greatness led him to dissent from its pursuit. Yet, the heroic tradition suggests a rather different framework for understanding the relationship between suffering, self-destruction, and greatness in Thucydidean political thought. Consider briefly how these themes relate in Homer’s *Iliad*. Perhaps no text more vividly depicts the *pathos* of war than this epic, and perhaps no one is implicated in greater suffering than its greatest heroes, Achilles and Hector. Each causes untold death and destruction for his own side as well as his opponents, and each follows the path of reputation to his ruin. For Achilles, the tradeoff between greatness and destruction is explicit: he is made to choose between a death that wins him imperishable glory and an obscure, stable life at home. He chooses war, glory, and his own demise.

No one can deny that the *Iliad* exhibits a deeply humane concern for the horrors of war and the costs of Achilles’ choice. But would we suggest that Homer (or whomever was the intentional intelligence responsible for the epic) was critical of Achilles’ pursuit of greatness as a result? Would we assume that the poet sought to deter his audience from emulating his heroes because of the violence they caused for themselves and others? Few would countenance such conclusions, for we acknowledge that, whatever its trans-historical value as an exploration of the human condition, Homer’s approach to greatness and war grew out of a mindset radically different from our own.

For all of Thucydides’ attempts to offer a rationalistic, naturalized account of greatness, he did not abandon the basic set of heroic assumptions linking greatness, fame, suffering, and ruin. In this way, Thucydides was closer to Homer than to ourselves. Viewing the Athenian democracy as a collective hero, he might at once measure its greatness in terms of suffering *and*

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<sup>15</sup> Connor 1984: 246.

<sup>16</sup> Connor 1984: 247, 231.

<sup>17</sup> Foster 2010: 3.

feel admiration, even awe, at just how much suffering it could endure before it finally yielded. From this heroic perspective, there was nothing inconsistent in finding the height of Athenian power glorious and its fall from this apex pitiful.

This dissertation thus defends an approach to democratic greatness and suffering similar to that of Adam Parry. Parry summarized the basic scheme of Thucydides' "tragic" historical perspective in the following terms: "Civilization is the creation of power and is splendid and admirable, but it inevitably ends in its own destruction, so much so that this destruction is virtually the measure of its greatness."<sup>18</sup> Parry suggests that Thucydides did not begin from this perspective but became convinced that "the greatness of historical events is measured by their power to destroy" only after experiencing the destruction of Athens.<sup>19</sup> Something like this may have indeed been true of Thucydides' intellectual development, but we can do little more than speculate based on the scanty evidence that we have on hand. What we can say for certain, however, is that Thucydides did not create this perspective *ex nihilo*, as Parry might be read to suggest.<sup>20</sup> Even if Thucydides embraced a sort of Sophistic optimism as a young man, he would have been steeped in this heroic worldview from his birth. The adoption of his mature perspective would have represented a return of sorts, a reinvention of something he had always known, not a departure into wholly uncharted waters.

Parry's identification of Thucydides as a "tragic" thinker brings us to the final major critical debate into which this dissertation intervenes. For over a century, a fault line has existed in Thucydidean studies between those who see the Athenian as the first social scientist of the Western tradition and those who see him as a tragic historian indebted to archaic modes of thought. This debate can be traced back to Francis Cornford's 1907 book, *Thucydides Mythistoricus*, which argued that Thucydides' narrative conformed to an Aeschylean arc of *hybris*-driven reversal that was rooted in a pre-scientific and supernaturally-driven theory of historical explanation. Cornford's book was quickly rejected by defenders of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century orthodoxy—that is, the proponents of the scientific Thucydides—and many of his arguments continue to be dismissed as eccentric.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, the tragic characterization of Thucydides has steadily grown in prominence during the intervening century as scholars have developed a more nuanced appreciation of the artfulness of Thucydides' narrative technique, his deep indebtedness to Greek poetic traditions, and his pessimism concerning the capacity of abstract theory to guide political action effectively.<sup>22</sup> Against the traditional identification of Thucydides as the first "scientific historian" of the Western tradition, the thesis that he was instead the first tragic critic of scientific reductionism has risen to prominence.

Prominence has not meant consensus, however, and there remain dedicated defenders of

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<sup>18</sup> Parry 1972: 55.

<sup>19</sup> Parry 1972: 51.

<sup>20</sup> Parry 1972: 50-51, 55.

<sup>21</sup> Cochrane (1929) offered the most forceful and influential rejection of Cornford's book in the decades following its appearance. See also Stahl (2003 [1966]: esp. 14) for a critical account that benefits from nearly fifty years of scholarly reaction to Cornford's thesis.

<sup>22</sup> E.g. Stahl 2003 [1966]; Parry 1972; de Romilly 1977; Macleod 1983; Euben 1990: Ch. 6; Bedford and Workman 2001; Lebow 2003: Ch. 4; Balot 2015: 23-26.

the scientific Thucydides. Josiah Ober, for instance, has recently argued that Thucydides was the first “political scientist” of the Western tradition, and likens his explanatory perspective to that of some modern social scientists.<sup>23</sup> According to this reinvention of the old orthodoxy, Thucydides broke decisively with the Greek literary tradition in writing his text and offered a radical new way of thinking and speaking about politics. For Ober and others who pursue a similar line, to identify Thucydides with tragic modes of explanation is not only to fundamentally misunderstand his intention, it is to ignore his most important contribution to thinking about politics.

The scholarly literature is thus dominated by two very different thinkers that go by the name of Thucydides, a scientist and a tragedian, and by two scholarly camps set in polemical opposition to one another. This dissertation will demonstrate that such division is neither necessary nor justified. The division arises out of the widespread but false assumption that tragic and scientific explanatory modes are fundamentally incompatible, forcing scholars into thinking that they must choose one side or the other. This interpretive misstep is encouraged and compounded by ahistorical understandings of tragedy and science as they pertain to Thucydides’ political thought. Political theorists who have identified Thucydides with tragic explanation, in particular, have done so without great historical or textual rigor. Often, the understanding of tragic explanation applied to Thucydidean thought is stipulative and formulaic, resulting in a superficial account of Thucydides’ engagement with the tragic tradition. On the other hand, those classicists who have investigated Thucydides’ relationship to tragedy with greater rigor have tended to lose the forest for the trees, limiting their focus to specific features of Thucydides’ narrative technique and prose style, setting aside larger questions about Thucydides’ explanatory perspective.

There is too much compelling evidence that Thucydides engaged with both modes of explanation to make the denial of either persuasive. The belief that tragic and scientific explanation are incompatible is not only unwarranted, it occludes Thucydides’ central contribution to thinking about political explanation. As Chapter 5 of this dissertation will demonstrate, Thucydides engaged in a complex combination of tragic and scientific explanatory modes, in effect reinventing the tragic tradition of *hybris*-driven reversal by grounding it in a naturalistic conception of causation borrowed from Greek scientific thought. The result was a unique kind of inquiry into democratic politics that helpfully challenges modern preconceptions about what constitutes explanation in political science. It was this vision that afforded Thucydides his unique understanding of the essential features of Athenian imperial democracy and the political arrangements that were necessary for it to achieve the heights that it did.

This dissertation proceeds in two parts. Part I, “Athens as a Hero,” looks at the ways in which Thucydides constructs Athens as a heroic entity in the first book of his text. In this part, Athens is predominantly considered as a unitary agent, and questions of the internal organization of the hero are suppressed, as they are in Thucydides’ Book I. The first chapter treats Thucydides’ Archaeology in depth. It argues that this opening digression on the development of

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<sup>23</sup> Ober 2006; 2010; Ober and Perry 2014; cf. Ober 2001. See also Doyle 1990; Tritle 2006.

power in Greece develops a systematic contrast between Athens and Sparta along the lines of a traditional antithesis between autocratic and egalitarian forms of rule. Thucydides establishes Athens as the latest iteration of a Greek autocratic tradition including Greek tyranny and heroic kingship, thus subverting the customary use of this antithesis to characterize Athens as the egalitarian antitype of autocratic rule, especially that of the Persian King. In opposition to Athens, Sparta is identified as the exemplar of egalitarian rule. The next chapter carries the construction of Athens as an autocratic city forward into the speeches and narrative of Book I. It tracks the ways in which Athens is presented by the Corinthians, the Athenian envoys at Sparta, Pericles, and Thucydides according to the heroic pattern of aggressive expansionism and the tyrannical pattern of passive conservatism developed in the *Archaeology*. Much of this chapter focuses on the first speech of Pericles, attending to the subtle ways in which he utilizes and modifies heroic patterns of thought to construct his war policy. It argues for a novel interpretation of Pericles' first speech and war policy as a careful negotiation between the demands of heroic greatness and of tyrannical conservatism.

Part II of the dissertation, "The Hero as a Democracy," looks at how Thucydides complicates the construction of Athens as a hero in the first half of Book II by considering the internal governance of the city. In particular, it explores the way that democratic deliberation adds a further level of complexity to thinking about the judgment and behavior of the hero. The first chapter of this part looks carefully at the way in which Periclean leadership is presented as both a solution to the potentially problematic existence of equality in the deliberative sphere and as a problem for the democratic status of Athenian government. By offering a close reading of key passages in Pericles' Funeral Oration, this chapter argues that the statesman offers a novel interpretation of democracy as an intricate balance between popular, egalitarian, and autocratic spheres of governance. This is a vision that Thucydides will eventually endorse in a qualified way, at once recognizing the crucial role that Pericles' quasi-autocratic leadership played in stabilizing the democratic hero and the fragility of Pericles' vision in the absence of a superlative leader such as himself. The final substantive chapter of the dissertation focuses on Thucydides' analysis of the dynamics of Athenian reversal after the death of Pericles. It considers Thucydides' account of the post-Periclean turn within the tradition of thinking about the *hybris*-driven reversal of heroic autocrats, arguing that Thucydides sought both to utilize and reinvent this pattern of explanation in his own analysis. In a characteristically subversive move, Thucydides demonstrates that equality among leaders in the deliberative sphere, rather than being the antidote to the onset of *hybris* in the democratic hero, is the direct cause of its hybridistic policy. The quasi-autocratic leadership of Pericles is instead identified as the cornerstone of moderation and stability. In addition to developing this interpretation of Thucydides' analysis of Athenian decline, this chapter uses it as a starting point for thinking about Thucydides' larger negotiation between tragic and scientific explanatory modes. In the dissertation's conclusion, some implications of this analysis for the rest of Thucydides' text will be briefly considered, as will a few lessons we might draw for thinking about democracy in the twenty-first century in light of Thucydides' analysis.



Part I:

Athens as a Hero

## Chapter 2: Equality, Autocracy, and Athens: The Archaeology

Dionysius of Halicarnassus, one of Thucydides' first and most unforgiving critics, had little time for the Archaeology.<sup>1</sup> His complaints were many: the Archaeology was exaggerated and untrue, he thought; it was far too long; and, by suggesting that the Trojan and Persian wars did not live up to their reputation, it was disparaging and unpatriotic.<sup>2</sup> But most damning for Dionysius, ever the literary formalist, was that the Archaeology did not perform the function that an introduction was supposed to perform. The writers of rhetorical handbooks had been clear on this point: the introduction was supposed to anticipate and sketch out the later arguments of the work.<sup>3</sup> This, Dionysius argued, the Archaeology did not do. It was instead "a sort of history in and of itself," a digression that stood apart from the rest of the work and did not introduce it.<sup>4</sup>

Dionysius proposed a severe corrective: to excise the Archaeology from the text entirely, thereby skipping from 1.1.3 to 1.20.1. Few have endorsed Dionysius' solution, but many have shared his dissatisfaction. The Archaeology is crowded with arguments, observations, and ideas about the development of Greek civilization that seem irrelevant for Thucydides' account of the Peloponnesian War, interesting though they may be in their own right. Focusing on one of the more bizarre examples, Dionysius asks pointedly, "Why was it necessary to tell of the luxury that the Athenians practiced in the old days, that they tied their hair into knots and wore golden cicadas on their heads? And that the Lacedaemonians 'were the first to be stripped naked during athletic competition and to anoint themselves with olive oil when nude'?"<sup>5</sup> It is a fair question, and one that has puzzled modern scholars as well.<sup>6</sup> It is a question that should not just be asked rhetorically, however, as Dionysius has, with an eye towards rejecting what may at first appear absurd in Thucydides. Rather, it should be asked in the spirit of interpretive charity, in the hope

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<sup>1</sup> Dionysius of Halicarnassus was a historian, literary critic, and professional teacher of rhetoric in Augustan Rome. For an excellent translation and commentary of his essay on Thucydides, see Pritchett 1975. For a more comprehensive treatment of Dionysius' life and work, see de Jonge, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> *On Thucydides* 19. For more extensive criticism of Thucydides for his (supposed) lack of patriotism, see *Letter to Gnaeus Pompeius* 3.

<sup>3</sup> *On Thucydides* 19. Cf. Aristotle *Rhetoric* 3.14.6.

<sup>4</sup> *On Thucydides* 19.

<sup>5</sup> *On Thucydides* 19, quoting Thucydides at 1.6.5.

<sup>6</sup> Hornblower (1991, 25) simply notes that "this chapter is remarkable for giving space to topics usually neglected by [Thucydides]," who "normally shows little visual sense...or interest in athletics." More recently, there have been three accounts of this contrast that have attempted to tease out the internal logic of the passage and place it within larger readings of the Archaeology. Ludwig (2002: Ch. 6) reads the episode not so much as a contrast between sartorial habits as a progression in the development of trust within Greek *poleis*. Foster (2010: 23-26) focuses on the way in which the passage juxtaposes the material objects of peace with surrounding discussions of the piratical and imperial objects of war. Jaffe (2017: 148-52), who comes closest to the reading developed here, focuses on the manner in which the passage anticipates Thucydides' later characterological contrast between the Athenians and Spartans developed throughout Book I. Each of these studies has something to offer in the way of interpretive insight, but they are collectively limited by their commitment to textualist interpretive practices. This chapter will demonstrate that an appreciation of the passage's engagement with fifth-century political and anthropological stereotypes is crucial for arriving at a more robust account of its contribution to the larger project of the Archaeology.

of understanding how the Archaeology may after all function as an effective introduction to Thucydides' account of the Peloponnesian War. Such an understanding will surely offer a more satisfying interpretation of the Archaeology. It may also serve as the foundation for a more plausible interpretation of the work to which it serves as a prologue.

This interpretive puzzle may be thought irrelevant for those interested in Thucydidean political thought, preceding as it does all of the abstract discussion of justice, democracy, and power that have attracted political theorists to Thucydides' text. On the contrary, the Archaeology is the purest and most elaborated instance of Thucydides the political theorist at work.<sup>7</sup> The observable facts of the Greek past were few and far from obvious in their signification. To make sense of this past, Thucydides needed to project backward a vision of political power that could not be empirically derived from the evidence on hand. Rather, it was derived from the theories that he had developed while contemplating the workings of political power in his own day, and these were the same theories that informed the analyses he provided throughout the rest of his text.<sup>8</sup> The Archaeology thus distills for us Thucydides' theoretical vision with unparalleled immediacy, making it a crucial starting point for any work on Thucydidean political thought.

Scholars who have recognized the theoretical importance of the Archaeology such as Jacqueline de Romilly and Josiah Ober have made significant progress in elaborating the theory of power expressed therein.<sup>9</sup> There is, however, more to the Archaeology than either has suggested. De Romilly and Ober, like many others, have focused their attention on just one of its major themes: the development of sea power.<sup>10</sup> But this continues to neglect significant portions of the Archaeology. For instance, it offers no help in explaining why such things as the difference between Athens and Spartans in their manners of dress merits mention. To grasp this, we have to look beyond sea power to recognize the basic structural contrast being drawn between Athens and Sparta as fundamentally different types of regimes built on different forms of power and different cultural practices.

That the Archaeology develops a contrast between Athens and Sparta is no great revelation, for this is a major theme throughout the work.<sup>11</sup> However, the Archaeology does not merely gesture at this antithesis, as many commentators have supposed.<sup>12</sup> It also teaches the

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Farrar 1988: 138-39.

<sup>8</sup> M.I. Finley (1975: 18) makes this point powerfully: "[Thucydides] had nothing to go on other than Homer and other 'old poets', tradition, contemporary evidence, and a very powerful and disciplined mind. The result is a sweeping theory...derived from prolonged meditation about the world in which Thucydides lived, not from a study of history." See also Parry 1972: 48-51.

<sup>9</sup> De Romilly 1956; Ober 2001. Both will be discussed in greater depth below.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Hornblower 1991: 3, 8.

<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, the development of this contrast in the Archaeology has been overlooked by many of those commentators prone to see the contrast between Athens as Sparta as a major theme of Thucydides' text. See, for instance, Orwin 1994: 30-32.

<sup>12</sup> Hornblower (1991: 8) notes this contrast in passing. Allison (2013: 258-61) identifies the passages where Athens and Sparta/Sparta's allies are structurally opposed to one another, but offers little in the way of analysis. Jaffe (2017: 139-159) is a rare exception, as he identifies the contrast between Athens and Sparta to be a central feature of the Archaeology. His account is hindered, however, as many accounts of the Archaeology are, by its practice of

reader something fundamental about Thucydides' understanding of it. Thucydides constructs the relationship between Athens and Sparta in the Archaeology according to a commonplace fifth-century conception of the two basic regime types: autocratic rule and egalitarian association. Unexpectedly, it is Athens that Thucydides identifies as the most advanced member of a Greek autocratic tradition stretching back to the heroic figures of Minos and Agamemnon. He presents Sparta, on the other hand, as the exemplar of egalitarian political community, an altogether new political phenomenon in the Greek world. By figuring these two powers in this way, Thucydides challenges the belief that democratic Athens was characterized by its equality and opposition to autocratic rule, a traditional piety of democratic ideology. At the same time, however, he establishes a direct line of continuity between the Athenian democracy and the heroes of the Greek past, bridging the gap between the age of demigods and the age of men. In this way, Thucydides is able to convey to his reader not only that the Peloponnesian War was greater than the wars immortalized in Homer's *Iliad* and Herodotus' *Histories*, but that the Athenian democracy was greater than any hero born of Zeus.

The claim that Athenian democracy might be conceived of as a subspecies of autocratic rule will ring of paradox. In modern thought, equality and democracy are considered to be conceptually inextricable, and a strong connection between the two was similarly understood in fifth-century political thought. The strength of this connection was such that Herodotus could use equality-words such as *isonomia*, *isêgoria*, and *isokratia* to stand in for *dêmokratia* in his text.<sup>13</sup> But the precise meaning of *dêmokratia* appears vague and fluctuating in the decades after it enters into the literary record, and it did not hold a monopoly on the use of equality-words to describe it. *Isonomia*, for instance, could be used of any regime that eschewed autocratic rule for an association of equal citizens, thereby describing either an oligarchic or a democratic regime.<sup>14</sup> Thucydides' original readers might not therefore have been as incredulous as modern readers at the identification of Spartan oligarchy with egalitarian rule. But the identification of Athenian democracy with autocratic rule, rather than in opposition to it, was a direct challenge to popularly held Athenian beliefs.

To demonstrate that Thucydides did in fact pose such a challenge will require a careful consideration of his rendering of Athens and Sparta in the Archaeology. Before this, however, a discussion of the fifth-century context is necessary to set the stage for the subtle allusions Thucydides will use to characterize Athens and Sparta and the general intellectual materials with which he built the contrast between the two. Thucydides' original Athenian audience would have been accustomed to the sophisticated use of such allusion and deeply familiar with the

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identifying themes from later in Book I and reading them back into the opening digression, and by its neglect of Thucydides' fifth-century context.

<sup>13</sup> 3.80.6, 5.78.1, 5.92a.1.

<sup>14</sup> Thucydides' Thebans, for instance, describe their regime as *oligarchian isonomon* at 3.62.3. It is also a point of enduring debate whether the use of *isonomous* in an Athenian drinking song from the late-sixth century or early-fifth century refers to aristocratic or democratic *isonomia*. See, for instance, Ehrenberg 1946: 89; Vlastos 1953: 389-344; Hornblower 1991: 456.

phenomena being alluded to.<sup>15</sup> For a modern reader, however, these associations are easily missed, requiring a sketch of the relevant background if they are once again to be appreciated.

### *Equality and Autocracy in the Fifth Century*

During the fifth-century, the tripartite division of regime types—democracy, oligarchy, monarchy—had yet to become a standard feature of Greek political thought.<sup>16</sup> Though in the later tradition of political theory this will be seen as *the* Greek understanding of political regimes, fifth-century thinkers made sense of the possibilities of political organization according to a schema that was at once cruder and more elaborate than the tripartite division.<sup>17</sup> It was cruder in that it focused on a single polarity between autocratic rule and free, egalitarian association. It was more elaborate in that this polarity was not conceived of only as a difference in abstract political systems, but as part of a much larger contrast between two fundamentally different cultural systems. In addition to political institutions, these cultural systems differed in their attitudes towards material consumption, warfare, honor, and much else. Only by the final decades of the fifth century was this ethnological polarity reduced in certain contexts to the abstract consideration of political systems, but, even then, it continued to bear the cultural allusions that these systems evoked, even if only implicitly.

The polarity between autocratic and egalitarian cultures came to predominate Greek thinking in the wake of the Persian invasions, and for a time autocratic culture was firmly associated with stereotypes of eastern barbarism despite the rich recent history of Greek tyranny.<sup>18</sup> Appropriately, the first surviving literary work to rely heavily on this intellectual polarity was Aeschylus' *Persians*.<sup>19</sup> Produced for the Athenian stage just eight years after Xerxes' invasion, the tragedy develops a multifaceted contrast between the autocratic invaders and the egalitarian Greeks. The most explicit moment in this contrast occurs in a short dialogue between Queen Atossa, Xerxes mother, and a Persian elder. As Simon Goldhill has argued, this dialogue highlights differences between the Athenians and Persians in their form of political rule, their manner of warfare, and the nature and use of their wealth, each time reinforcing a polarity between the Persian prioritization of individuals and the Athenian prioritization of the

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<sup>15</sup> For a similar point, see Raaflaub 2003: 72.

<sup>16</sup> It has been argued by some (e.g. Mitchell 2008: 3-4) that the tripartite schema of regimes was customary from the early fifth century. The only evidence to support this comes from Pindar *Pythian* 2.81-88, a passage that is suggestive but ultimately ambiguous. To conclude from these few lines alone that, "From the early fifth century, Greek political theorising was based on the premise that there were three constitutional forms" (Mitchell 2008: 3) overstates the evidence by teleologically interpreting Pindar's characteristically obscure lines. The first clear statement of this tripartite schema will not appear in the literary tradition until Herodotus, some forty to fifty years after the likely compositional date of *Pythian* 2. For the dating of Pindar's ode to c. 470, see Burton 1962: 113-15.

<sup>17</sup> The identification of the tripartite division as the Greek understanding of political regimes emerges in the early modern period, but it remains in use even by some scholars of classical political thought. See, for instance, Ober 2008: 3-4.

<sup>18</sup> Momigliano 1975: 129-32; Hall 1989: 56-69; 1997: 44-46; Cartledge 1993: 13, 38-39; Georges 1994: 245.

<sup>19</sup> See especially Goldhill 1988; Hall 1989: 56-100. Cf. Gruen (2011: 9-21), who helpfully warns against reading *Persians* as an obvious celebration of the superiority of Greek institutions over those of the Persians, but pushes his corresponding denial of Persian "otherness" beyond the point of being convincing.

collective.<sup>20</sup> The queen assumes that the Athenians will be governed autocratically, as the Persians are, asking of the elder, “What shepherd watches over them and lords over their army?”<sup>21</sup> In response, the Persian elder replies, “Of no man are they called the slaves or subjects,” underlining the free and equal manner of Athenian political organization.<sup>22</sup> The queen also assumes that the Athenians will be archers, the stereotypical Persian form of warfare, and her expectations are again confounded. The elder explains that the Athenians fight with spear and shield; that is, they fight in a phalanx, a collective unit that required the equal cooperation of all members to succeed, unlike the individualistic (and, according to democratic ideology, cowardly) archer.<sup>23</sup> The queen also inquires about Athenian wealth. Though here she does not explicitly allude to the Persian side of the polarity, the private wealth of the royal house is reiterated throughout the play, and special attention is drawn to the king’s affinity for gold.<sup>24</sup> When the elder responds to the queen’s query, however, he comments on the Athenians’ wealth of silver, an allusion to the mines that provided money for the construction of the democracy’s navy. In contrast to the royals’ use of gold for private aggrandizement, the suggestion is thus of collectively owned wealth used for public benefit.<sup>25</sup>

Aeschylus also develops the contrast between the Athenians and the Persians outside of the dialogue between queen and elder. Earlier in the drama, the queen notes that, should Xerxes be unsuccessful in his invasion, there will be no way for the Persians to hold him accountable for his failure. As king, he will be *ouch hupeuthunos polei*, “unaccountable to the city.”<sup>26</sup> Formulated in this way, the unchecked nature of Xerxes’ rule strikes a sharp contrast with the Athenian practice of conducting annual *euthunai* for their magistrates, public reviews that prescribed punishment for misbehavior.<sup>27</sup> There is also an important difference in the way that Aeschylus identifies the Persians and Greeks in the drama. While there are multiple catalogues of individual Persians, no individual Greek is ever named, and the only city named is Athens.<sup>28</sup> A contrast is thus implied between a Persian army of individuals presided over by a single man and the collective effort of a Greek navy constituted by equally anonymous citizens.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Goldhill 1988.

<sup>21</sup> *Persians* l. 241. As Goldhill (1988: 191) notes, the diction of this question is interesting. Shepherd (*poimanôr*) makes explicit reference to a characteristic Homeric formula for ruler (“shepherd of the people,” *poimena laôn*), while “lords over” (*epidespozein*), though a *hapax*, is strongly suggestive of archaic tyranny.

<sup>22</sup> *Persians* l. 242.

<sup>23</sup> Consider, for instance, the comments of Lycus in Euripides’ *Heracles* (ll. 162-64): “The bow is no proof of manly courage; // no, your real man stands firm in the ranks // and dares to face the gash the spear may make” (trans. Arrowsmith, 3rd edition). See also: Sophocles *Ajax* 1120-22. For a discussion of equality and cooperation in relation to the hoplite phalanx, see Goldhill 1987: 65. Cf. Hall 1989: 85-86.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, the repetition of *poluchrusos* (“rich in gold”) at the start of the play: ll. 3, 9, 45, 53.

<sup>25</sup> *Persians* l. 240. On this point, see Goldhill 1988: 190-91.

<sup>26</sup> *Persians* l. 213.

<sup>27</sup> Herodotus (3.80.3) emphasizes unaccountability as the characteristic condition the monarch in his Persian Debate. For the implied contrast with Athenian procedure in this passage, see: Goldhill 1988: 191; Hall 1989: 97-98. For a more general consideration of Athenian democracy, autocratic government, and unaccountability in the fifth century, see Hoekstra 2016.

<sup>28</sup> *Persians* ll. 12-58, 302-29, 950-1001.

<sup>29</sup> For a defense of this interpretation of Greek anonymity and a summary of other possible interpretations, see Goldhill 1988: 192-93.

Though it is the classic example of the fifth-century polarity between egalitarian Greeks and autocratic barbarians, *Persians* is not the only Athenian tragedy to feature this construct. As Edith Hall notes, “Barbarian tyranny became a rhetorical topos in the repertoire of the tragic poets,” as did the contrast of these tyrants with those Greek kings who were artfully figured as fifth-century democratic leaders rather than despotic rulers.<sup>30</sup> In Aeschylus’ *Suppliant Women*, for instance, the Argive king Pelasgus underlines the necessity of a popular vote when determining Argive policy, contesting the assumption of the Egyptian chorus that he can make policy unilaterally.<sup>31</sup> Later, when a band of Egyptian warriors arrives to take the chorus as their property, Pelasgus stands by the collective decision to offer the chorus protection, refusing to yield to the imperious demands of the warriors’ herald.<sup>32</sup>

The antithesis between autocratic and egalitarian regimes, and the assumption that this political difference mapped onto a general ethnological difference between Greeks and non-Greeks, extended beyond Athenian tragedy. The prevalence of the antithesis across literary genres suggests that it was a fundamental feature of the way that many fifth-century Greeks understood and explained the world that they lived in. In the Hippocratic treatise *Airs, Waters, Places*, for instance, we find reference to a similar antithesis in an attempt to account for the perceived difference in physical and mental constitution of Asian and European peoples.<sup>33</sup> The author suggests that autocratic institutions were in part to blame for Asian timidity and cowardice: “For wherever men are ruled by kings, there they must be the greatest cowards . . . For their spirits are enslaved and they are unwilling to take risks voluntarily and boldly for the sake of another’s power.”<sup>34</sup> In contrast, European courage could be traced to the autonomy that egalitarian institutions provided: “Whoever is self-governing—since they undertake risks for their own sake and not that of another—shows a ready willingness and faces formidable danger. For they themselves bear the prizes of victory.”<sup>35</sup> This account involves gross generalizations about the difference between European and Asian peoples—that Asians were cowards, that Asian political systems were autocracies; that Europeans were brave, that European political systems were egalitarian.<sup>36</sup> The very crudeness of this explanation, however, is revealing. It demonstrates how eager some fifth-century Greeks were to organize the world according to this polarity, even when the observable facts of the matter did not support such a tidy dichotomy.

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<sup>30</sup> Hall 1989: 154.

<sup>31</sup> *Suppliant Women* ll. 365-401. See also ll. 601, 604, 942-3. These passages have been the subject of much debate among scholars of Athenian tragedy on account of their “anachronistic” references to democratic practices. Cf. Easterling 1985; West 2006.

<sup>32</sup> *Suppliant Women* ll. 909-49.

<sup>33</sup> As with all the treatise of the Hippocratic Corpus, there are many questions surrounding the authorship and precise date of this work. The general consensus, however, is that this is a work of the later-half of the fifth century (Jouanna 1999: 375; Craik 2015: 11). On the shift from “Greeks” and “Barbarians” to “Europeans” and “Asians”, see Rosalind Thomas (2000: 86-98), who interprets this as an Ionian-centric strategy for dealing with the different historical relationships of the Greeks of Asia Minor and the European Greeks with Persia.

<sup>34</sup> *Airs, Waters, Places* 23.33-36.

<sup>35</sup> *Airs, Waters, Places* 23.37-40.

<sup>36</sup> The author notes earlier in the text (16.5), for instance, that there are Greeks and barbarians who live in Asia who do not conform to this pattern.

Herodotus further reinforces this point. Though a more nuanced political thinker than the writer of *Airs, Waters, Places*, the basic distinction between egalitarian Greeks and autocratic barbarians plays a central structuring role in his *Histories*. This polarity comes to the fore in episodes such as Solon's visit to Croesus' court and the conversation between Xerxes and the Spartan Demaratus, both of which pit notable Greeks against eastern autocrats in contentious discussions over the relative merits of egalitarian and autocratic ways of living.<sup>37</sup> More subtly, the antithesis is also present in his ethnographic investigations of various peoples, though Herodotus frequently problematizes the sufficiency of the contrast between Greek and barbarian as a causal explanation for political systems and military outcomes.<sup>38</sup> As we will shortly see, Herodotus also complicated the simple political binary between autocratic and egalitarian political regimes, though he does so without fully setting it aside.

If the political binary of autocratic rule and egalitarian association began as part of a larger ethnological polarity structuring Greek (and especially Athenian) perception of their relationship to the Persians, by the final decades of the fifth century it could be extracted from this system and considered abstractly. Indeed, many of the first instances of what we would call political theory in ancient Greek literature appear as abstract articulations and problematizations of the autocracy-equality antithesis. One such instance occurs in Euripides' *Suppliant Women*, likely produced in the late 420s or early 410s, when a Theban herald and Theseus, the Athenian king, engage in a debate about the relative merits and deficiencies of autocracy and democracy.<sup>39</sup> This *agôn* is particularly interesting for two reasons. Though nominally about the difference between Athens and Thebes, each side presents a theoretical argument about the preferability of autocracy or democracy in general, not any particular instantiation of either. The autocratic argument is also untethered from any reference to non-Greeks, Persian or otherwise. It is instead voiced by a Theban, disembedding the autocracy-equality antithesis from any larger ethnological polarity, at least at the explicit level.<sup>40</sup> In short, Euripides' characters demonstrate that the autocracy-equality binary could be treated as a matter of theoretical speculation by the final decades of the fifth century, not simply as a post-war cultural stereotype.

We find a similar level of abstract argumentation removed from ethnology in Herodotus' Constitutional Debate, possibly written as late as the 420's, where the future constitution of the

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<sup>37</sup> For a brief statement of the ideological polarity at play between Solon and Croesus, see Kurke 2011: 136. For the Xerxes-Demaratus episode, see Redfield 1985: 115-16; Lateiner 1989: 160; Cartledge 1993: 61-62. Cf. Gruen 2011: 21-22.

<sup>38</sup> Thomas (2000: chs. 3-4) offers a careful account of the ways that Herodotus both relies on and reflects these binaries even as he problematizes them. Cf. Redfield (1985) and, more recently, Provencal (2015), who are more content to see an overriding need for symmetry in Herodotus' ethnography.

<sup>39</sup> *Suppliant Women* ll. 409-56. Theseus makes frequent and important use of the idea of equality in his defense of democracy. See ll. 408, 432, 434, 441. On the dating of the play, a good summary of the extensive scholarly debate is Morwood 2007: 26-30.

<sup>40</sup> Euripides may well have expected his audience to pick up on the allusion to eastern despotism implied by such an argument, thus compounding the association between Thebes and Persia that carried forward from the Thebans' choice to medize in the face of Xerxes' invasion. Even if this is so, the explicit connection between autocracy and eastern despotism has become attenuated, allowing the debate to be recast as an abstract one within a Greek context.



Persian government is at issue among three Persian elites.<sup>41</sup> At first glance, this debate appears to confound the simple polarity between autocratic rule and egalitarian association. The debate offers the seminal elaboration of the tripartite division of political regimes in ancient Greek political thought. However, careful attention to the argument of the first speaker, Otanes, indicates that the debate does not begin with this tripartite framework. Rather, it begins by assuming the traditional polarity between autocratic rule and egalitarian association. It is only with the intervention of the second speaker, Megabuzos, that the dialogue takes on a tripartite form.<sup>42</sup>

Otanes' speech consists of a case against autocratic rule (*mounarchon*) and a positive case for egalitarian rule (*isonomiên*). He suggests that autocracy was naturally productive of transgressive, hybristic rule, and thus it should be avoided at all costs.<sup>43</sup> To do so, Otanes suggests, one must allow a multitude (*to plêthos*) to govern. Such a regime, he argues, will hold its magistrates accountable and make policy publicly, thus removing the structural conditions causing transgressive rule.<sup>44</sup> Working within the assumptions of the simple polarity between autocratic rule and egalitarian association, Otanes posits an exhaustive opposition between the rule of one and the rule of many. Otanes shows no awareness that multiplicity admits of different scopes, or that a multitude might itself rule autocratically. Rather, he assumed that there is but a single alternative to the autocratic rule of one: the rule of many. So he concludes, "I suggest that we dispense with one-man rule and exalt the multitude (*to plêthos*), for in multiplicity is everything (*en gar tô pollô eni ta panta*)."<sup>45</sup>

The next speaker, Megabuzos, exploits Otanes' failure to see that multiplicity might take different forms. Megabuzos agrees with Otanes' critique of autocratic rule, and he agrees that there must not be a single ruler. But he argues that this corrective need not mean rule of all.<sup>46</sup> Rather, it might mean rule of some, namely, rule of the best, sidestepping problems that would inevitably arise (he argues) when allowing the uneducated majority to partake in the making of policy.<sup>47</sup> In introducing this third option, it may seem that Megabuzos is challenging the adequacy of the autocracy-equality polarity and thus introducing into Greek political thought an altogether different framework for thinking about political regimes. In a sense this is true, but it

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<sup>41</sup> *Histories* 3.80-82. The exact date for when this passage's composition is a vexed question for at least two different reasons. First, the dating of Herodotus' writing itself is unclear. At best, it seems that we can establish that much of the text that we have seems to have been in place by around 430 BCE or soon after it (see Asheri *et al.* 2007: 51). This passage could have been written at this point or at some other in the preceding decades. The second problem concerns the fidelity of Herodotus' account to historical reality. It is much debated whether such a Constitutional Debate as Herodotus describes ever took place and, if it did, whether Herodotus' speeches are historically accurate representations of what was said (see Asheri *et al.* 2007: 471-72). This study assumes that, whatever the historical basis of these speeches, the specific words and pattern of argumentation that appear are Herodotus' own.

<sup>42</sup> This is a point overlooked by most scholarly treatments of the Constitutional Debate. See, for instance, Lateiner 1989: 167-70; Asheri *et al.* 2007: 471-72; Gruen 2011: 24-25.

<sup>43</sup> *Histories* 3.80.2-5.

<sup>44</sup> *Histories* 3.80.6.

<sup>45</sup> *Histories* 3.80.6.

<sup>46</sup> *Histories* 3.81.1.

<sup>47</sup> *Histories* 2.81.2-3.

may also overstate the case. Megabuzos' argument appears to accept the basic framework of the polarity between equality and autocracy while nevertheless adding to it a further binary on the side of equality, that between equality of all and equality of some. Democracy and oligarchy thus share a structural dissimilarity to autocracy even as they are themselves distinct from one another on different grounds.

The theoretical innovation introduced in the Persian Debate maps onto Herodotus' narrative presentation of the Persian Wars in an important way. While the ethnological binary of Greek and non-Greek, and especially Persian, does important work in Herodotus' narrative, so too does the difference between Athens and Sparta. These two cities are shown to have importantly different political conventions, different deliberative styles and tendencies, and different foundations for their military might. They exemplify the rule of all and the rule of some for Herodotus, depicting the different possibilities that egalitarian government allows. These differences, however, make neither any less Greek than the other, nor any less opposed to the autocratic Persians (at least in the period Herodotus is describing).<sup>48</sup>

Before turning to the Archaeology, it is worth noting that the polarity between autocratic rule and egalitarian association makes a number of appearances in the later books of Thucydides' text. The most theoretically sophisticated of these comes in the Thebans' attempt to dissociate themselves from their medizing forbearers and save face before the Spartans. The Theban speaker draws a sharp line between their present and former regimes by placing each on different sides of the equality-autocracy antithesis: "For our city was not then [i.e. when it medized] being governed according to oligarchy with legal equality (*oligarchian isonomon*) or democracy, but by that very thing which is most opposite to laws and the greatest self-control, but closest to tyranny, as affairs were managed by the absolute rule (*dunasteia*) of a few men."<sup>49</sup> Cutting through the middle of the tripartite scheme of democracy, oligarchy, and monarchy, the Thebans assert a fundamental difference between the form of oligarchy which they practice and that which was practiced by their forbearers. It is a striking move, in part because it may not appear entirely necessary. The fact that any regime change occurred gives the Thebans leverage to disclaim responsibility for the actions of their ancestors during the Persian Wars.<sup>50</sup> The Thebans, however, appear insecure whether their audience will accept the move from one form of oligarchy to another as a genuine instance of regime change. To make their case, the Thebans therefore assert the primacy of the equality-autocracy polarity over the tripartite scheme of democracy, oligarchy, and monarchy. By doing so, the Thebans are able to suggest that their present regime is less akin to their previous oligarchy than it is to a democracy, sharing as it does with this latter regime a commitment to legal equality that the former lacked. Conversely, the Thebans characterize their former regime in the language of autocracy, calling it a "*dunasteia* of a few men." *Dunasteia* is a somewhat vague term used to describe absolute, hereditary rule,

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<sup>48</sup> However, there do appear to be strong parallels between Herodotus' Persians and the Athenians at the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War, the time period when Herodotus was probably finalizing his text. On these parallels and other historical resonances, see Raaflaub 1987.

<sup>49</sup> 3.62.3.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Aristotle *Politics* 1276a7-1276b15.

often suggesting in Thucydides' text a species of rule exemplified by tyranny but extending beyond it to include dynastic oligarchies as well.<sup>51</sup> Thus the Thebans assert that their former regime was "closest to tyranny," safely establishing it as a categorically different regime from isonomic oligarchy and thereby exonerating themselves from their ancestors' misdeeds.

The Thebans assertion of this contrast is also striking for the way that it utilizes and extends the intellectual framework invoked in Herodotus' Persian Constitutional Debate. Like Herodotus' Megabuzos, the Thebans accept the basic structural opposition of democracy and isonomic oligarchy to autocratic rule. At the same time, however, they insist that autocratic rule, like isonomic rule, admits of a further dichotomy between the absolute rule of one and of a few. The Thebans thus reintroduce a symmetry to the equality/autocracy polarity that Herodotus' debate had lost, but it comes at the cost of the tripartite schema. In the Thebans' theoretical vision, the rule of one, few, and many no longer maps neatly onto the polarity between equality and autocracy, and the scope of the ruling group is demoted to a secondary consideration when classifying regime types.

A second instance of the polarity occurs in Alcibiades' speech to the Spartans after his exile from Athens. In an attempt to defend his family's long history of democratic leadership, he states, "We have always stood against the tyrants--and everything opposed to an absolute ruler (*toi dunasteuonti*) is called the people (*dêmos*)--wherefore the leadership of the multitude (*tou plêthous*) remained with us."<sup>52</sup> Like the Thebans, Alcibiades deploys the polarity in an attempt to excuse himself from blame and ingratiate himself to his audience. In contrast to the Thebans, however, it is in Alcibiades' interest to insist on the crudeness of this antithesis rather than to draw further complexities into it. By asserting that "everything opposed to an absolute ruler (*toi dunasteuonti*) is called the people (*dêmos*)," Alcibiades makes use of a shared antipathy to tyranny to assert the fundamental similarity between his (former) allegiances and those of his audience. By suppressing the difference between oligarchy and democracy and placing all enemies of autocracy into a single camp, Alcibiades and the Spartans become allies rather than opponents. Alcibiades' effort to establish similarity between himself and his audience is compounded by the canny elevation of *dêmos* over equality as the consequential term opposed to tyrannical rule. As a consequence of this redescription, Alcibiades leaves the Spartans no position from which to think ill of him for leading the *dêmokratia*, for they too emerge as proponents of the *dêmos* and its rule.

The speeches of the Thebans and Alcibiades demonstrate that Thucydides was keenly aware of the polarity between equality and autocracy and its potential for rhetorical exploitation and manipulation. They are not sufficient, however, to prove that Thucydides himself believed in the explanatory purchase of the polarity in any of its forms. Such evidence can be found, however, in Thucydides' discussion of the political factors that made possible Brasidas' movement through Thessaly on his way to Thrace. Noting that the popular elements of Thessaly

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<sup>51</sup> Cf. 4.78.3, 4.126.2, 6.38.3. The close association with tyranny is more pronounced in Thucydides' use of the related verb form, *dunsteuô*: 2.102.6, 6.89.4.

<sup>52</sup> 6.89.4.

were favorable to the Athenians, Thucydides explains that, “If it was not the custom for the Thessalians to be governed by absolute rule (*dunasteiai*) rather than egalitarian association (*isonomiai*), he never would have advanced.”<sup>53</sup> Here we find Thucydides utilize the basic distinction between *dunasteia* and *isonomia* as part of his explanatory toolkit. Like Euripides, Thucydides’ use of the conceptual scheme shows no signs of the larger ethnological system in which it was intimately bound up in the immediate aftermath of the Persian Wars. This passage implies that Thucydides believed that the basic polarity between egalitarian and autocratic rule retained its explanatory power within an entirely Greek context and could be used to arrive at a deeper understanding of the course that the Peloponnesian War took. The greatest indication of this, however, comes not from Book IV, but from the first pages of his text.

### *Power and the Archaeology*

In turning to the Archaeology, it is useful to begin where scholars have thus far been most productive: the theory of power. Thucydides introduces the Archaeology as an attempt to substantiate the claim that war between Athens and Sparta saw “the greatest mobilization of force” ever among Greeks, therefore surpassing both the Trojan and Persian wars.<sup>54</sup> As Thucydides indicated in his opening sentence, greatness is to be considered primarily as a matter of military power, and this is to be measured in terms of the absolute level of military resources and the scope of cooperative action involved.<sup>55</sup> The Archaeology begins from an initial condition characterized by the lack of these constitutive components of power. By way of a genealogical narrative that is at once linear and periodic, Thucydides demonstrates that Greek power developed through successive eras culminating in his own, which saw both the greatest accumulation and development of material resources and the most extensive cooperation among the Greeks.<sup>56</sup>

The Archaeology’s opening sentence introduces the central concepts of his genealogical account by noting their initial absence:

For since there was no commerce, neither did they engage with one another without fear by land or by sea; each cultivated what was theirs so far as subsistence demanded and neither had surplus wealth nor cultivated the earth, it being unclear when someone else would come and rob them, since at the same time they also lacked walls; believing that they could gain control over the food required to live day by day anywhere, they

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<sup>53</sup> 4.78.3.

<sup>54</sup> 1.1.2-3. On the translation of *kinêsis megistê* as the “greatest mobilization of force” rather than “greatest movement” or “greatest disturbance,” see Rusten 2015.

<sup>55</sup> Thucydides identifies these two dimensions of power when justifying his belief that the war would be great and most worthy of account: “...judging that both [cities] were reaching their peak in all manner of military resources (*paraskeuê*) at that time and seeing that the rest of Greece was allying with one side or the other, some doing so immediately while others were intent upon it” (1.1.1).

<sup>56</sup> In the Archaeology, the progress of material resources (*paraskeuai*) proceeds according to a linear fashion. The scope of cooperative action, however, obeys a more cyclical development, reaching an initial apex in the Trojan War that is only once again approached (and surpassed) by the Persian Wars and the Peloponnesian War. See Parry 1972: 55ff.; cf. Foster 2010: Ch. 1.

migrated without difficulty, and on account of this they did not grow strong in either the size of their cities or in any other military preparation.<sup>57</sup>

Dionysius of Halicarnassus wrinkled his nose at the convoluted structure of this sentence, suggesting that Thucydides could have done without its sub-clauses.<sup>58</sup> But this list, however offensive it is to a delicate aesthetic sensibility, serves as an outline for the narrative to follow and an analytic framework for the theory driving it. The Archaeology will explain how it was that these isolated, nomadic people came to develop commerce, agriculture, walls, and the rest, incrementally increasing their power in the process.

Naval innovation acts as the catalyst for further Greek development in the Archaeology. Initially, maritime piracy encouraged the strong and the weak to work together on their raids, providing the first instance of sustained cooperation.<sup>59</sup> With Minoan thalassocracy, naval cooperation brings about significant advances in material resources. By clearing the sea of pirates, Minos fostered an increase in seaborne trade, thus increasing revenues for himself and others, and brought about the circumstances in which walls might be built. This allowed cities to be built by the sea, further increasing their capacity for commerce, which, in turn, led to wider cooperation among Greeks in the form of Minoan empire (*archê*), as “those who were weaker, desiring profit, submitted to the slavery of the stronger; and the more capable, possessing surplus resources, gained the weaker cities as subjects.”<sup>60</sup>

Thucydides conjectures that eventually a single king, Agamemnon, possessed sufficient inherited resources and naval power to intimidate the rest of the Greeks into a common action, the Trojan War.<sup>61</sup> The scale of this cooperative action was significant, but the material resources of the Greeks were yet insufficient to support the aggregated force, and the effective power of the expedition was crippled by the division of men between fighters, farmers, and raiders.<sup>62</sup> In the subsequent age of Greek tyranny, wealth continued to grow and naval technology improved, but the myopic concerns of tyrants for their own persons and households meant that Greeks did not again attempt any large-scale cooperative action.<sup>63</sup> Only in the wake of the Persian invasion, when the nearly-comprehensive alliance of Greeks split between the leadership of Athens and Sparta, did the now unprecedented wealth, naval power, and political interdependence of the Greeks combine to engender war on a truly enormous scale.<sup>64</sup>

Despite foreshadowing the central concepts of his analysis in the opening sentence, at no point in the Archaeology does Thucydides offer an explicit, systematic theory of Greek power. Commentators have nevertheless been quick to identify and reconstruct the theory implicit in the genealogical narrative. De Romilly summarizes this theory as follows:

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<sup>57</sup> 1.2.2.

<sup>58</sup> *Second Letter to Ammaeus* 15.

<sup>59</sup> 1.5.1.

<sup>60</sup> 1.8.3.

<sup>61</sup> 1.9.1, 3.

<sup>62</sup> 1.11.1-2.

<sup>63</sup> 1.13.1-15.3.

<sup>64</sup> 1.18.2-19.1.

*A fleet makes possible commerce. Commerce provides revenue. Revenue gives birth to a treasury. A treasury, on the other hand, is tied to stability, which leads to the existence of walls. And these three terms, fleet-treasury-walls, then make it possible for a state to organize many others under its command, and to acquire power.*<sup>65</sup>

Josiah Ober imposes a further level of theoretical complexity onto these terms by dividing them into a “material” and a “conceptual triad.” Ships, walls, and capital form the material basis for power in the Archaeology, he argues, and contribute to the growth of *dunamis* (power), defensive security, and *archê* (imperial rule).<sup>66</sup> For Ober, these material and conceptual triads reinforce one another to suggest an “upward cycle of power [that] seemed, on the face of it, potentially unlimited,” as ships contributed to revenue, which in turn generated walls and greater security, laying the groundwork for increased *dunamis* and *archê*, thus further increasing security, revenue, and naval power, and so on and so forth.<sup>67</sup>

For both de Romilly and Ober, the Archaeology’s theory of power accounts for the unprecedented strength of the Athenians at the outbreak of the war, based as it was in an *archê* built on ships, walls, and imperial revenue.<sup>68</sup> Spartan power, however, despite being the other party in the unprecedented mobilization of force at the outset of the Peloponnesian War, cannot be accounted for within these terms. Thucydides describes Sparta as a land power, and he attributes Spartan strength to a political order (*politeia*) consistently opposed to tyrannical rule and conducive to good government (*eunomia*).<sup>69</sup> Unlike Athens, it did not aggrandize itself with revenues derived from sea-based *archê*, nor did it garrison itself behind walls, but secured its power by insisting that its dependent allies govern themselves oligarchically and come to its aid when needed.<sup>70</sup> Sparta therefore looks to be an anomaly in the Archaeology.<sup>71</sup> It is the only power of its kind described, and it falls well outside of the naval-based power equation that formed a line of continuity between Minos, Agamemnon, the Greek tyrants, and Athens.<sup>72</sup>

For some notable commentators, the asymmetry between Thucydides’ theoretical development of the bases of Athenian and Spartan power is related to another asymmetry in Thucydides’ presentation of the two powers: Athens, it is argued, is depicted as more powerful than Sparta, as sea power is identified as superior to land power.<sup>73</sup> This, in turn, is taken to imply a prediction about the eventual course of the war. “If the Archaeology were our only evidence,”

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<sup>65</sup> de Romilly 1956: 261-62. “En effet, la *flotte* permet le *commerce*. Le commerce apporte des *revenus*. Les revenus donnent naissance à un *trésor*. Le trésor, d’autre part, est lié à la *stabilité*, laquelle entraîne l’existence de *remparts*. Et ces trois termes, flotte-trésor-remparts, permettent alors à un État d’en *grouper* d’autres, plus nombreux, sous sa domination, et d’acquérir la *force*.”

<sup>66</sup> Ober 2001: 275-281.

<sup>67</sup> Ober 2001: 278.

<sup>68</sup> 1.18.2, 19.1.

<sup>69</sup> 1.18.2.

<sup>70</sup> 1.19.1.

<sup>71</sup> De Romilly 1956: 281-85; Luraghi 2011: 188-89; Saxonhouse 2017: 343-44.

<sup>72</sup> Presumably, the power of Hellen and his sons was also land-based, and in this way may act as a precursor to Spartan power (see Jaffe 2017: 145-46). But it seems that here the structural similarities of their respective power end. Hellen and his sons ruled as absolute, hereditary kings, while Spartan power grew out of its constitutional order.

<sup>73</sup> See, for instance, Finley 1942: 92; Connor 1984: 33-34.

writes W. R. Connor, “we might conclude that Athens should win the war with Sparta.”<sup>74</sup> For Connor, the obvious incongruity of this expectation with reality serves to create an ironic effect for the reader. Despite the reader’s knowledge that Athens will lose the war, Thucydides develops a theory of power predicting otherwise, encouraging her to doubt the validity of theory to account for reality.<sup>75</sup> For Connor, this is but the first ironic moment in a text that will continually upset theoretical expectations and focus the reader’s attention on the unpredictable contingencies of history.

As accomplished as Connor’s reading of Thucydides often is, his conclusion that the Archaeology’s account of land and sea power decisively favors the latter is unfounded. Connor, following John Finley Jr. before him, relies on a single passage to justify this claim:<sup>76</sup>

They made gains in strength who turned not least towards [naval power], both by monetary tribute and rule over others; for especially all of those who did not have sufficient land were sailing upon the islands and making them subjects. But no one joined in land wars from which any power accrued; all of those that did occur were conducted by each [city] itself against neighbors, and the Greeks did not go out on foreign expeditions far from their own land in order to conquer others.<sup>77</sup>

Read out of context, this passage looks like clear Thucydidean support for Connor’s position. No power was accrued from land wars, it states, while those who focused on sea power gained in strength. When read along with the surrounding passages, however, it is clear that its claims are not meant as a comprehensive statement concerning Greek history as a whole. The scope of Thucydides’ claim concerning the impotence of land power is limited to just one epoch described by the Archaeology, the age of tyranny.<sup>78</sup> This much is made clear by Thucydides’ description itself. The anterior limit of the claims is clearly indicated by the final part of the quotation, which asserts that the Greeks did not go on foreign expeditions. Thucydides thus has in mind a period after Agamemnon’s voyage to Troy, which was just such an expedition. The posterior limit is clarified in the subsequent sentence: “For they had not yet joined together as subjects of the great cities, nor in turn were they making common expeditions on equal terms, but neighbors made war against each other mostly by themselves.”<sup>79</sup> The period being described is therefore prior to the Persian Wars, when the cities did join together under the leadership of Sparta and Athens to engage in something considerably greater than a neighborly squabble. The period that fits between these two periods is the age of Greek tyranny.

Actual descriptions of Spartan power further undercut the thesis that land power is categorically inferior to sea power in the Archaeology. Thucydides offers three characterizations

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<sup>74</sup> Connor 1984: 34.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Ober’s (2001: esp. 278-81) comparable treatment of the theoretical expectations created by the Archaeology and the historical reality of the war’s eventual course.

<sup>76</sup> Finley 1942: 92; Connor 1984: 33. See also Momigliano 1944: 3; Crane 1998: 148; Taylor 2010: 8.

<sup>77</sup> 1.15.1-2.

<sup>78</sup> Gomme (1945, 126) points to the historical problems that arise if we read Thucydides’ assertion to be a general characterization of Greek development, though he does not draw the charitable conclusion that Thucydides must have had in mind a claim of more limited scope.

<sup>79</sup> 1.15.2.

of Spartan power relative to other Greek states in the digression, none of which suggest deficiency. In his first description, he notes that the Spartans were responsible for ridding mainland Greece of tyrannical rule. This provides a clear indication that Spartan land power was in fact superior to the naval power cultivated by the tyrants.<sup>80</sup> Next, Thucydides identifies the Spartans as the preeminent power in Greece at the onset of the second Persian invasion, the moment when the Athenians first turn to sea power in a serious way.<sup>81</sup> Finally, in the wake of the Persian defeat and the split of the Greek alliance, Thucydides suggests that Athens and Sparta were “clearly the greatest in power, the one prevailing on land, the other prevailing through ships.”<sup>82</sup> Thucydides thus leaves his reader with a sense of balance between Spartan land power and Athenian sea power on the eve of war, not a clear sense of the latter’s superiority.<sup>83</sup> A close reading of the *Archaeology* offers no concrete evidence to suggest that the theoretical aim of the digression is to establish the structural dominance of sea power to land power, thus undercutting any ironic effect this introduction is supposed to have.

### *Athens and Sparta as Antitypes*

If the focus on naval empire in the *Archaeology*’s theory of power is not meant to be ironic, what then is its purpose? Some commentators have speculated that perhaps it has no conscious purpose: rather than being a calculated asymmetry favoring sea power, it is simply a product of Thucydides’ greater interest in Athens. De Romilly argues, for instance, that Thucydides includes Sparta in the *Archaeology* only as an afterthought. Even when he is speaking about Athens and Sparta collectively, she suggests, he is predominantly thinking about the former.<sup>84</sup> “Only one history interests him,” she says, “that which leads from barbarism to the Athenian empire.” We should not therefore find it surprising that the theoretical foundations of land power get short shrift.<sup>85</sup>

There might be warrant for de Romilly’s interpretation if the descriptions of Spartan power discussed above were the city’s only appearance in the *Archaeology*. That brief analysis

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<sup>80</sup> 1.18.1.

<sup>81</sup> 1.18.2.

<sup>82</sup> 1.18.2.

<sup>83</sup> One might suggest that so much is implied in the final sentence of the *Archaeology* (1.19.1): “The individual military resources were greater for them at the outset of the present war than when they were at their strongest when the alliance was intact.” It is unclear who exactly the “them” (*autois*) refers to here. This passage has been read to suggest that either Athenian power alone surpassed the combined power of the alliance against the Persians, or that both Sparta and Athens had each respectively surpassed this combined power. (For a defense of the former position, see Hornblower 1991: 56; for the latter, see de Romilly 1956: 282-83.) I favor the latter reading, both because of the symmetry that it gives to the *Archaeology*, balancing Thucydides’ claim at 1.1.1, and because the *men . . . de* structure of the previous sentence encourages the reader to treat the Spartans and the Athenians as a pair in this train of thought. Even if one does read this to be a statement about the growth of Athenian power, however, it does not establish its relative superiority to Spartan power at the outset of the war; only its relative superiority to Spartan power fifty years prior to the war, a claim perfectly consistent with his aim to show that the combined mobilization of powers at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War clearly exceeded that during the Persian Wars.

<sup>84</sup> de Romilly 1956: 281-85.

<sup>85</sup> de Romilly 1956: 285; Parry 1972: 55. Cf. Saxonhouse 2017: 344.



only enters into Thucydides' narrative as part of an explanatory digression on the dissolution of mainland Greek tyranny.<sup>86</sup> In this passage at least, it does appear to play a secondary role. However, this is not Sparta's only or even first appearance in Thucydides' genealogy. Thucydides earlier presents his reader with two antithetical contrasts between Sparta and Athens. The first of these, a contrast between the luxurious way of life of the Athenians and the austere manner of the Spartans, has been glimpsed above.<sup>87</sup> The second presents the reader with a hypothetical contrast between the future ruins of Athens and Sparta.<sup>88</sup> While apparently unrelated to Thucydides' theory of power, and indeed much else in the Archaeology, these juxtapositions suggest that Sparta plays an important if enigmatic role in the Archaeology.

These two contrasts are peculiar, and they prove confusing for a number of different reasons. The subject matters that they discuss are atypical for Thucydides, as "he normally shows little visual sense," in the words of Simon Hornblower, and almost never speaks about themes such as dress, athletics, or ceremonial buildings.<sup>89</sup> Both contrasts interrupt the chronological flow of the Archaeology, drawing the reader's attention to Athens and Sparta long before they have emerged on the scene as dominant powers.<sup>90</sup> It is also unclear how each contrast functions as a proof for the specific argument that it is introduced to support.<sup>91</sup> The inclusion of these contrasts therefore appears unmotivated, leaving the reader deeply puzzled.

By attending carefully to the allusions of these contrasts, however, it is possible to understand that they are doing crucial work for Thucydides within the framework of the Archaeology. We can begin by looking closely at Thucydides' characterization of the dress of the Athenians:

The Athenians were the first among the Greeks to put down their arms and to adopt more luxury (*trupherôteron*) with a relaxed lifestyle. Because of this inclination for delicate living (*dia to habrodiaiton*), it has not been long since the older men of the upper class ceased wearing linen tunics and tying their hair up on their heads in a knot

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<sup>86</sup> 1.18.1-2.

<sup>87</sup> 1.6.3-5.

<sup>88</sup> 1.10.1.

<sup>89</sup> Hornblower (1991: 25) offers this comment in relation to the first contrast, but it might easily be extended to the second as well.

<sup>90</sup> Thucydides' comments about elite dress in Athens and Sparta (1.6.3-5) occur in his discussion of the age of Minos, and more specifically in his discussion of the piracy that was rampant before this age. The contrast concerning the hypothetical material remains of Athens and Sparta (1.10.1) occurs during Thucydides' discussion of Mycenae on the eve of the Trojan War.

<sup>91</sup> The contrast of elite dress (1.6.3-5) bears only a tangential relationship to the points leading to it. Thucydides argues that Greeks were once largely piratical, and it was not considered a shameful lifestyle (1.5.1); he draws parallels between this way of life and that of certain mainland barbarians in his own day, noting that they continue to wear arms as a means of protection (1.5.2-3); he notes that the Greeks also use to wear arms during the age of piracy (1.6.1-2); he notes that the Athenians and Spartans were the first peoples to make significant innovations in how the Greeks dressed (1.6.3-5). (However, cf. Ludwig 2002: ch. 6.) In the contrast of hypothetical material remains, the point Thucydides makes works somewhat against his larger claim of the relative insignificance of the Trojan War. The contrast is introduced to suggest that one should not underestimate Mycenaean power based on the impressiveness of its material remains (1.10.1). Instead, Thucydides goes on to argue, one should doubt the significance of Mycenaean power based on his calculation of the size of the fleet sent to Troy and their lack of sufficient money to lay a siege (1.10.3-1.11.1).

with golden-cicada fastenings; on account of which this fashion prevailed as well for older men among the Ionians for a long time in virtue of their common descent.<sup>92</sup>

The specific words used to indicate luxuriousness and delicacy of living, *trupherôteron* and *habrodiaiton*, were loaded terms in Thucydides' day. Both carried with them strong anti-egalitarian associations.<sup>93</sup> *Habrosunê*, from which *habrodiaiton* is derived, referred specifically to an elite lifestyle centered around conspicuous consumption and delicacy that differentiated its practitioners from the common people and reinforced their superiority.<sup>94</sup> It was characterized by expensive garments, long hair, gold ornaments, perfumes and scented oils, and "a certain sensuality," in the words of Leslie Kurke.<sup>95</sup> *Habrosunê* also carried with it specific overtones of eastern despotic culture. It was a lifestyle that was originally appropriated from Lydia by Greek elites in the sixth century, and after the Persian invasions in the fifth century it took on the derogatory connotations of Asian subservience and effeminacy more generally.<sup>96</sup> Aeschylus repeatedly uses *habro-* words to describe the Persians, and especially the Persian women, in his tragedy bearing their name.<sup>97</sup> Herodotus, for his part, accounts for the origins of *habrosunê* in a story wherein Croesus and Cyrus conspire to make "women instead of men" out of the Lydians and thereby foreclose the possibility of future revolt against the Persian King.<sup>98</sup> One might point to a number of other significant examples.<sup>99</sup>

Thucydides' use of *trupherôteron* would have struck a very similar chord for his audience. *Truphê*, from which *trupherôteron* is derived, began to be used almost interchangeably with *habro-* words in the late fifth century to describe elitist conspicuous consumption.<sup>100</sup> Though it did not bear the same historical relationship with eastern despotism, *truphê* continued to have strong anti-egalitarian connotations in Athenian discourse and, at times, connotations of

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<sup>92</sup> 1.6.3.

<sup>93</sup> On the politics of *habrosunê* and *truphê* in the fifth century, see Kurke 1992.

<sup>94</sup> For a characterization of the main features of *habrosunê*, see Kurke 1992: 93-98.

<sup>95</sup> Kurke 1992: 96.

<sup>96</sup> There is some disagreement among scholars as to when *habro-* words became pejorative. Edith Hall (1989: 81) claims vaguely that it was pejorative "from early times" when used to describe men and cities, while Leslie Kurke (1992: 98-104) argues that *habrosunê* only took on a derogatory association with effeminacy after the Persian Wars. According to Bernhardt (2003: 19-23, 121-35; as cited in Garvie 2009: 62), this process did not begin until some fifty years after the Persian invasion, and it did not extend to include all Asiatics (as opposed to Lydians and Phrygians specifically) until early in the fourth century. For explicit reference to the Lydian origin of *habrosunê*, see Xenophanes fr. 3 DK; Aeschylus *Persians* ll. 41-41, as well as the scholion for this passage, which includes a one-word fragment from Anacreon. For a less explicit reference, see Anacreon fr. 28/373 PMG, ll. 2-3, which refers to the *pektis*, a lyre of Lydian origins.

<sup>97</sup> *Persians* ll. 41-42, 135, 541, 543, 1073. Lines 135 and 541 specifically refer to the Persian women, while line 543 refers to the women's couches. For early fourth-century uses of *habro-* words to describe the Persian lifestyle, see Xenophon *Cyropaedia* 8.8.15; Plato *Alcibiades* 122c3.

<sup>98</sup> 1.155.3. Herodotus does not specifically use a *habro-* word here to describe the Lydian lifestyle, but the practices described fit the contours of *habrosunê*. On this point, see Kurke 1992: 102. Note, however, that the Lydian penchant for luxury, described with *habro-* words, predates Cyrus' behavioral reforms in Herodotus' account. See 1.55.2, 1.71.2-4.

<sup>99</sup> For example, Aeschylus *Agamemnon* ll. 918-20; Euripides *Orestes* l. 349; *Bacchae* l. 493.

<sup>100</sup> For example, see Pentheus' movement between the two words in Euripides' *Bacchae* (ll. 968-70). Cf. Plato *Alcibiades* 122c1-3. See also Kurke 1992: 103-5.

eastern effeminacy.<sup>101</sup> In the Attic Orators, for instance, one finds the word frequently used to describe excessive and self-aggrandizing consumption that was directly at odds with democratic sumptuary legislation and the liturgy system, a system in which elite resources were spent on activities that benefited the whole citizenry, not just the elite individual.<sup>102</sup>

In addition to the general connotations of *habrosunê* in post-Persian Wars discourse, contemporary evidence illustrates the direct connection made by Athenians between the elegant manner of dress described by Thucydides and autocratic rule. In Aristophanes' *Knights*, performed in 424, we find a representation of *Dêmos* that is strikingly similar to Thucydides' portrait of the archaic Athenian elites. At the conclusion of the play, *Dêmos* comes on stage "wearing a golden cicada" (*tettigophoras*) and perfumed with myrrh, "brilliant in his old-fashioned dress." Aristophanes makes the connection between this manner of dress and autocracy explicit. Immediately preceding *Dêmos*' arrival on stage, he is called "sole-ruler (*monarchon*) of Greece and this here land," and upon entering he is addressed as "King (*basileu*) of Greece."<sup>103</sup>

In sharp contrast to the Athenians' taste for eastern, autocratic luxuriousness, Thucydides marks the Spartans as distinctly egalitarian and non-eastern in their manner of dress:

In turn, the Lacedaemonians were first to adopt moderate clothing (*metriai esthêti*) alike to the present fashion, and the wealthy adopted an egalitarian lifestyle (*isodiattoi*) as much as possible in other matters regarding the many. They were also first to be stripped naked during athletic competition and to anoint themselves with olive oil when nude; before this, even in the Olympic games, athletes competed wearing a loincloth over their genitals, and it is not many years since they have ceased. This is still the case among the barbarians, some of whom now--especially the Asians--wear girdles when they compete in boxing and wrestling matches.<sup>104</sup>

The contrast drawn here with the Athenians is stark. Whereas the Athenian elites pursued *habrodiaton*, an anti-egalitarian mode of conspicuous consumption, the Spartans were *isodiattoi*, a Thucydidean neologism found nowhere else in classical Greek literature. The meaning of the term is nevertheless clear: *iso-* means equality, and when compounded with *diata*, "way of living," it suggested an egalitarian lifestyle antithetical to the sort of conspicuous consumption and desire for social differentiation suggested by *habrodiaton*. Furthermore, on account of its *iso-* prefix, it naturally suggests kinship with the characteristic diction of egalitarian association: *isonomia*, *isokratia*, etc.

Perhaps more subtly, Thucydides' identification of the Spartans with athletic nudity also bears significant egalitarian overtones. While there are multiple traditions accounting for why

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<sup>101</sup> Euripides' use of *truphê* in particular continues to bear connotations of eastern effeminacy: see *Bacchae* l. 150; *Iphigenia at Aulis* l. 1050; *Orestes* l. 1113; *Trojan Women* l. 997; see also Aristophanes *Lysistrata* l. 387.

Aristophanes' use of the term, while continuing to bear strong connotations of effeminacy, often drops any explicit allusion to the Asianness: see, for example, *Ecclesiazusae* l. 901, 973; *Lysistrata* l. 405; *Clouds* l. 48.

<sup>102</sup> Demosthenes' fourth-century speeches offer many striking instances of this usage. See especially *Against Meidias* 158-9.

<sup>103</sup> *Knights* ll. 1330-33.

<sup>104</sup> 1.6.4-5.

nudity was introduced into Greek athletics, the effect of such practice was to remove all external forms of social distinction from the scene of athletic competition.<sup>105</sup> It also suggests that combatants trusted one another to respect their physical and sexual integrity as equal citizens even when they went unarmed.<sup>106</sup> The egalitarian nature of these practices is brought into even greater relief by Thucydides' invocation of the norms of non-Greek cultures, and especially Asians. Whereas Thucydides identifies the Athenians with practices heavily associated with the autocratic cultures of the east, even suggesting that the Athenians were the *originators* of these practices rather than the inheritors, Thucydides' Spartans are credited with introducing the moderate and egalitarian lifestyle distinctive of the fifth-century Greeks.

Thucydides' contrasts between the dress of the Athenians and Spartans situates them within the traditional polarity between cultures characterized by autocratic rule and egalitarian association. Thucydides' second contrast between these two cities in the *Archaeology* continues this project, establishing a line of continuity between the private habits of elites and the material composition of their cities. He writes,

Suppose the city of the Lacedaemonians was destroyed and all that remained was the temples and the foundations of its buildings, I think there would be great disbelief for those living much later that its power matched its fame (and yet the Spartans occupy two-fifths of the Peloponnese and are hegemon over the rest and many allies besides; but all the same, because the city is not centralized and does not make use of lavish temples and buildings, living instead according to traditional Greek custom in unwalled villages, they would be underestimated). But, should the same thing happen to the Athenians, they would conjecture from the visible evidence of the city that their power was twice what it actually was.<sup>107</sup>

In this final sentence, Thucydides draws the reader's attention to the spectacular building projects completed under Pericles' leadership in the decades prior to the Peloponnesian War. These monumental structures, most famously the Parthenon, today serve as a powerful symbol of the first flowering of democratic government in Greece. Their ideological charge, however, was very different in the fifth century. As Lisa Kallet has illustrated, spectacular building projects were characteristic of tyranny in the classical Greek mindset.<sup>108</sup> Thucydides himself, for instance, notes of the Peisistratids in Book 6 that they "beautifully adorned their city," echoing a comment made by Herodotus.<sup>109</sup> The latter also dwells on the building projects of the Samians in the time of Polycrates, the tyrant whom he praises for surpassing all non-Sicilian Greeks in "magnificence" (*megaloprepeia*).<sup>110</sup> Aristotle, a century later, is also instructive here, as he

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<sup>105</sup> For a brief mention of two Greek traditions accounting for athletic nudity on pragmatic grounds, see Harris 1972: 19-20.

<sup>106</sup> Ludwig (2002: ch. 6) develops this point at length.

<sup>107</sup> 1.10.2.

<sup>108</sup> Kallet 2003.

<sup>109</sup> Thucydides 6.54.5; Herodotus 1.59.6. On this verbal echo, see Kallet 2003: 125-26.

<sup>110</sup> 3.60.1-4, 3.125.2. Dewald (2003: 48) points out that Polycrates is not given direct credit for the accomplishment of the Samian building projects, a fact she explains by Herodotus' dislike of tyrants.

mentions grandiose building projects among the characteristic features of tyranny.<sup>111</sup> And then there is the story from Plutarch's *Life of Pericles*, which suggests that the Periclean building projects were actually criticized in the fifth-century as tyrannical, built as they were (in part) from the "tax" imposed on the subjects of the empire.<sup>112</sup> Thucydides' invocation of the spectacular appearance of Athens is therefore far from neutral. Rather than celebrating egalitarian culture, it continues to construct Athens along the lines of the stereotypical autocrat.<sup>113</sup>

There are further, related resonances between this second contrast and the autocracy-equality polarity to tease out. Commentators have noted that there is a systematic difference between the way that characteristically autocratic and characteristically egalitarian cultures approach the constitution of power in Herodotus.<sup>114</sup> Autocratic cultures, and especially the Persians, externalize power as something material and quantifiable, something which can be gazed upon with pleasure. The egalitarian Greeks, on the other hand, routinely consider power to be intrinsic and qualitative, a product of *aretê*. The exemplary illustration of this difference, though far from an isolated instance, is the confrontation between Demaratos and Xerxes in Book VII. Within the Archaeology's contrast, we see that Sparta and Athens are being differentiated in this same manner. Like Herodotus' autocrats, the Athenians externalize their power and represent it materially. Spartan power, on the other hand, leaves little material trace.

One can take the intertextual relationship between Thucydides' contrast and Herodotus' representation of the autocracy-equality polarity even a step further. Herodotus also illustrates the ease with which autocratic externalizations of power slid into overestimations of that power. The paradigmatic example is again Xerxes in Book 7, who doubts that the Greeks will even face him in battle, let alone defeat him, due to the overwhelming visual appearance and quantitative superiority of his army.<sup>115</sup> Demaratos, however, assures him that the Spartans will stand their ground regardless of the numerical odds against them. Their power, he suggests, is fostered by the poverty of their land and fear of their laws, which breeds men of discipline and virtue.<sup>116</sup> Xerxes laughs at Demaratos, unable even to take Demaratos' prescient warning seriously. So it is that Thucydides suggests future onlookers will react, overestimating the power of the Athenians and underestimating that of the Spartans.

All of this suffices to show that, far from stuffing the Archaeology with archaic trivia, Thucydides' proleptic contrasts between Athens and Sparta situate the cities within a

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<sup>111</sup> *Politics* 1313b21-24.

<sup>112</sup> The evidence for this comes in Plutarch's *Life of Pericles* 12.2, and many have doubted the story's authenticity. Samons (2016: 95-99) argues convincingly that there is likely to be some kernel of truth to the accusation of tyranny leveled against the building project, even if Plutarch's account is not exactly accurate.

<sup>113</sup> In this context, it is worth mentioning also the massive building projects completed by the Persian Kings in Persepolis during the fifth century. For some scholars, the Periclean building program appears to be in direct architectural and artistic conversation with Persepolis. For the seminal article laying out the case for the extensive parallels between the two, see Lawrence 1951. For a more specific focus on the similarities between the Parthenon Frieze and the Apadana Reliefs, see Root 1985.

<sup>114</sup> Konstan 1987.

<sup>115</sup> 7.101.2.

<sup>116</sup> 7.102.1-3, 104.1-5.

conventional polarity between autocratic and egalitarian cultures. Before either enters into the developmental narrative as a dominant Greek power, Thucydides teaches his reader to understand the cities as familiar antitypes: Athens the exemplar of autocracy, Sparta of equality. With this in mind, it becomes much less of a mystery why Sparta deviates from the theory of sea power when the city emerges onto the scene, while Athens conforms to it. All of the powers that abide by the sea-power template prior to the entrance of the great powers of the Peloponnesian War--Minos, Agamemnon, the tyrants--share an autocratic orientation. It is only fitting that Athens should also conform to this template given Thucydides' previous construction of her as an autocratic culture. The Spartans, however, sit outside of and opposed to the autocratic paradigm, both culturally and in the structural bases of their power. It is no coincidence that, when Thucydides discusses the foundations of Spartan power, he highlights that they had never been ruled by a tyrant (*aiei aturanneutos ên*).<sup>117</sup> Even in their role as leader of the Peloponnesian League they pursue a more decentralized, egalitarian manner of organization, directly contrasting with the hierarchical, tribute-paying empire of the Athenians.<sup>118</sup> Sparta was, in effect, the anti-autocrat in Thucydides' Archaeology, a genuinely new and unique regime in an otherwise autocratic Greek tradition. Whereas Athens was the newest iteration of an enduring pattern, it was Sparta that was innovative and unprecedented, offering a genuine alternative to the sea-based, commercial empires of the Greek past. If one of the two powers is cast into high relief against the backdrop of Thucydides' developmental history, it is not Athens, but Sparta.

### *Thucydides, Athens, and Democratic Ideology*

More than simply offering a revisionist history of the Greek past, the Archaeology offers a revisionist account of Athenian identity in relation to this past and in relation to the autocracy-equality polarity that helped to structure it. As Josiah Ober has noted, Thucydides departs from the fifth-century ethnographic polarity that saw autocracy as a characteristically eastern phenomenon by giving autocratic political structures "a firmly Greek prehistory."<sup>119</sup> But it is only if we recognize that Athens stands at the head of this Greek autocratic tradition that we can feel the full force of Thucydides' move. According to democratic ideology, democracy replaced tyranny in Athens and stood in perpetual opposition to it.<sup>120</sup> It was the Athenian democracy that had expelled the Peisistratids and had opposed the Persian invasions. As we've seen, Athens is the only Greek city named in Aeschylus' *Persians*, and it was Theseus, the legendary Athenian king and sometimes founder of Athenian democracy, who defends the virtues of egalitarian rule in Euripides' *Suppliant Women*. Thucydides was, therefore, turning Athenian self-understanding on its head, so to speak, by identifying the democracy with the form of rule that they had long identified themselves against. Adding yet another blow, he suggests that the true paradigm of

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<sup>117</sup> 1.18.1.

<sup>118</sup> 1.19.1.

<sup>119</sup> 2001: 279.

<sup>120</sup> For complementary characterizations of the relationship between democracy and tyranny in the mental landscape of fifth-century Athens, see Ober 2003; Osborne 2003: 252-53.

egalitarian, anti-tyrannical association is Sparta, the sworn enemy of and eventual victor over Athens (and, it turns out, the power that actually removed the Peisistratids from Athens).

If Thucydides' Archaeology is as subversive as this suggests, we might expect some sort of acknowledgment or defense of this fact on the author's part. It is therefore revealing that he immediately follows the Archaeology's narrative with a criticism of popularly-held opinion, especially that of the Athenian people. He pointedly criticizes the common run of people for "accept[ing] alike what they hear from each other about past events, even those pertaining to their own country, without discrimination."<sup>121</sup> For this reason, traditional ideology provided no reliable guide to the facts of the past, whether this be the past of one's own community or that of another, since it is constituted by stories that have not been properly scrutinized. This made Thucydides' job of discerning the actual past more difficult, but it also served to underline the superior authority of his own, meticulously considered account.

Thucydides sharpens the point of his criticism of popular belief by singling out three examples of widely-held misconceptions. The first is noted as a specifically Athenian error. The Athenian multitude (*athênaiôn to plêthos*), he says, thinks that Harmodius and Aristogeiton killed Hipparchus when the latter was tyrant of Athens. The truth of the matter, however, is that Hipparchus was actually the younger brother of the tyrant, Hippias, not the tyrant himself.<sup>122</sup> Thucydides then continues to consider two misconceptions regarding Sparta that were more widely shared among the Greeks. First, he states, it is believed that the Spartan kings have two votes rather than one. Second, it is thought that they had a "Pitanate regimen." Neither of these beliefs were true, however, leaving Thucydides to conclude that the common run of people (*hoi polloi*) were so lazy in their pursuit of truth that they simply adopted whatever beliefs were nearest at hand.<sup>123</sup>

The epistemological thrust of Thucydides' criticism of popular belief formation is fairly obvious. What is more easily overlooked, however, and what scholars have plainly missed thus far, is the political dimension of his examples. Thucydides is not just criticizing a random set of beliefs here that he has found to be erroneous, or picking the three most egregious. He is pointedly criticizing important beliefs that run counter to his construction of Athens as an autocratic culture and Sparta as an egalitarian one. To begin with his treatment of Harmodius and Aristogeiton, Thucydides aims to blow up the bedrock of Athenian belief in their egalitarian and anti-tyrannical heritage. These two figures were widely celebrated in democratic ideology as the tyrannicides who, in the words of an old Athenian drinking song, made Athens *isonomon*, politically equal.<sup>124</sup> They were lionized by the democracy as no other citizens were, given cult honors, and a statue of them was twice erected in the agora.<sup>125</sup> It is telling of the symbolic value of this statue that, when Xerxes sacked Athens, he carried off the first iteration of this statue as a

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<sup>121</sup> 1.20.1.

<sup>122</sup> 1.20.2.

<sup>123</sup> 1.20.3.

<sup>124</sup> Athenaeus 15.50. This claim may also have been inscribed on the statues of Harmodius and Aristogeiton in the agora. See Raaflaub 2003: 64.

<sup>125</sup> For the significance of Harmodius and Aristogeiton in fifth-century democratic ideology, see Raaflaub 2003: 63-67; Ober 2003.

symbol of Athenian submission.<sup>126</sup> It is equally telling that, once the Athenians had defeated the Persians and reoccupied their city, a new statue of the “tyrannicides” was quickly erected to replace the original. In Thucydides’ correction of the story, however, the entire political legend is revealed to be based on a lie. Harmodius and Aristogeiton, far from symbolizing the founding moment of Athenian equality, had not even been tyrannicides. All they had done was kill the tyrant’s brother, leaving the tyranny in place. By debunking this foundation myth, Thucydides underlines the extent to which democratic ideology had taught the Athenians a false version of its own past. This had, in turn, encouraged a similarly false understanding of themselves as inherently egalitarian and anti-autocratic; a misunderstanding Thucydides sought to correct.

Looking to Thucydides’ Spartan examples, we can see that the factual corrections are complementary. Both examples contest anti-egalitarian practices supposedly attached to the Spartan kingship, revealing Sparta to be more egalitarian than otherwise believed. This is easiest to see in Thucydides’ first correction. By denying that the Spartan kings held two votes rather than one, Thucydides shows that they did not hold exceptional powers in the making of public policy. Rather, they exercise power that is formally equal to that of other citizens. The second example requires more careful attention, as an apparent ambiguity in its meaning has resulted in the sentence being frequently mistranslated. In a literal translation, Thucydides states that people believe that “there is a Pitonate regiment for them (*autois*), a regiment which never even existed.” Most commentators and translators assume that the “them” here is the Spartans at large, making the claim an outright denial of the existence of this regiment in Sparta.<sup>127</sup> As D. H. Kelly has pointed out, however, this is not the grammatically best option. Given Thucydides’ immediately preceding denial of the Spartan kings’ two votes, “them” should instead refer to these kings specifically. The claim is thus that people believe the Spartan kings to have a Pitonate regiment, which Thucydides denies.<sup>128</sup> Again, Thucydides takes direct aim at a misconception about the extraordinary privileges that the Spartan kings have, revealing these kings to be far more equal with their fellow citizens than was widely believed. Furthermore, in this instance he is specifically denying a practice that would have made the Spartan kings comparable to tyrants, who characteristically had private control over a troop of bodyguards.

Thucydides’ criticism of popular knowledge is as political as it is epistemological. He wishes not only to expose the popular method for acquiring beliefs as unreliable, he wants to expose certain beliefs as baseless that run counter to his construction of Athens as autocratic and Sparta as egalitarian. The moves are subtle, as is so often the case with Thucydides, but their meaning is significant. When viewed in light of the polarity between Athens and Sparta

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<sup>126</sup> Hall 1989: 67; Raaflaub 2003: 63.

<sup>127</sup> This is, for instance, the translation of Hobbes, Jowett, Smith, and Warner. Mynott retains the ambiguity of the Greek.

<sup>128</sup> Kelly 1981: 32. To underline this point, Thucydides then takes a step further and denies that there ever was a Pitonate regiment in Sparta, making it impossible for the Spartan kings to have had personal possession of troops that never existed. The veracity of this latter claim has been the source of much debate among ancient historians, and it is not one that this present discussion will attempt to address. For a summary of this debate and relevant bibliography, see Hornblower 1991: 57-58.



constructed in the previous narrative, both through the contrasts of culture and the bases of their power, the cumulative message is clear and consistent.

### *Democracy, Tyranny, and Heroism*

If Thucydides' *Archaeology* shows a greater focus on Athens than on Sparta in certain respects, this is not because he was concerned with the former to the exclusion of the latter. It was rather because a central polemical opponent in the *Archaeology* was Athenian democratic ideology itself. More than Homer or Herodotus, it was the assumptions of the Athenian imagination, the city's official understanding of itself as egalitarian and anti-autocratic, that he sought to contest in this programmatic introduction. The opponents and dependents of Athens, we can imagine, would have more readily accepted his message, and perhaps already stood in agreement with it. As we see later in Book I, for instance, Thucydides' Corinthians accuse Athens of being a *polis tyrannos*, a tyrant city.<sup>129</sup> This may have been a characterization that many Greeks agreed with at the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War, but it was one that may have been problematic for many within Athens itself. To teach the Athenians that something like this was the case would have required a fundamental revision of their beliefs about their collective past or a reckoning with how far they had betrayed their foundational values. This was the task that Thucydides set out to accomplish.

At least two important questions arise from the argument of Thucydides' *Archaeology* when read in this way. One of these we might characterize as a conceptual question about the Athenian democracy, the other as a question of Thucydides' own political project. The conceptual question concerns just how far Thucydides wants to go in characterizing the Athenian democracy as an autocratic regime. In Thucydides' narrative, we see that the Athenian democracy aligns with previous Greek autocrats in their possession of an empire and the foundations of their military strength. However, we also get some hint of the fact that Athens is importantly different from the hereditary kings and tyrants that came before it in terms of how domestic policy is made. Twice we find references to the fact that Athenians made policy collectively, both in reference to the decision to acquire a navy.<sup>130</sup> Such references suggest that Athens may rule as an autocrat over its empire, but that it may yet be characterized by some degree of equality within the city. This is merely left as a suggestion, however, and the tidy distinction between autocracy abroad and equality at home is not supported by Thucydides' characterization of Athenian culture. The depiction of the luxury-loving elites suggests the desire for hierarchical differentiation among citizens within the city of Athens, not simply in relation to their imperial dependents. The *Archaeology* thus raises the question, but it does little to answer it. Instead, it is a question that will be developed over the course of the text, and it will be treated in detail in Chapter Four of this dissertation.

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<sup>129</sup> 1.122.3, 124.3.

<sup>130</sup> 1.14.3, 18.2.

The second question concerns the politics of Thucydides' identification of Athens with autocracy. Given the predominantly negative connotations of tyranny within Athenian democratic ideology, it would appear that Thucydides is not only subverting the democracy's self-understanding by identifying it with autocracy, but offering an outright condemnation of the Athenian regime.<sup>131</sup> It is tempting to suggest on this basis that Thucydides shares what Josiah Ober has called the "dissident sensibility" of the elite critics within Athens, an "informal yet self-consciously critical 'community of interpretation'" that sought to contest the legitimacy of the rule of the many over the few, often by redescribing democracy as a form of tyranny.<sup>132</sup> Such an identification would have to come with some qualification. Scholars typically assume that elite critics were primarily concerned with the extent to which the many tyrannized the few within Athens, not with the tyrannical rule of Athens over its imperial dependents.<sup>133</sup> To put this another way, their primary complaint was that Athens was ruled by a *dêmos tyrannos*, not that the city collectively ruled as a *polis tyrannos*. Thucydides' *Archaeology*, on the other hand, largely glosses over the domestic situation of Athens, focusing instead on the structure of the empire. We might nevertheless think that the *Archaeology* reveals Thucydides to be a natural ally of this dissident community, even if he was not its paradigmatic member.

It is, however, a mistake to assume that the identification of Athenian imperial democracy with the Greek autocratic tradition must be symptomatic of a condemnatory attitude on Thucydides' part. For an author so eager to challenge the beliefs of his contemporaries, the presumption that he shared the prevalent normative evaluation of autocratic rule simply because it was orthodox is problematic. To ascribe this belief to Thucydides, there will need to be some indication in the text that his project is not only critical of democratic ideology, but of the imperial democracy itself. Such evidence, however, is conspicuously absent. For many of its fourth-century critics, tyranny was illegitimate primarily because it was structurally unjust and fostered further injustices on the part of the tyrant. Thucydides, however, forgoes the language of justice in the *Archaeology*, evaluating different regimes instead according to their contribution to the development of material resources and collective action; that is, to Greek greatness.<sup>134</sup> In this development, there is a role to play even for pirates and tyrants, figures that would have been

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<sup>131</sup> Foster (2010: 21-22), for instance, drawing on Connor (1984: 24) and Mills (1997: 224-25), approaches this conclusion when discussing the structural similarity of Athens and the Minoan Thalassocracy in the *Archaeology*. She suggests that widespread Athenian hatred of Minos and the memory of his harsh imperial treatment of the Athenians would suggest a damning precedent for Athens' own imperial project.

<sup>132</sup> Ober 2003: 215. See also Ober 1998; Raaflaub 2003: 81-82.

<sup>133</sup> Raaflaub 2003: 81-82. Cf. Kallet 2003. As Kallet notes, the two terms were often interdependent and easily blurred in critical discourse, perhaps leading to an overly artificial distinction between the two on the part of modern commentators. If there is any truth to Plutarch's story of the criticism of the Periclean building project by Thucydides son of Melesias (*Life of Pericles*, 12), it may have been an important part of the elite critics' complaint that the *dêmos tyrannos* had also become a *polis tyrannos*. Nevertheless, it remains true that the *primary* concern of the elites was that the *dêmos* ruled over their betters within Athens as a tyrant.

<sup>134</sup> Cf. Orwin (1994: 30-32), who at once acknowledges that Thucydides refrained from drawing conclusions about the justice and injustice of past wars in the *Archaeology* and makes the claim that "the progress Thucydides depicts in the *Archaeology* is progress in, among other things, justice" (30). This conclusion oversteps the evidence of the text itself--nowhere in the *Archaeology* does Thucydides use the language of justice or injustice.

considered villainous by Thucydides' contemporaries.<sup>135</sup> Tyrants do receive something that amounts to criticism by Thucydides for having a narrow concern for the interest of their own house. Thucydides' concern, however, is not that there was anything structurally unjust about this situation. Rather, he points to the myopia of tyrannical rule as the factor that inhibited them from instigating any large-scale action and thus doing anything worthy of account (*ergon axiologon*).<sup>136</sup>

Thucydides is explicit about the normative framework that concerns him in the opening justification for writing about the Peloponnesian War. He "expected it to be great and worthier of account (*axiologôtaton*) than anything that had happened before."<sup>137</sup> As briefly mentioned in this dissertation's introduction, Thucydides' nomenclature here is novel, but the framework itself is akin to that of Homeric epic. In this evaluative mode, which we can call heroic for convenience, *kleos*, often translated as "fame", is a dominant value. "*Kleos* is something the heroes prize and strive for," in the words of James Redfield, so that, even after death, they might "acquire a kind of permanence which confers on [their deeds] something approaching immortality."<sup>138</sup> In the heroic world, "a place in the tradition of song is the greatest prize the society can award its heroes."<sup>139</sup> But, it is important to note, what is great and deserving of *kleos* is considered independently of whether something or someone is just. Indeed, the greatest of heroes within the Greek tradition are often those who have committed the most harrowing injustices. Heracles savagely kills his own children. Agamemnon sacrifices his own daughter. Achilles refuses to come to the aid of the Achaeans, who are dying in droves, even once a fitting gift has been offered. None of these unjust acts disqualify these heroes as suitable recipients of *kleos*. Rather, the injustices committed are intimately linked with their greatness. Heracles' butchery spurs the heroic labors for which he will be forever remembered. Agamemnon's sacrifice launches his voyage to Troy. Achilles' refusal further reinforces his place as a pivotal figure for Greek success. Within the heroic evaluative framework, injustice remains lamentable and a very real evil, but it is one that can be eclipsed by the greatness of the acts that it engenders.

It might be thought that the apparently positive evaluation of greatness with which Thucydides begins is subverted at the tail end of the Archaeology, when the unprecedented greatness of the Peloponnesian War is identified with the unprecedented sufferings (*pathêmata*) that it gave rise to.<sup>140</sup> Connor, for one, has argued that this passage serves to heighten the ironic effect of the Archaeology's analysis of power. He writes,

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<sup>135</sup> Thucydides (1.5.1-2) notes the incongruity between his contemporaries' evaluation of piracy and the original role that it played in Greek civilization, going so far as to argue that the practice was once thought worthy of prestige. Cf. Foster (2010: 17-19), who argues that Thucydides sought to expose the baselessness of the pirates' prestige by demonstrating that "piratical violence had created a state of permanent insecurity" (18). Such a state was not "created," however, by piratical violence. Thucydides' initial state was also one characterized by "permanent insecurity." Piracy actually offered some improvement in this respect, as it encouraged the strong and weak to cooperate to some degree, rather than to exist in a state of perpetual conflict (cf. 1.5.1, 1.2.4).

<sup>136</sup> 1.17.1.

<sup>137</sup> 1.1.1

<sup>138</sup> Redfield 1975: 32, 35.

<sup>139</sup> Redfield 1975: 35.

<sup>140</sup> 1.23.1-2.

The technical treatise investigating the sources of power and success in the early Greek world becomes at the end of the Archaeology a disquisition on the suffering of war...the greatest [war] now, we can see, [is] to be judged not by comparisons with the massive operations described by Herodotus, but in the concentration and intensity of human suffering in the long and destructive war.<sup>141</sup>

To modern eyes, it may be hard to understand how Thucydides' cataloguing of Greek suffering could be anything but a condemnation of war itself. But there is a gulf that separates our thinking on this matter from that of the ancients; a point forcefully made by Wilfred Owen's poem, "Dulce et Decorum est." Rather than isolating Thucydides from the Greek tradition, his equation between suffering and greatness further embeds him within it.<sup>142</sup> Herodotus, for instance, whom Connor sees as so different from Thucydides in this regard, makes a very similar claim about the war he chose to write about. He states that "more evils (*kaka*) came into being for Greece" during the Persian Wars than in all of the generations prior to Darius' invasion.<sup>143</sup> The affinities become even stronger when we look to the traditions surrounding the Greek heroes, where the equation between greatness, power, and suffering is even more pronounced. Heracles leaves a trail of destruction wherever he goes, and the life that would eventually win him fame and apotheosis is marked by extraordinary misfortune.<sup>144</sup> Achilles' very name suggests widespread pain and grief (*achos-laos*), and the undying *kleos* that is his fate depends on his own destruction.<sup>145</sup> One could go on indefinitely with examples of this sort: "much-suffering" Odysseus, Oedipus, Ajax, Agamemnon. Bernard Knox has written of the Sophoclean hero that "suffering and glory are fused in an indissoluble unity."<sup>146</sup> This statement rings true of the entire heroic tradition.

To suggest, therefore, that Thucydides' equation of greatness and suffering is somehow novel and ironic is badly mistaken.<sup>147</sup> Rather than subverting Thucydides' commitment to a heroic evaluative framework, his focus on suffering confirms it. As N. J. Lowe has rightly pointed out, Thucydides perceived that "he and his readers were *living* an epic."

The greatest epic plot in human memory was neither the Trojan nor the Persian wars, but the experience of his own generation; and it was moreover an *Iliad* in the original minor

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<sup>141</sup> Connor 1984: 31, 248. Cf. Parry (1972: 50-54) who, like Connor, suggests that Thucydides' equation of greatness and suffering comes as an original insight, but who nevertheless argues that this insight did not undermine Thucydides' belief that the pursuit of power was "admirable" (54).

<sup>142</sup> It is worth noting that certain ancient commentators on Thucydides' text found there to be nothing strange about Thucydides' equation between greatness, importance, and suffering. For instance, Lucian observes in *How to Write History*, "Thucydides...expect[ed] that the war would be great, more memorable, and more important than any that had gone before; and in fact the sufferings in that war were great" (54.1, tr. Kilburn).

<sup>143</sup> *Histories* 6.98.2.

<sup>144</sup> See, for instance, the characterizations of Heracles in Sophocles, *Philoctetes* ll.1417-1423 and Euripides, *Heracles* esp. ll. 1196-8, 1255-1310.

<sup>145</sup> On the etymology of Achilles' name, see Nagy 1979: 69-93.

<sup>146</sup> Knox 1964: 6.

<sup>147</sup> The same can be said of Foster's contention that Thucydides "confutes the delusion" that military power is "glorious" by showing that they might have a "destructive effect on society" (2010: 10). Would we ever suggest that Homer "confutes the delusion" that Achilles was worthy of *kleos* because he shows him to have a "destructive effect on society" in the *Iliad*?

key of suffering and tragedy, stripped of Herodotus' comfortably Odyssean moral and patriotic reharmonising.<sup>148</sup>

By harking back to a heroic perspective on greatness, Thucydides situates himself outside of both democratic ideology and the counter-ideology of the elite critics. His perspective is one that prioritizes the metrics of capacity, not justice. This project, however, wasn't just a throwback to a bygone age. It was a reinvention. While invoking heroic values, Thucydides naturalizes the heroes of the Greek past, treating them not as demigods but as humans governed by the same principles of political power as his contemporaries. For Thucydides, there were not races of bronze and iron. There were just men. In Chapter 5, much more will be said about the innovative aspects of this project and its importance for understanding later moments of Thucydidean analysis. For now, it is important simply to recognize the continuum that this establishes between the members of the Greek autocratic tradition. Thucydides' Archaeology leads the reader to recognize not only that his war was greater than all those that came before it. It creates a perspective from which the Athenian imperial democracy can be seen to surpass the great kings and warriors of the heroic age who were honored with imperishable fame.

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<sup>148</sup> Lowe 2000: 91.

### Chapter 3: Between Heroism and Tyranny: Athenian Character and Policy

Thucydides' Archaeology suggests a further question with regard to Athens. All of the autocratic tradition's participants share a structural similarity in the bases of their power—ships, walls, and money—and all are assumed to act in the pursuit of their interests. The Archaeology suggests, however, that heroic kings and tyrants differed significantly in their interpretation and pursuit of these interests. Minos and Agamemnon were actively and ambitiously expansionist. Minos conquered and colonized the Cyclades, becoming the dominant power in the southern Aegean.<sup>1</sup> Agamemnon coordinated a Panhellenic assault of unprecedented size on distant Troy.<sup>2</sup> Both of these heroic kings used their surplus resources as a means of accumulating more power, subjugating weaker cities in the continual effort to aggrandize their greatness.<sup>3</sup> The tyrants, on the other hand, adhered to a more conservative policy. Those who had navies and suffered from insufficient land pursued modest imperial projects.<sup>4</sup> Most of the tyrants, however, were concerned only with cultivating their private wealth, which Thucydides conspicuously describes in terms of the physical body (*to sōma*), and securing the power of their households in their respective cities.<sup>5</sup> Unlike the heroic kings, the tyrants focused on preserving what they had rather than acquiring more. As a result, Thucydides' states, they accomplished nothing worthy of account (*ergon axiologon*).

A dichotomy thus emerges within the Archaeology' tradition of autocratic rule between heroic greatness and tyrannical security.<sup>6</sup> The heroic king, preoccupied with greatness, sets his sights outside of his home city, seeking to project his power wherever he may do so. The tyrant instead focuses on something internal to and smaller than the city: his own physical person and the power of his household. This distinction between heroic and tyrannical autocratic styles was not one that was widely established in fifth-century political thought, as often the two forms of autocratic rule were presented as indistinguishable from one another.<sup>7</sup> The distinction is rather Thucydides' own. By introducing such a polarity into the conceptual framework guiding his work, however, Thucydides' Archaeology encourages the reader to wonder about the Athenian autocrat: will it conform to one of these patterns rather than the other, or will it adhere to a style all its own?

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<sup>1</sup> 1.4.1.

<sup>2</sup> 1.9.1-11.2.

<sup>3</sup> 1.8.3.

<sup>4</sup> 1.15.1.

<sup>5</sup> 1.17.1.

<sup>6</sup> Farrar (1988: 144-45) astutely recognizes this polarity in her account of the Archaeology, but she quickly focuses her attention on the idea of tyranny as the "consequence and cause of a polarization of interests of members of the *polis*" as she leaves the Archaeology and applies this framework to the rest of the text. In what follows, I suggest that Thucydides intended for his reader to keep both models of autocratic rule in mind as he or she tracks the characterization of Athens in Book I.

<sup>7</sup> This is not to say that there are not important differences in the way that heroic kings are portrayed in Homeric epic and tyrants are portrayed in fifth-century literature (on this point, see Seaford 2003). It is merely to suggest that many fifth-century Greeks may not have clearly and routinely differentiated the two, as demonstrated by some works of Athenian tragedy and problematized by others.

This question becomes a central preoccupation of Thucydides' first book. The two Corinthian speeches, the *Pentekontaetia*, and Pericles' first speech all contribute to a rich introductory discussion of Athens' autocratic style. Viewing these different moments in the text through the lens of the Archaeology's autocratic tradition enables the reader to recognize that Thucydides' identification of Athens as an autocratic power is a structuring feature of his analysis of Athenian greatness even after the Archaeology. In addition to this, the reader becomes better equipped to identify the various rhetorical strategies used by Thucydides' speakers to present Athens along heroic and tyrannical lines, the theoretical moves being made in such efforts, and the tensions inherent in the positions that result. The rich ingenuity with which Pericles negotiates between heroic and tyrannical elements in the war policy that he prescribes for the Athenians also becomes apparent.

This chapter considers the Corinthians' two speeches in such a way that an important shift can be observed between their use of heroic and tyrannical paradigms to characterize the Athenian threat. It will further problematize and supplement these speeches with the Athenians' response in Sparta and Thucydides' *Pentekontaetia*. The central subject of focus, however, is Pericles' first policy speech. Of Pericles' three speeches delivered in direct discourse, this first speech is of particular interest for the light it sheds on the autocratic character of the Athenians, but it has been relatively neglected by political theorists, who often focus more of their attention on the Funeral Oration and the final speech.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, commentators of all disciplinary stripes interested in the heroic overtones of Periclean policy have failed to recognize the speech's rich characterization of Athens as a collective hero. Loren Samons II, for instance, has recently written:

Pericles makes no grand ideological or philosophical claims about Athens in this first speech, as he will later do in his last two speeches in Thucydides' work. The more complex ideas here . . . have nothing to do with ostensibly *Athenian* character traits or ideals.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast, this chapter demonstrates that Pericles' first speech is deeply ideological in character, constructing Athens as a hero from its very first line while simultaneously and ambitiously reconsidering what it means to be heroic. Indeed, the speech attempts to establish a salutary

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<sup>8</sup> Consider, for instance, Orwin (1994: 25, 28, 61, 133), who makes only gestural reference to the speech. Mary Nichols (2015: 30-31), in a chapter devoted to Pericles, gives the content of the speech just two paragraphs. Ober (1998: 81-83) gives it just three. Connor (1984: 50-51) also gives the speech surprisingly short shrift. Two recent exceptions are Bernard Dobski (2017) and Seth Jaffe (2017: 180-92). Dobski argues that the speech advances a universalist vision of the proper ends of political life; this is markedly different from the interpretation offered here, and depends on an exaggerated view of Pericles' claims to self-sufficiency. Jaffe offers a more textually nuanced account that seeks to draw out the differences in political psychology between the Spartans and Athenians. There is little to disagree with in Jaffe's account, and this study complements its analysis by carrying forward the previously developed reading of the Archaeology to Pericles' first speech and developing more historically contextualized consideration of Pericles' arguments. In doing so, this analysis is able to identify and explore the interaction between heroic and tyrannical paradigms that occurs in Pericles speech, an interaction that is absent in Jaffe's analysis, thereby offering a richer account of what Thucydides' Pericles is doing by articulating his war policy as he does.

<sup>9</sup> 2016: 147. In addition, cf. Euben 1986: 374-75, 378; Connor 1984: 50-51, 71-72

balance between heroic and tyrannical elements in Athenian war policy that goes beyond anything previously accounted for in the Archaeology.

Pericles' first speech is a culmination of a certain way of thinking about Athens that dominates Book I but becomes increasingly problematic as the war progresses. Thucydides' pre-war narrative and speeches treat Athens as if it were a single, unitary actor, focusing almost entirely on its relationship with other cities. Little is said of the internal dynamics of Athens as Thucydides and his speakers vie with one another to conceptualize Athens as an autocratic entity. Pericles' first speech is in this sense the final word in this discussion, at once representing the most sophisticated attempt to negotiate Athens' relationship with the various strands of the Greek autocratic tradition, dramatically illustrating the unity of Athens in the Athenians' approval of his prescribed policy, and hinting at further complexities that attend conceptualizing a democracy as an autocratic power.

What follows does not assume or defend the ideas that Pericles was Thucydides' mouthpiece or that Thucydides wrote his work to uphold Pericles' reputation. Even as Thucydides insists on conveying the truth of what happened and what was said, we must recognize that Pericles was one actor among many in his narrative. Thucydides holds him at a distance just as he does his other speakers, giving the reader space to judge the validity and effectiveness of what he has to say. This does not mean that Pericles was just like any other speaker in Thucydides' text. No other speaker is consistently abstracted from the agonism of policy debate in the way that Thucydides' Pericles is. No other speaker is introduced and eulogized with comparable praise. No other speaker is allowed so many speeches in the Athenian assembly, nor do others' speeches explicitly refer to and build on one another in the way that Pericles' speeches do. There are clearly differences between what Thucydides has to say and what he has Pericles say. But this fact alone is not sufficient to demonstrate that Thucydides wished to criticize Periclean policy and Pericles as a man. Rather, we must constantly recognize and remind ourselves of the different explanatory and rhetorical demands that each faced when speaking. At the risk of oversimplifying the matter, we must remember that Thucydides is writing about events that already happened and with an eye to posterity. Pericles, on the other hand, is embedded within a set of historical circumstances that are partly known and partly unknown to him, encouraging one action or another, and faced with an Athenian populace of variable temperament.<sup>10</sup> This does not mean that Thucydides' direct speech is never rhetorical, nor that it never intends to influence his reader's action. Similarly, it does not mean that Thucydides' Pericles never utilizes an explanatory mode of speaking, attempting to teach his listeners about the fundamental dynamics of political life by stepping back from present circumstances. But these complications only give us further reason to suspect that there may be more going on than straightforward criticism when Thucydides and Pericles appear at odds with one another in the text.

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<sup>10</sup> Or, as Farrar (1988: 187) puts it, "It is not appropriate, though it might be tempting, to contrast the agent Pericles, who moves forwards and experiences life from the inside, with the historian Thucydides, who thinks backwards and reflects on life from the outside."



## *Characterizing the Athenian Autocrat*

Before approaching Pericles' first speech, it is helpful to look at the rich dialogue concerning Athenian character and greatness developed by Thucydides in Book I. Pride of place in this discussion is often given to the Corinthians' speech at the First Spartan Congress, and rightfully so. In admonishing the Spartans for their negligence and exhorting them to war, the Corinthians draw the most vivid account of the Athenian national character to appear in Thucydides' text. More than simply offering a vivid account, however, they appear to say something fundamentally true about the Athenian juggernaut. This section will highlight these features and account for the reasons that we have for accepting their validity. At the same time, however, it will underline the rhetorical nature of the portrait that the Corinthians paint, calling attention to the ways in which Thucydides encourages his readers to be skeptical about Corinthian speech even as he confirms much of its content. By attending to this process, we are able to recognize both the pervasive use of autocratic paradigms in Book I to account for Athenian greatness and the potential that these paradigms have for manipulation in the pursuit of specific political objectives.

The Corinthian account of Athenian national character is wrought through a series of juxtapositions with the Spartans--two peoples that are "entirely different," the Corinthians claim--resulting in a catalogue of polar oppositions that are deeply unflattering for the Corinthians' host.<sup>11</sup> While depicting the Spartans as a sluggish, conservative people, the Corinthians emphasize the Athenians' frenetic activity and unquenchable thirst for gain: "They are innovators, quick both to form plans and to execute their schemes in reality;" "They again are bold beyond their ability, risk takers beyond reason, and optimistic amid dangers;" "They are tenacious...and often away from home...for they expect to acquire something by their absence;" "When victorious over enemies, they advance to the utmost, and they retreat as little as possible when defeated."<sup>12</sup> Nor is this all:

Should they not accomplish what they intend, they believe themselves deprived of what is theirs, while what they advance upon and acquire they believe a paltry achievement in comparison with future successes. And if they fail in some endeavor, they satisfy their need by turning their expectations elsewhere, for they are unique in that having and hoping for what they set their minds upon are the same because of the speed with which they execute their plans. With labors and risks they toil in this way for their whole lives; they enjoy least what they have due to always acquiring more; they believe there to be no holiday other than doing what they must and peaceful leisure a greater misfortune than laborious occupation. So, if someone should say of them, encapsulating their character, that they are by birth incapable of quiet themselves and of allowing it to other people, he would speak correctly.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> 1.70.1.

<sup>12</sup> 1.70.2-5.

<sup>13</sup> 1.70.7-9.

The Athenians appear an unstoppable force of acquisitive intention and action. The concision and rapidity of the Corinthians' Greek prose, so difficult to capture in English, sweeps away the Greek reader, allowing form and content to reinforce one another. The repeated use of balanced constructions creates inertia and gives the description a sense of inevitability to match that of further Athenian expansion. The rhetoric is masterful, and the portrait of the Athenians is surprisingly flattering. Were it not for the larger condemnation of Athens in which this description is embedded, one might think it among the finest moments of praise in Thucydides' text. Despite their opposition to the aim of the speech, one could imagine the Athenian observers often nodding their heads in approval as the Corinthians let forth this descriptive deluge.

The speech admits of obvious hyperbole. It is a spectacular turn of phrase to suggest that the Athenians execute their plans so quickly that to have and to hope are one and the same for them. But the fact that they fail to achieve some of their plans, as noted immediately before and after this statement is uttered, undermines the literal truth of the claim. Occasionally Athenian hopes go unfulfilled regardless of the speed with which they are pursued. Nor can the audience realistically accept that the Athenians take no holiday (the Greek is *heortên*, "festival" or "feast") from the pursuit of their acquisitions. The City Dionysia, for instance was well known and attended by non-Athenians, and, while not devoid of the trappings of empire, festivals such as this one did indeed mean an interlude from active expansion.<sup>14</sup> These moments of exaggeration are relatively innocent, however, and they have not deterred most commentators from believing that Thucydides' Corinthians reveal something essential about the Athenian national character. This belief is furthered by the general animosity that serves as a backcloth to the Corinthians' portrait. We would be much more likely to doubt the veracity of an invective leveled at an enemy, whereas praise of the same appears to be beyond bias.

If the Corinthians have captured the essence of the Athenian character, it appears that Thucydides is offering a clear indication of which model of autocratic rule the Athenian democracy gravitates towards. As a restlessly expansionist people, the Athenian democracy reprises the model of Minos and Agamemnon, the heroic kings of the distant past. They too were innovators, imperialists, and expansionists. Minos establishes the first thalassocracy and extends his rule throughout the Cyclades, while Agamemnon seeks to conquer Troy and all but invents the idea of Greekness in this common effort. The Archaeology, however, at the same time that it offers us a framework for understanding the Corinthian portrait, gives us reason to pause before accepting this portrait at face value. The construction of a strong antithesis between the Athenians and Spartans is consistent with the Archaeology's framework, but the specifics of the antitheses do not cohere. The Corinthians hardly mention the structural foundations of Athenian and Spartan power, nor does their characterological contrast pivot around the difference between autocratic and egalitarian cultures. This contrast instead turns on conservative passivity versus expansionist activity. It resembles, in other words, the contrast internal to Thucydides' autocratic tradition, that of heroic kingship versus tyranny, with the Athenians resembling the former and

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Pericles' comment at 2.38.1. The now classic work on the imperial context of the City Dionysia is Goldhill (1987).

the Spartans the latter. In a subtly ironic framing, those who think of themselves as the foremost tyrannomachs of the Greek tradition are attributed cultural characteristics that are allusive to tyranny.<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, in encouraging the Spartans to take the initiative against Athens, the Corinthians argue that Spartan political practices are outdated (*archaiotropa*) compared to those of the Athenians and are therefore a critical disadvantage.<sup>16</sup> “As a matter of necessity,” they say, in political practice “as in other skills (*technês*), that which is new always prevails.”<sup>17</sup> The Archaeology, however, gives us good reason to question this argument both in principle and as it is applied. At the level of principle, the Archaeology suggests that politics and technical skill follow distinct patterns of development, making such a straightforward analogy untenable. Seamanship, the *technê* that Thucydides focused on most in the Archaeology, progresses in a linear manner, new superseding the old, as the Corinthians suggest. Political development, however, is nonlinear and periodic. The Greek tyrants, it is true, are overpowered and replaced by Spartan *eunomia*, which might be conceived of as an innovative form of rule by comparison. But the tyrants did not supersede heroic kingship in the same manner. Rather, heroic kingship became destabilized as a result of migrations, Agamemnon’s expansionist war against Troy, and civil strife. Tyranny enters the scene as a result of the further development of commercial wealth and sea power, and it is not clear that it is a superior political form when it arrives.<sup>18</sup> The Corinthians’ maxim therefore looks suspect given what Thucydides’ reader has thus far encountered in his text.

Even if we accept this maxim in principle, however, we might still question the way in which it is applied. In the first instance, we might wonder what exactly it is that we are to identify with Athenian newness. Naturally, we might think that the novelty of Athenian politics stems from the establishment of the democracy. Regardless of whether we date this to the reforms of Cleisthenes or Ephialtes, the democracy would have been a much younger regime than that of the Spartans, which was already famed for its antiquity at this time. Though perhaps the most intuitive sense of the Corinthian’s claim, there is good reason to believe that this is not what the Corinthians are referring to specifically. If they are effectively suggesting that democracy will, by virtue of its relative newness, always surpass Spartan style *eunomia*, it is hard to understand what the uptake of the Corinthians’ exhortation is. Must the Spartans become democrats if they are to have any chance against Athens? Nothing of this sort is explicitly or implicitly suggested by the rest of the Corinthians’ speech, and it is hard to imagine that this is what they had in mind. Perhaps the Corinthians are then thinking about the different ways in which the Athenians and Spartans constructed and led their alliances? The Athenian development of a centralized, tribute-paying empire could be considered a political innovation, at least within a fully Greek context. (The Persian empire had long been established along such

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<sup>15</sup> Farrar (1988: 183) similarly notes the resemblance between Thucydides’ Spartans and the model of tyranny developed in the Archaeology.

<sup>16</sup> 1.71.2.

<sup>17</sup> 1.71.3.

<sup>18</sup> 1.12.1-13.1.

lines.) Again, though, the upshot of such a claim makes it unlikely that this is what the Corinthians are referring to or suggesting that the Spartans adopt. Are we to imagine that the Corinthians want the Spartans to rule over them with a more authoritarian hand, demanding tribute and depriving them of all autonomy? Nothing of what the Corinthians say in the rest of their speech coheres with this idea, and common sense rebels at it.

It appears rather that the Corinthians have something else in mind: the active and aggressive way in which the Athenians pursue their interest. It is this that the Corinthians are suggesting that the Spartans mimic, and thus we must assume that it is this which the Corinthians are identifying as the crucial Athenian innovation. If this is so, however, there seems to be something fundamentally confused about the Corinthians' delineation of active expansionism as an innovative mode of political behavior. As the Archaeology has demonstrated, this was the characteristic practice of the heroic kings, the oldest form of stable political rule Thucydides could identify. Spartan passivity and conservatism, on the other hand, resembles the *modus operandi* of the tyrants, a relatively newer form of rule than heroic kingship. In applying the principle that "the new always prevails," the Corinthians therefore appear to have gotten their history backward. According to the Corinthians' logic of political progress, it should be the Spartans who are poised to defeat the Athenians as a matter of necessity.

Moments such as these cast doubt on the idea that Thucydides is using the Corinthians as a mouthpiece for what he believes to be true. We might more readily think that Thucydides is presenting the Corinthians as talented rhetoricians who will utilize whatever argument can help them achieve their end, and that it just happens to be the case that what is true of the Athenians is political advantageous for the Corinthians at this moment in time. This sense only increases when one turns to the Corinthians' second speech in Sparta later in Book I. The Corinthians are again urging war against the Athenians, but their primary audience is no longer the Spartans, who have already voted for war, but the other members of the Peloponnesian alliance. We find a very different rhetorical strategy in this speech, and accordingly a very different picture of the Athenians. Whereas previously the Athenian character appeared as an irresistible driving force about to engulf the whole world, now it is not even given pride of place in the constitution of Athenian power. Rather, the Corinthians suggest that Athenian power resides more in hired mercenaries than the Athenians themselves.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, that power which is homegrown is attributed to acquired skill rather than natural character.<sup>20</sup> On both accounts, the Corinthians argue, the Peloponnesians possess a decisive advantage, for mercenaries can be lured away by the promise of higher pay, and "the advantage that we have by nature cannot be theirs through instruction, while that which they excel at through skill we can acquire by practice."<sup>21</sup> In a remarkable reversal of their former position, the Peloponnesians now stand as the unqualified betters of the Athenians in terms of natural character. The previously defeatist Corinthians are

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<sup>19</sup> 1.121.3.

<sup>20</sup> 1.121.4.

<sup>21</sup> 1.121.4.

now optimistic of Peloponnesian success. “In all likelihood,” they assert with extraordinary confidence, the Athenians “will be overcome by a single naval victory.”<sup>22</sup>

While raising the Peloponnesians’ spirits, this change of position concerning the Athenian character leaves the Corinthians in a rhetorical bind. In insisting that the war is winnable, they must nevertheless maintain that the threat is sufficiently serious to warrant immediate action. The Corinthians continue to press the idea that an unchecked Athenian menace will eventually reduce them all to slavery, but they also pursue a different strategy, perhaps recognizing the tensions inherent in that line of argument. Unlike in the first speech, where the Athenians are characterized in heroic terms, the second speech features a Corinthian turn towards the language of tyranny. Twice they characterize the Athenians as a *polis tyrannos*, and the previously mentioned description of Athenian power as “bought” or “mercenary” (*ônêtê*) furthers this association.<sup>23</sup> By thus framing the Athenians, the Corinthians encourage the Peloponnesians to take a principled stand against this Panhellenic menace, suggesting there would be inconsistency in their acquiescence when they are so wary of tyrants lording over any single city.<sup>24</sup>

Corinthian rhetoric is effective. In both the first and second Spartan Congress they get their desired result, even if Thucydides makes it clear that their speech was not the decisive factor in convincing the Spartans to go to war.<sup>25</sup> This effectiveness across contexts, however, comes at the price of consistency. Who are the Athenians in the Corinthians’ eyes beyond a hated foe to be fought at all costs? The reader cannot say for certain. Instead, the reader interested in finding some underlying reality to the Athenian character encounters the Corinthians’ varying portraits as so many hypotheses that need testing. Verification must come from elsewhere.

The Athenians’ response to the first Corinthian speech, as interesting as it is in its own terms, sheds little further light on the matter. Their stated aim is to demonstrate to the Spartans that they hold their empire “not unreasonably” (*oute apeikotôs*) and that they are a city “worthy of consideration” (*axia logou*).<sup>26</sup> This latter characterization mirrors the Archaeology’s claim that the Greek tyrants had not accomplished anything worthy of consideration (*eprachthê ouden ergon axiologon*), thereby, perhaps, subtly reinforcing the Corinthians’ affiliation of the Athenians with heroic expansionism.<sup>27</sup> But, in general, the Athenians adhere to a perspective that is consistently and explicitly autocratic, yet neither clearly expansionist nor conservative. They willingly admit that they hold a dominant position within their “alliance,” going so far as to

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<sup>22</sup> 1.121.4.

<sup>23</sup> There was a deep relationship between tyranny and mercenary power in the archaic and classical Greek mindset, as it was one of the central institutional features that allowed the tyrant to subvert the traditional norms of a city. According to Seaford (2003: 97), mercenary power allowed the tyrant “to dispense with the ancient principles of solidarity through kinship and of reciprocity,” instead using money as the foundation on which to establish and maintain his power.

<sup>24</sup> 1.122.3, 124.3.

<sup>25</sup> 1.88.1. Cf. 1.118.2.

<sup>26</sup> 1.73.1.

<sup>27</sup> 1.17.1.

suggest a quantitative rather than qualitative difference between the rule of the Persian king and their own rule over the Ionians.<sup>28</sup> They assert moreover that justice is not required of them, for justice itself requires equality, and theirs is a situation of the more capable ruling over the less. Nevertheless, the Athenians argue, they have treated their dependents with some degree of equality, allowing them recourse to “equal laws” (*tois omoiois nomois*) in court, thereby having demonstrated more justice than is necessary.<sup>29</sup> For this, they think, they should be praised, but instead they have been greeted with resentment.<sup>30</sup> Habituated to being generously treated as equals, the dependents bristle whenever the Athenians exercise their power as rulers, as they believe themselves to have been wronged by an equal rather than forced by a superior.<sup>31</sup> The Athenians do not address the inevitable question of why they continue in this masquerade of equality if it is neither required by justice nor conducive to the greater stability of their rule. Instead, the Athenians are satisfied to press upon the Spartans that theirs is not an alliance characterized by equality, but of the superior ruling inferiors.

Unlike the Corinthians, the Athenians base their argument in the universality of human nature, not the partiality of national character. In ruling over others who are weaker than them, they argue, they are doing what anyone would do in the same situation.

We have done nothing amazing or deviant from normal human behavior if we accepted an empire that was being given and did not give it up, overcome by the greatest of conquerors<sup>32</sup>—honor, fear, and advantage; nor in turn are we the first to do such a thing, but rather it has always been the case that the weaker are coerced by the stronger.<sup>33</sup>

According to the Athenians, their imperialism is neither heroic nor tyrannical, it is human. It springs from motivations that are common to all and, in their view, compelling for all. We are all would-be members of the autocratic tradition, the Athenians suggest. They introduce these notions of compulsion and inevitability not in any explicit attempt to exculpate the supposed injustices of their rule. As they state at the outset of their speech, they will not seek to defend themselves on these grounds.<sup>34</sup> Rather, they wish to give the Spartans pause, to make them consider the implications of victory, should that be the result. According to their universalist perspective of human nature, this would see the Spartans reprise the role of the Athenians as the hated imperial power, losing the goodwill (*eunoia*) that they presently enjoy as the power opposed to Athens.<sup>35</sup> The Athenians are, they claim, a villain the Spartans should be loath to lose, backing their audience into a corner from which both victory and defeat appear problematic.

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<sup>28</sup> 1.77.5.

<sup>29</sup> 1.77.1.

<sup>30</sup> 1.76.3-4.

<sup>31</sup> 1.77.3-4.

<sup>32</sup> Thucydides' Greek here is more ambiguous than English allows for. For the rhetorical effect created by this ambiguity, see Fisher and Hoekstra 2017: 382-83.

<sup>33</sup> 1.76.2.

<sup>34</sup> 1.73.1.

<sup>35</sup> 1.77.6.

In pursuing this bold rhetorical strategy, the Athenians do not wholly deny the existence of national differences, but even draw upon the notion in order to give their rhetorical knife a final twist. After suggesting that Spartan victory would lead only to further rule and hatred, the Athenians assert that the Spartans will be particularly poorly equipped to deal with this on account of their national customs. “You are not able to mix your own conventions and practices (*ta nomima*) with others, and, besides, when one of you goes abroad he follows neither them nor those which the rest of the Greeks observe.”<sup>36</sup> This is an overt allusion to the medism and tyrannical ambitions of Pausanias after the Persian defeat, a particularly shameful moment in Spartan history and a direct cause of Athens’ rise to preeminence.<sup>37</sup> In itself, the admission that different cities have different endemic cultures does not commit the Athenians to any inconsistency. One can insist at the same time that there is a universal human tendency towards rule driven by honor, fear, and interest and that this tendency manifests itself differently among different people. Yet, the particular example of Pausanias raises significant questions about the central thrust of the Athenian argument. As an individual, Pausanias adds anecdotal evidence to the Athenians’ contention: he sought to replace Persian rule with his own and became abominable to the allies in doing so. As a collective, however, the Spartans responded to Pausanias’ abuses by recalling him from his post and ceding the leadership of the anti-Persian efforts to Athens. Recognizing the perils of their position, they chose to retreat rather than press their rule. This retraction raises considerable doubts concerning the inevitability of Spartan rule should they defeat the Athenians in the imminent war, and of the universality of the compulsion to rule whenever one can. The Spartans rather appear to have already disproved the Athenians’ claim: as a people who could rule, they chose not to.

The Corinthian and Athenian speeches leave the reader without solid ground to stand on. Thucydides’ direct narrative of the period between the Persian and Peloponnesian Wars, however, the so-called *Pentekontaetia*, offers a perspective from which the reader can assess many of their claims. As Connor has noted, this mini-history, folded into the narrative between the First and Second Spartan Congresses, works as a touchstone against which to judge the legitimacy of the Corinthians’ initial portrait of the Athenian and Spartan temperaments.<sup>38</sup> By detailing the process whereby Athenian power became “great” and thus compelled the Spartans to war out of fear, Thucydides engages both with the national characteristics articulated by the Corinthians and with the Archaeology’s various models of power. It therefore offers an invaluable guide in making sense of the constitutive components of Athenian democratic greatness according to Thucydides’ own understanding.

The *Pentekontaetia* begins by continuing the work of the Archaeology and establishing the autocratic structural bases of Athenian power. The narrative describes the process whereby the Athenians built walls, established imperial revenue, used this revenue to augment their naval

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<sup>36</sup> 1.77.6.

<sup>37</sup> The referent of the allusion is made explicit by the immediately preceding reference to Spartan behavior in the wake of the Persian War (1.77.6).

<sup>38</sup> Connor 1984: 43.

power, and then used this naval power to effectively expand and consolidate their empire.<sup>39</sup> The bulk of the narrative, however, concerns this final point, and it is here that the affinity of the Athenians with the heroic rather than the tyrannical model of autocratic rule becomes clear. The dizzying pace of Athenian action is evident as soon as Thucydides turns towards the augmentation of the empire. Major imperial actions are described in rapid succession using a prose style that is atypically clear and workaday for the author. In the first paragraph alone, Thucydides accounts for the siege and capture of Eion, the enslavement of Skyros, the defeat of the Carystians, the revolt of the Naxians, and their eventual submission.<sup>40</sup> Historians lament the brevity with which Thucydides treats these and subsequent events, as descriptive richness is sacrificed for narrative pace. The choice of narrative style, however, creates a clear sense of the frenetic activity of Athenian imperial expansion, furthering the reader's acceptance of the Corinthians' characterization. "The impression that emerges," Connor writes of the *Pentekontaetia* as a whole, "is of the restless energy of the Athenians, their refusal to be stymied, their ability to come out of every setback with even greater vigor than before."<sup>41</sup>

It is not, however, only in its general depiction of collective character that Thucydides' *Pentekontaetia* aligns the Athenians with the heroic model of autocratic rule. It also does so through the concrete actions attributed to the Athenians. Minos, for instance, is credited with the first thalassocracy over the Cyclades in the Archaeology. In the *Pentekontaetia*, we see the Athenians take up that mantle, ruling over this same island chain with increasingly absolute power. At the same time, the reader witnesses actions that are directly reminiscent of Agamemnon's invasion of Troy. In addition to numerous actions in Asia Minor and Cyprus, the Athenians undertake a large-scale voyage to Egypt in an attempt to contest Persian supremacy along the Nile.<sup>42</sup> The cumulative effect of these actions contributes to the sense that the Athenians are not only the heirs of heroic autocracy, but that they are superior to their predecessors. The Athenians combine Aegean thalassocracy with ambitious foreign undertakings; they are both Minos and Agamemnon simultaneously, and altogether more stable to boot. While Agamemnon's ultimately victorious voyage to Troy sent Greece into turmoil, the Athenians hardly skip a beat when faced with the utter destruction of their fleet in Egypt.<sup>43</sup> The *Pentekontaetia* thus establishes the Athenians' empire as a phenomenon that has precedent in Greek history, but no equal.

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<sup>39</sup> The establishment of walls: 1.89.3-93.8; 1.107.1; 1.108.3. The establishment of imperial revenue: 1.96.1-2. The augmentation of the fleet: 1.99.3. The expansion and consolidation of the empire: 1.97.1-118.2.

<sup>40</sup> 1.98.1-4.

<sup>41</sup> Connor 1984: 45.

<sup>42</sup> 1.104.1-2, 109.1-110.4.

<sup>43</sup> Athenian destruction in Egypt strongly foreshadows what will take place in Sicily. Thucydides highlights this resonance with the phrase, "few out of many . . . were saved, and the majority was destroyed" (1.110.1.). Cf. 7.87.6; also 3.112.8.



## *Periclean Policy and Heroic Resolve*

Thucydides establishes the heroic tenor of Periclean war policy in the statesman's very first sentence.<sup>44</sup> "Athenians," he begins, "I have always been of the same mind, do not yield (*mê eikein*) to the Peloponnesians."<sup>45</sup> This refusal to yield is the crux of Pericles' position, and it remains constant in Thucydides' work. It is on this note that Pericles' final speech concludes, and mentions of yielding and refusing to yield are echoed three times elsewhere in his two policy speeches.<sup>46</sup> The specific language in which this appeal is made is strongly suggestive of the stubbornness demonstrated by tragic heroes, especially of the Sophoclean variety. As Bernard Knox has argued, *eikein*, "to yield," was "a favorite Sophoclean word."<sup>47</sup> In six of his seven remaining tragedies, we find this word used (often repeatedly) in appeals for heroes to relent from a course upon which they have resolutely set themselves. According to the pattern Knox identifies, heroes reject these appeals, they refuse to yield, and they follow their resolve to its tragic end. Consequently, Knox states, "this word [i.e. *eikein*] (with its compounds) is the key word of the Sophoclean tragic situation."<sup>48</sup>

Knox may overstate the rigidity of the Sophoclean pattern that he identifies. There is some diversity in the way that Sophoclean heroes respond to the appeals to yield. Oedipus, for instance, is frequently unyielding, as in response to Jocasta's entreaties to drop the question of his identity, but he also heeds the chorus' appeal not to punish Creon with death for his supposed attempt at usurpation. Ajax appears to yield to Tecmessa's supplications, either through a momentary lapse in his resolve or as a stratagem to be left alone, but he ultimately follows through with his plan. Creon eventually yields in his attitude towards Antigone, but his change of heart comes too late. There is, therefore, some flexibility to the Sophoclean formula, suggesting that the pattern identified by Knox should be treated as a loose framework rather than a strict template. This framework constructs a common set of expectations of how the hero's story will play out while leaving sufficient flexibility for each hero to enact his or her own story.

It is not difficult to see where Sophocles and his audience might have derived this framework of expectations. The pattern of the Sophoclean hero is, to a significant extent, already to be found in the *Iliad*. The refusal of both Achilles and Hector to yield at crucial junctures of

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<sup>44</sup> It has frequently been noted that Thucydides' immediately preceding characterization of Pericles as "most capable in speech in action" echoes a Homeric formulation used to describe Achilles (*Iliad* 9.443; cf. 9.53-54, 9.374), but to my knowledge the heroic resonances of Pericles' opening have not yet been recognized in the scholarship. Connor (1984: 72) comes closest when stewing over whether the Athenians should have rescinded the Megarian Decree, noting that "to yield entails the loss of Athens' heroic status." The point, however, is not developed. For the Homeric echoes of Thucydides' characterization of Pericles, see Lloyd-Jones 1983: 181; Connor 1984: 50; Hornblower 1991: 225-26.

<sup>45</sup> 1.140.1.

<sup>46</sup> 2.64.3; cf. 1.141.1, 2.60.1, 2.61.1.

<sup>47</sup> Knox 1964: 15.

<sup>48</sup> Knox 1964: 15. One can find parallels in tragedy outside of Sophocles as well. In *Prometheus Bound* (l. 320), for instance, Ocean decries Prometheus' unwillingness to yield to his sufferings, using *eikein* to do so, and attempts to persuade him to submit to the rule of Zeus. Prometheus, of course, rebuffs Ocean's advice and maintains his defiant attitude. (The author of *Prometheus Bound* also used other words to describe the titan's refusal to yield, such as *epichalas* at l. 181.)

the epic are central points of the narrative's development. Hector's refusals instigate the narrative's climax. He first refuses the advice of Polydamus to retreat with the troops behind the walls of Troy. He then refuses to yield when Achilles pins him outside the city's walls, disregarding the pleas of both his mother and father. The first refusal results in the death of countless Trojans, while the second results in the death of Hector himself. Achilles' stubbornness is a more pervasively structuring feature of the epic, beginning with his initial defiance of Agamemnon in Book I. It reaches its peak in the so-called embassy scene of Book 9, when Agamemnon sends Ajax, Odysseus, and Phoenix to try and appease Achilles with untold gifts. The condition set upon these gifts is nothing less than Achilles' submission to Agamemnon's authority. "Let him give way," Agamemnon says, "and let him yield place to me, in as much as I am the kinglier and inasmuch as I can call myself the elder born."<sup>49</sup> Showing his typical good sense, Odysseus does not articulate Agamemnon's request in just this way, but instead exhorts Achilles to "stop, and give way from your heart-wrenching anger."<sup>50</sup> Even with this softer touch, however, Achilles refuses. "Not if he gave me gifts as many as the sand or the dust is," Achilles responds, "not even so would Agamemnon have his way with my spirit"<sup>51</sup>—even though this refusal will mean death for countless companions.

Pericles' invocation of heroic stubbornness will perhaps strike the reader as a dubious note on which to begin. As the fates of Achilles and Hector suggest, the model of the Sophoclean hero is not a happy one. The costs of heroic stubbornness are severe. Antigone is buried alive. Creon loses his whole household. Oedipus is confronted with the fact that he is a patricide and participant in incest. Perhaps only Philoctetes can be said to survive his stubbornness unscathed, but this is the exception that proves the rule: it is only through the intervention of a god that he is able to do so. The heroic resolve of these figures is also met with particularly harsh criticism by their interlocutors on stage. Sophoclean heroes are said to be ill-advised (*aboulon/aboulia*), misguided (*duslogistos*), mindless (*anous*), fools (*môros/môria*), even savages (*ômos*); they act with senselessness (*aphrosunêi/aphronôs*), with rashness (*tolmêi*), and with over-boldness (*thrasos/thrasus*).<sup>52</sup> They are "in love with the impossible," as Ismene famously says of Antigone.<sup>53</sup> Haimon poetically articulates the crux of the hero's folly in an attempt to deter Creon from his adamant resolve:

A man, though wise, should never be ashamed  
of learning more, and must not be too rigid.  
Have you not seen the trees beside storm torrents--  
the ones that yield (*hupei*) preserve their limbs and leaves,  
while the resistant perish root and branch?

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<sup>49</sup> Il. 9.158, 160-61.

<sup>50</sup> I. 9.260.

<sup>51</sup> I. 9.385-86.

<sup>52</sup> *Aboulia*: *Electra* ll. 398, 429; *aboulos*: *Oedipus Tyrannos* l. 634; *duslogistos*: *Ajax* l. 40; *anous*: *Ajax* l.763, *Antigone* ll. 99, 562; *môros*: *Oedipus at Colonus* l. 592; *môria*: *Antigone* l. 470; *ômos*: *Ajax* ll. 205, 885, 930, *Antigone* l. 471; *aphrosunêi*: *Antigone* l. 383; *aphronôs*: *Ajax* l. 766; *tolmêi*: *Ajax* ll. 46, 1004; *thrasos*: *Antigone* l. 853, *Electra* ll. 626, 995; *thrasus*: *Electra* l. 1446.

<sup>53</sup> I. 90.

And so the ship that will not slacken sail,  
the ropes drawn tight, unyielding (*hupeikei mêden*), overturns.  
She ends the voyage with her keel on top.  
No, yield from your wrath (*eike thumou*), allow a change of stand.<sup>54</sup>

Against such a background, one cannot help to question the wisdom of Pericles' counsel to the Athenians. It would appear that Thucydides presents Pericles as setting the city up to fail; to be torn up root and branch like an unyielding oak. We might ask whether Pericles, by insisting on such a policy, had indeed "lost all political reason," drunk on power and a prisoner to his own resolve.<sup>55</sup>

Before pronouncing the folly of Pericles (or rejecting the tragic association because it would entail his folly), there are two important considerations to bear in mind. The first pertains specifically to questions of interpreting the hero, Sophoclean and otherwise. Despite the lamentations of their on-stage critics, it is not the case that Sophoclean heroes were simple models of bad judgment, or, for that matter, that all his heroes are to be evaluated in the same way. Sophocles was not a writer of simple morality tales, but a master of disquieting ambivalence. While his heroes may at times deny very reasonable appeals to yield, their commitment to their own conception of what is right and honorable for themselves is often deeply compelling. As Knox comments,

It is through this refusal to accept human limitations that humanity achieves its true greatness. It is a greatness achieved not with the help and encouragement of the gods, but through the hero's loyalty to his nature in trial, suffering, and death; a triumph purely human, then, but one which the gods, in time, recognize and in which they surely, in their own far-off mysterious way, rejoice.<sup>56</sup>

It is true, heroes suffer as a result of their stubbornness, and often they make others suffer as well. But, as has been previously noted, this is what greatness costs. The same qualities that made heroes difficult friends and family members won for them everlasting fame and often cult worship. Is it unreasonable to suffer and incur suffering for such greatness? Perhaps, but perhaps not. Sophocles asks his audience to consider both sides.

Returning to Pericles, we must also note that there are very real ways in which his policy differs in its basic structure from the stubbornness of a Sophoclean hero. For these heroes, as for those of the *Iliad*, the root of their resolve was in the seat of their passions, their *thumos*. We see this quite clearly in the various appeals for these heroes to yield. Haimon concludes his advice to Creon by enjoining him to "yield from your *thumos*."<sup>57</sup> Odysseus implores Achilles to "yield

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<sup>54</sup> ll. 710-18. Trans. Wyckoff, amended. On the textual ambiguity of l. 718, see Griffith 1999: 245-46.

<sup>55</sup> The quotation comes from Geoffrey Hawthorn (2009: 227), who answers the question in the affirmative. It bears noting that Hawthorne arrives at this conclusion through his own analysis of events in the first years of the war, not through the echoes of the Sophoclean hero in Pericles' policy. For misgivings similar to Hawthorne's concerning "Pericles' overweening confidence," though with a greater focus on Pericles' purported role in instigating the disruption of Athenian moral norms, see Monoson and Loriaux 1998: 290.

<sup>56</sup> 1964: 27.

<sup>57</sup> l. 718.

from your anger” (*metallêxanti choloio*); Achilles eventually retorts that Agamemnon will never have “his way with my *thumos*.”<sup>58</sup> It is this passionate stubbornness that makes for a natural contrast with reason and good counsel, the constant refrain of Sophoclean interlocutors. They appeal to a contrast between intelligence and passion—the rational and spirited parts of the soul, as Plato would later put it—giving rise to the criticisms of these heroes as “mindless,” “senseless,” and so on. Few, if any, of these heroes would consent to their interlocutor’s characterizations of their actions as irrational. Creon, for instance, defends his intractability with detailed argumentation, and Oedipus is depicted as hyper-rational throughout. But these same heroes would not have denied the implacability of their *thumos*; they simply would have contested the incompatibility of such spirit with right reason.

Pericles, like Sophocles’ interlocutors, places an opposition between intelligence and emotion at the center of his policy of heroic resolve. Against these critics, however, he locates the source of heroic resolve in the intellect rather than the emotions. The Athenian refusal to yield, according to his view, must be grounded in the commitment to a rational plan, a constant *gnômê*, which is itself grounded in a careful analysis of the situation. Rather than act as the wellspring of Athenian stubbornness, the passions, mutable as they are and sensitive to haphazard changes of circumstance, are identified by Pericles as its greatest challenge. He articulates the conflict at once: “I know (*eidôs*) that it is not in the same temper (*orgêi*) that people are persuaded to fight a war and that they actually engage in it, but they change their minds (*gnômas*) in line with their fortunes.”<sup>59</sup> As circumstances change, they work on peoples’ emotions, which in turn affect their policies if they are not of resolute mind. Pericles thus contrasts two different conceptions of *gnômê*, one that leads *orgê* and one that follows it.<sup>60</sup> In the first—that which he himself advocates—*gnômê* is the result of a rational calculation that may consider changes in circumstance and emotion, but which ultimately adheres to its own autonomous determination. The second conception of *gnômê* is slavish and reactive, responding only to momentary changes in circumstance and emotion and allowing these changes to dominate dispassionate calculation. Resolute adherence to the first sort of *gnômê* is no mean feat, especially in times of war.<sup>61</sup> It nevertheless forms the crux of Pericles’ conception of heroic resolve, as well as a defining characteristic of Pericles himself. If the Athenians are to adopt his heroic policy, Pericles demands that the people commit to his *gnômê* with the same constancy that he has shown: “Make up your minds (*dianoêthête*) here and now either to submit before suffering any harm, or if we are going to fight, as seems better to me, that we will be unyielding (*mê eixontes*) to pretexts great and small alike and we will hold what we have acquired without fear.”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Il. 9.260, 386.

<sup>59</sup> 1.140.1.

<sup>60</sup> Edmunds (1975: 10) offers a helpful account of Pericles’ transition in this passage between *gnômê* as “policy based on intelligence or insight” to “(potentially fickle) state of mind.”

<sup>61</sup> Cf. 3.82.2.

<sup>62</sup> 1.144.1.

Pericles states that the reward for this resolve, more than victory over the Spartans, will be a claim to partake in the intelligence (*xuneseôs*) of the common policy. To stake such a claim, Pericles underlines, requires steadfast commitment to that policy—that is, mastery of the intellect over the passions—even if they should encounter some adversity.<sup>63</sup> Such a challenge will be inevitable, he argues, not because their policy is in any way flawed, but because events and their outcomes are at times “no less stupid (*amathôs*) than people’s thoughts.”<sup>64</sup> This is a striking and unusual simile, and the exact meaning of *amathôs* in this context is ambiguous.<sup>65</sup> The language, however, clearly reinforces Pericles’ intellectualist theme: the test of Athenian resolve will be their ability to stand by their good judgment in a world that is often hostile to human reasoning, and in a war that will try the steadfastness of their thoughts.

It is important to appreciate the suggestive politics of Pericles’ word choice. *Amathia*, literally meaning “lack of education” or “ignorance,” often featured in fifth-century attacks on the popular capacity to rule successfully. In the Old Oligarch, for instance, it is alleged that “in the popular mass (*dêmos*), there is the most *amathia*,” and it is wondered by an imaginary critic how such an uneducated rabble could ever guide the collective successfully.<sup>66</sup> We find this thought echoed by the Theban Herald in Euripides, who again assumes that the common man is *amathês* and therefore an incompetent ruler.<sup>67</sup> The anti-democratic polemic of Herodotus’ Megabyzos makes much the same point.<sup>68</sup> In these elite arguments, popular *amathia* is taken to be a primary obstacle to good government. For Pericles, however, it is the *amathia* of events that poses the danger to intelligent Athenian policy more than that of the Athenian people. While noting that the thoughts of people can also be *amathôs*, his entire speech presumes that his Athenian audience will be capable of stably abiding by right reason through the inevitable shifts of fortune. In this way, Pericles assumes in the Athenian many a constancy of correct belief that was traditionally heralded as the exclusive possession of the Greek aristocrat.<sup>69</sup> Pericles’ policy is thus ennobling in the aristocratic intellectual capacity that it attributes, and in the heroic resolve that it demands of the Athenian people.

If the Athenians are to maintain their resolve and intellectual mastery of their emotions in the face of a chaotic world, they must understand the rational bases that they have for believing in their capacity to endure anything the Peloponnesians might throw at them. The majority of Pericles’ speech articulates these reasons in detail, and he exhorts his fellow citizens to

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<sup>63</sup> 1.140.1.

<sup>64</sup> 1.140.1.

<sup>65</sup> It is ambiguous whether *amathôs* should have a passive meaning (that events are inscrutable for humans) or an active meaning (that you cannot educate events in the way you might a person), or whether it is meant to suggest both. Recognizing that both senses are possible, I favor the active meaning, along with Syme 1962: 56; Edmunds 1975: 16-17.

<sup>66</sup> 1.5-6.

<sup>67</sup> *Suppliant Women* ll. 417-22.

<sup>68</sup> *Histories* 3.81.2. Megabyzos does not use the term *amathia* or *amathês* exactly, but he expresses the same idea: “It is not in the people’s capacity to recognize (*ginôskein*) anything; for how might one recognize (*ginôskoi*) anything who neither was taught (*edidachthê*) nor knew (*eide*) anything good or proper?”

<sup>69</sup> See, for instance, a passage in Theognis (ll. 319-22) that bears a striking resemblance to Pericles’ opening claim of constancy, and the remarks of Edmunds (1975: 11, 22).

understand them: “Concerning what pertains to war and the resources on each side, know (*gnôte*) that we are not the weaker party, hearing each point in turn.”<sup>70</sup> It is not necessary presently to account for each of Pericles’ points, but a general observation and a particular example are worth noting. In general, Pericles’ account of Athenian power coheres with Thucydides’ theory of power in the *Archaeology*. It builds its case from a careful consideration of the different capacities of the Athenians and Spartans that are due to their structurally different modes of power. In doing so, however, Pericles also takes a step beyond the *Archaeology*. Rather than dwelling on the different forms of power utilized by the two combatants, his efforts are directed towards providing an analysis of the ways in which this difference will impact their respective abilities to fight a long, drawn out war against the other. In other words, he applies the theory of the *Archaeology* to the historical circumstances that the Athenians faced. While noting that the Spartans might have the upper hand against the Athenians in a hoplite battle, he argues that in a protracted war Athenian walls, money, and naval supremacy will have a decisive advantage.

Most of Pericles’ rationale concerns the crucial roles of money and sea power a war against Sparta, but it is worth drawing particular attention to the way in which he utilizes the equality-autocracy antithesis as well. The Peloponnesian alliance, Pericles notes, lacks “a single executive council” (*bouleutêriôi henî*) and instead distributes an equal vote (*isopsêphoi*) to each of its heterogenous members.<sup>71</sup> The result of this, he argues, will be an inability to take decisive action and a tendency for their deliberations to focus on the parochial interests of its individual members. Equality, in Pericles’ analysis, encourages each party to think only of themselves, distracting the collective from the pursuit of the common good. The process is subtle, he argues, but the effect is devastating:

Each thinks that their own negligence will not suffice to do any harm, and someone else will take care to look after [the common good] on their behalf; as a result, because everyone individually entertains the same delusion, the collective destruction of the common goes unnoticed.<sup>72</sup>

Pericles implies that the Athenians will have a critical advantage over the Spartans in this respect, as they exercise consolidated, autocratic rule over their dependents. He stops short of elaborating on the Athenian advantage explicitly, however. He chooses rather to level this criticism against the Spartans, noting that it will prove a significant shortcoming in a long war, and to leave his audience to fill in the blanks. We might suspect that this omission stems from a hesitation to underline the autocratic character of the Athenian empire when it is not absolutely necessary to do so. Yet, there is another reason why Pericles may have demurred. The assembly that Pericles was presently speaking to also distributed the vote equally among its members. Pericles’ criticism of the Peloponnesian alliance would thus appear to double as a criticism of Athenian democracy, making it reasonable not to push this argument too far.

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<sup>70</sup> 1.141.2.

<sup>71</sup> 1.141.6.

<sup>72</sup> 1.141.7.

As many commentators have noted, Pericles' account of the Athenian advantage in a protracted war against the Peloponnesians responds almost point by point to the Corinthians' second speech in Sparta. For those eager to read Thucydides' speeches as authentic transcripts of what was actually said on these occasions, this symmetry is reason for concern.<sup>73</sup> Considered at a purely literary level, however, this coordination provides the reader with an effective demonstration of Periclean intelligence.<sup>74</sup> It gives credence to Pericles' call for rationally grounded heroic resolve, suggesting to the reader that, in adopting a stance of heroic resolve, Athens will not duplicate the errors of the Sophoclean hero. Moreover, it primes belief in Pericles' position that there is more to be feared from "the domestic errors" of the Athenians than from "the plans of our opponents," for Pericles has effectively demonstrated that the Athenians can withstand whatever the Spartans may bring against them.<sup>75</sup> These errors, however, should they occur, will not be the result of the stubborn adherence to Periclean policy, as the errors of the Sophoclean heroes arise out of their intransigent passion. Rather, such errors will arise from the departure from this policy and the embrace of the passions enflamed by the shifting fortunes of war.

### *Heroic Necessity*

In addition to demanding heroic resolve from the Athenians, there is a second way in which Pericles' speech constructs his war policy as heroic. Drawing his speech to a close, Pericles exhorts his audience: "You must know that it is a necessity to be at war—and we will have opponents who are less eager if we accept it more willingly—and that, for both a private individual and a city, the greatest honors result from the greatest risk."<sup>76</sup> Though not immediately

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<sup>73</sup> Connor 1984: 49 n. 58; Hornblower 1991: 226.

<sup>74</sup> Not all commentators have found Pericles' calculation of Athenian advantage convincing. Edith Foster (2010: 141-43) and Loren Samons II (2016: 142), for instance, both take issue with Pericles' characterization of Athens' opponents as farmers (*autourgoi*; 1.141.3). Foster, noting that it was the helots who farmed the Spartans land, not the Spartans themselves, accuses Pericles of deliberately distorting the reality of the Spartan's situation in order "to lessen the Athenians' fears of Sparta's fabled infantry while emphasizing Athens' material advantages" (143). The distortion, however, is Foster's. While Thucydides' Greek explicitly states that the *Peloponnesians* are farmers, Foster narrows Pericles' claim to refer only to the Spartans, both in her translation and discussion of the passage (141, 143). It is instead an accurate generalization about the Peloponnesians at large. Samons, utilizing a more reliable reading of the passage, nevertheless finds it "a strange claim in that it applied only to the Spartans' allies and not to the Spartans themselves" (142). It is not so strange, however, given the collective nature of the incursions into Attica that formed the primary thrust of the Peloponnesians' war strategy. Even if it was true that the Spartans were comfortable being away from home for long stretches of time while the helots farmed their land (which they were not, always fearing the potential of a helot revolt), the parameters of what was possible for a collective invasion of Attica were set by what the collective unit was capable of, not simply what the Spartans were capable of. If the rest of the Peloponnesians had to be back to farm their lands after only a short invasion, this then set the limit for what the Peloponnesians were capable of as a group. What is more, the crux of Pericles' argument is not even about the ability to campaign at length, but about the ways in which an agrarian economy produces neither great surpluses of money nor skilled sailors. This will be true whether or not it is the helots who are doing the farming, the Spartan citizens, or the rest of the Peloponnesians, and it is this fact about the fundamental structure of the Peloponnesian economy that does the work for Pericles in his analysis of Athenian advantage.

<sup>75</sup> 1.144.1.

<sup>76</sup> 1.144.3.

obvious, this is an insistence by Pericles that the Athenians meet and endure the necessity of war in a heroic manner. Recognition of how this is so requires that we unpack this dense statement and work through the apparent tension in what Pericles is asking of the Athenians. Most importantly, the heroic resonances of Pericles' claim will emerge by attending to Pericles' assertion that by eagerly doing what is necessary, the Athenians will win for themselves the greatest honors; an assertion that sits at odds with the widespread view among many ancients and moderns that actions committed in the grip of necessity are liable to neither praise nor blame.

Before attending to the apparent tension between necessity and responsibility, however, it is important to address another possible tension in Pericles' claim: that pertaining to the relationship between necessity and choice. If, as Pericles claims, "it is a necessity to be at war," it would appear that the Athenians have no choice in the matter. And yet, it is exactly this choice that the Athenians are gathered to make in the assembly that Pericles addresses. Moreover, Pericles invokes the language of freely chosen action after claiming the necessity of war, suggesting that "we will have opponents who are less eager if we accept it more willingly (*hekousioi mallon dechômetha*)." It would appear, then, that the Athenians are free to either accept or deny this necessity. But if the Athenians have a choice in the matter, in what way can we say that war is necessary?

This puzzle arises not from any confusion or incoherence on the part of Thucydides' Pericles but from the imposition of mistaken assumptions about the concept of necessity onto Thucydides' text.<sup>77</sup> As it appears in Thucydides, necessity, or *anankê*, is importantly different from the "hard" necessity of physical force and the natural scientific theories of necessary causation which are mutually exclusive with the concept of choice.<sup>78</sup> When Thucydides invokes *anankê* to describe action, he describes a situation of practical judgment in which an individual, or group of individuals, can see only one way forward given the situation that they are in.<sup>79</sup> In such cases, the force of circumstances leaves them but one choice that they might realistically make. This remains a choice for the agent, but it is a choice that they believe themselves compelled to choose. A clear example of such compulsion occurs late in Book 8, where Thucydides describes a situation in which a commander of a ship is necessitated (*anankastheis*) by a storm to put into port.<sup>80</sup> By describing this as necessitated action, Thucydides is not saying that the winds and swells of the storm actually drove the sailor's ship into harbor; a beleaguered mariner should be so lucky. Rather, Thucydides is claiming that the ship's commander recognized that he had to seek the safety of the port if he and his ship were to survive. It is possible that he could have chosen otherwise, but this choice would likely have been fatal.

There are important ways in which the necessity of war claimed by Pericles is different from that faced by the sailor. First and foremost, war is deadly; we might expect the necessity of

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<sup>77</sup> This argument has been made at greater length in Fisher and Hoekstra 2017.

<sup>78</sup> Thucydides does employ a conception of causal necessity in his text when he accounts for a series of tidal waves occurring in Greece in 426 BCE. He explains, "without an earthquake, it seems to me, such a thing would not have happened" (3.89.5). However, the word he uses to describe this relation is *aition* (cause), not *anankê* (necessity).

<sup>79</sup> Ostwald (1988: 7-19), in an important study of *anankê* in Thucydides' text, has called this a "psychological" conception of necessity. Hoekstra and I (2017) have described this as "practical necessity."

<sup>80</sup> 8.99.1.



self-preservation to demand that one avoid it, not to eagerly meet it. However, self-preservation need not only mean the preservation of the corporeal self. Essential to one's sense of self is not only the inhabited body, but also certain social roles that one might play and characteristics that one might possess. Deprived of these roles and characteristics, we may truthfully say that we are no longer ourselves in any meaningful sense. When faced with a choice in which such an essential feature of the self is threatened, this too can create a circumstance of necessity comparable to the threat of physical extinction. For Pericles, freedom is a feature of this order for the Athenians. It is not simply that they would prefer to be free rather than slaves, but that freedom is so deeply bound up with their conception of what it means to be Athenian that to become slaves would require that they no longer recognize themselves as Athenians. War is necessary, Pericles argues, because to shirk it would mean submission to the Spartans and slavery at their hands. Faced with such a choice, they must choose war, just as the sailor must choose port.

So runs the logic of Pericles' argument, but it is worth asking whether Pericles is right to assume that freedom is so integral to the Athenian collective identity. If it is, and if the war is a necessary condition for it, then he appears justified (at least in a conceptual sense) in arguing that war is indeed necessary. If it is not, it appears that he has dragged the Athenians into an unnecessary war with emotive, but ultimately specious, rhetoric. In Pericles' favor, the Persian Wars offer a significant precedent for the essential place of freedom in the construction of Athenian identity. When faced with the approach of Xerxes' army, the Athenians abandoned their city and risked everything on a sea battle rather than submit to the invader's rule. With such an action, the Athenians demonstrated that freedom was more essential to their collective identity than even the physical city of Athens itself. It is no coincidence that Pericles immediately draws upon this example after making his claim that the war is necessary. "Our fathers stood their ground against the Persians," he says, and "we must not fall short of them, but defend ourselves in every way against our enemies."<sup>81</sup> Pericles understood that so long as the Athenians were their fathers' sons, they could not relinquish their freedom without a fight.<sup>82</sup>

Pericles' claim that to go to war is a necessity draws upon his understanding of and aspirations for the Athenian character. But his speech does more than merely recognize the latent necessity of the situation. By creating an awareness of this necessity and fostering belief in it, Pericles contributes to the existence of that necessity. As necessity is a matter of belief about the choices at hand, it is possible to compel an agent by convincing them that they are compelled. Pericles thus helps the audience to recognize that, if they do in fact hold freedom to be fundamental, they have no choice but to choose war.

Dissolving the apparent tension between necessity and choice in Pericles' claim that "to go to war is a necessity" helps us recognize something important about Thucydides' political thought generally and the meaning of Pericles' argument more specifically, but it tells us little

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<sup>81</sup> 1.144.4.

<sup>82</sup> See also Pericles' suggestion in the Funeral Oration (2.36.1) that there exists an intimate relationship between Athenian autochthony, Athenian freedom, and Athenian excellence.

about the culturally specific ways in which Periclean policy is being framed. We learn more from the apparent tension between necessity and ethical evaluation. Pericles' claim that the Athenians stand to win the greatest honors by eagerly taking upon themselves the dangers of a necessary war is noticeably different from many other invocations of necessity in Thucydides' text. Often, when Thucydides' speakers appeal to necessity, they do so in order to invoke its supposed power of exculpation. Cleon, for instance, claims that those dependents who rebelled against Athens must be forgiven if they were compelled to do so by an enemy.<sup>83</sup> Later, an Athenian herald claims that the Athenians were not to be blamed for their occupation of Apollo's sanctuary at Delium due to the compelling threat that they faced from a superior Boeotian army.<sup>84</sup> More notoriously, the Athenian speakers at Sparta defend the existence of their empire by claiming that they were compelled to acquire it, that they would now face an existential threat if they gave it up, and that "one is altogether blameless when looking after himself amid the greatest dangers."<sup>85</sup>

Pericles' claim that, "for both a private individual and a city, the greatest honors result from the greatest dangers," cuts against the grain of these Athenian appeals to necessity. Not only does it assume that circumstances of necessity remain within the realm of praise and blame, it also prioritizes the compelling force of the intangible elements of the self over those of the physical self. In Pericles' account, one must sometimes die for freedom and for honor. On the other hand, when the Athenians insist in the above examples on the exculpatory force of necessity, these appeals are consistently grounded in the need to preserve the corporeal self, and this supposed need is held to trump the demands of justice and piety. These claims, despite their conceptual similarity to the claim being made by Pericles, participate in a radically different mentality from the arguments of his first speech.

These dueling perspectives on the relationship between responsibility, self-preservation, and necessity are not peculiar to Thucydides' text. Rather, they appear characteristic of the wider ideological tension in fifth-century Athens between the older, aristocratic/heroic mode of thought and the newer, demotic/sophistic one. Athenian tragedy provides numerous examples of this tension at work. In the opening scene of *Antigone*, for instance, the two daughters of Oedipus disagree sharply on what must be done in the face of Creon's proscription of burial for their brother, Polyneices, and what the ethical implications of their actions will be. Antigone feels compelled by her obligations to her brother, even if this means her death.<sup>86</sup> "I know that I am pleasing those whom it is most necessary for me to please," she says, insisting that a death resulting from the fulfilment of her obligation would be noble (*kalon*).<sup>87</sup> On the other hand, to refuse Polyneices burial in order to save her life, she claims, will incur the just hatred of the dead.<sup>88</sup> Ismene, however, identifies Creon's death sentence as the relevant source of necessity,

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<sup>83</sup> 3.39.2. Cf. 3.40.1.

<sup>84</sup> 4.98.6.

<sup>85</sup> 1.75.3-5.

<sup>86</sup> See esp. l. 89.

<sup>87</sup> *Antigone* ll. 89, 72, 96-97.

<sup>88</sup> *Antigone* ll. 93-94.

not the claims of Polyneices, and she believes that it excuses her from this suggested injustice: “So I, asking those beneath the earth to forgive me, since I am forced in these matters, will obey those who are in power.”<sup>89</sup> Like Pericles and the other Athenian speakers, the two sisters appear to inhabit two different and irreconcilable moral universes, deeply at odds with one another over the ethical implications of death.

The identification of death itself as a necessity was commonplace in Greek tragedy, as in Greek culture more widely. Death was the one unquestionable universal shared by humankind, the primary hallmark of what distinguished the human race from the gods. Death was, in this way, a deeply egalitarian phenomenon.<sup>90</sup> It waited for rich and poor alike, for the powerful and the weak, for the god-born heroes and the common soldiers they killed in droves. Conceptually, death appears to present itself as a distinct species of necessity. Though implacable, it is not an inescapable physical force. One may successfully avoid this or that death, living to die another day. But one must indeed die another day; in the long run, it is the hardest of necessities. The necessity of death also differs from the sort of compelled choice found in Thucydides. One may not ever accept that he or she must die, yet that will make little difference. Death will be no less necessary because of one’s unwillingness to believe in his or her mortality. The necessity of death is perhaps most comparable to the mysterious workings of oracularly-revealed fate. Just as we all must die somehow and at some time, Oedipus must kill his father and marry his mother. The particular manner in which these transgressions will occur is not predetermined; it will be a result of the choices that Oedipus makes in his life. But all of the paths he may choose ultimately lead to the same destination. The necessity under which Oedipus lives, and under which we all approach death, is at once both malleable and intractable.

It is against this backdrop of the necessity of death that the ethical implications of how one dies take on the meaning that they did for the hero. No one person was better or worse than another on account of their need to die; all were equally wretched on this account. There were distinctly better or worse ways to face up to this necessity, however. The highest sign of nobility came from a willingness to meet one’s death nobly, that is, to choose an honorable death that gave meaning to this necessity. Often, especially for women, this meant dying for the good of the family, as when the unnamed daughter of Heracles chooses to sacrifice herself in order to guarantee victory over Eurystheus and the survival of her kin in Euripides’ *Heracleidae*, or when Euripides’ Alcestis substitutes her own death for that of her husband. Both women are praised effusively for their deaths, and the chorus goes so far as to say of Alcestis, “in dying, she is worthy of fame (*eukleês*) and by far the best woman under the sun.”<sup>91</sup> In Antigone’s case, her death is a sacrifice to those who have already died, but who nevertheless maintain a claim on her. Often, though, death is to be chosen out of consideration for one’s own nobility. Sophocles’ Ajax, for instance, insists that, “The noble man must either live nobly or die nobly,” and faced

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<sup>89</sup> *Antigone* ll. 65-66.

<sup>90</sup> For an interesting discussion of this point as it pertains to the central themes and problematics of Euripides’ *Alcestis*, see Wohl 2015: 8-18.

<sup>91</sup> *Alcestis* ll. 150-51.

with the prospect of an ignominious life he commits suicide.<sup>92</sup> Megara abides by a similar logic in Euripides' *Heracles* when she refuses to allow her sons to die by the hands of Lycus and insists on giving them a death worthy of their father by her own hands. Euripides' Phaedra prefers to starve herself rather than to succumb to the lust she feels for her son-in-law in *Hippolytus*, at least before the nurse intervenes. For these characters, death is not thought of as something that must be avoided at all costs, but as the ultimate opportunity to prove their heroic mettle.

If the marriage between responsibility and necessity is characteristic of the hero in Athenian tragedy, the insistence on the exculpatory power of necessity is characteristic of the unheroic. We have already seen the example of Ismene, who argues from the perspective of the disempowered, but other examples abound. At times, these characters draw the basis of their claims to compulsion from other basic physical drives than self-preservation. In Euripides, for instance, characters of questionable repute frequently insist that lust is a necessitating force and therefore unaccountable to the dictates of conventional morality. Jason, for instance, dismisses any obligation owed to Medea for the services she rendered him on account of their being compelled by Aphrodite.<sup>93</sup> In *The Trojan Women*, Helen argues that she should be forgiven for the infamous act of running off with Paris, as not even Zeus could free himself from the power of *erôs*.<sup>94</sup> Phaedra's nurse in *Hippolytus* also draws on the example of Zeus and urges her mistress to give in to Aphrodite's compulsion, arguing that she will not be blamed for yielding to the rule of the goddess, especially if the alternative is death.<sup>95</sup> In each of these cases, necessity's exculpatory power is insisted on by characters marked as dubious and slavish. Jason's language characterizes him as a profit-loving knave. Helen is introduced by Poseidon as being "rightly" (*êndikôs*) treated as a captive slave.<sup>96</sup> Phaedra's nurse is also a slave, and one who has no compunction about betraying the master of her house. Like the characters that voice them, these arguments for the exculpatory power of necessity come from a sphere that stands outside and against the heroic.

There is therefore a significant ideological charge to Pericles' invocation of necessity in the conclusion of his speech. Pericles is demanding of the Athenians that they recognize and face necessity heroically, enduring the possibility of death for the preservation of their freedom. They are, in their own way, to make the same choice as Achilles, choosing the possibility of death with honor over the quiet life of the inconspicuous. Like Achilles, however, it is a choice they must make, for their characters will admit of no other.

Before moving on, it is important to note that Pericles again makes an interesting and uncustomary move while employing this heroic pattern of thought. The hero is an agonistic and ambitious creature, ever striving for unique levels of glory, but at the heart of Pericles' claim for the necessity of resisting Sparta is the demand for equality. Though often criticized for its

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<sup>92</sup> *Ajax* ll. 479-80.

<sup>93</sup> *Medea* ll. 526-31.

<sup>94</sup> *Trojan Women* ll. 946-50.

<sup>95</sup> *Hippolytus* ll. 433-78, 496-97.

<sup>96</sup> *Trojan Women* ll. 35.

bellicosity and aggressiveness, Pericles' war policy is not meant to win hegemony in Greece by conquering Sparta.<sup>97</sup> Rather, the purpose of the policy is to demonstrate to the Spartans that Athens cannot be conquered and therefore deserves recognition of equal status. It is, of course, not uncommon for heroes to bristle at being treated as an inferior or being undervalued. Such is the complaint that spurs Achilles on in the *Iliad*, for instance. The specific emphasis on equal status and juridical procedures, however, comes not from the heroic mode of thinking, but from the world of the egalitarian city. Notably, the language in which Pericles couches the usurpation of Athenian freedom, language that was presumably taken directly from the treaty between the Athenians and the Spartans, is derivative of the language used to discuss the give and take of justice in civic legal procedures. The root of Pericles' claim against the Spartans is their unwillingness to participate in such procedures.<sup>98</sup> As a general principle, he states that "the greatest or smallest determination of right (*dikaiôsis*) amounts to slavery all the same when pressed upon one's neighbors by equals without adjudication (*apo tôn homoiôn pro dikês*)."<sup>99</sup> The thought driving the Athenians' heroic policy is therefore not the need to establish unparalleled supremacy, but to require the Spartans "to deal with us rather on an equal basis (*apo tou isou*)."<sup>100</sup>

Despite this emphasis on the need to uphold equality between Athens and Sparta, we must not mistake Pericles' policy as advancing an egalitarian vision of the international order. The equality that Pericles perceives between Athens and Sparta is the product of their balanced military capability, not their inherent moral worth as sovereign nations. The equality that Pericles identifies between Athens with Sparta indeed demands the preservation of the Athenian empire, and therefore the unequal status of all of Athens' dependents. The Athenian ability to sustain a war with Sparta and to endure the Spartan destruction of Attica is dependent on their ability to draw the resources of the empire into the city. Thus, there is nestled in Pericles' thinking about the international order of Greece an interesting, if counterintuitive, thought. If the ability of the Athenians to stand as equals against the Spartans is dependent on the preservation of the inequality of their empire, then the Spartans' call to liberate those Greeks under Athenian rule threatens not only equality between Athens and Sparta. In effect, it threatens the existence of any equality of power in the Greek international order aside from the equal inferiority of all to Sparta.

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<sup>97</sup> For criticisms along these lines, see: Monoson and Loriaux 1998; Hawthorn 2009; Foster 2010.

<sup>98</sup> 1.140.2.

<sup>99</sup> 1.141.1.

<sup>100</sup> 1.140.5. Pericles is effectively making what would later be known as a balance of power argument, but the particular form that this argument takes helps to draw attention to the importance of recognition and belief in the process of deterrence. Pericles here implies that war will be the result of the Spartans' failure to recognize their *de facto* equality with the Athenians. Successful resistance on the part of the Athenians, however, will force the Spartans to acknowledge this equality in the future, thereby encouraging them to adopt peaceful methods for dispute resolution rather than belligerent ones.

Even after acknowledging this brief turn towards juridical language, it would appear that the primary focus of Pericles' first speech is to develop a heroic policy for the collective Athenian hero. However, the necessity of standing firm in the face of the overweening Spartan demands makes up only one half of the policy position that Pericles stakes out in this speech, even if it receives the lion's share of rhetorical emphasis. The second half of Periclean policy is only to be found buried deep in the speech, and it is encapsulated in a single sentence: "I have many other reasons to expect our success, so long as you refrain from extending the empire and taking on unnecessary risks for yourself while at war."<sup>101</sup> While demanding that the Athenians refuse to yield, Pericles simultaneously forbids them any aggressive expansion. Though given only passing mention, this is a major matter of policy. Indeed, when Thucydides distills Periclean war policy for the reader in his summary comments on the statesman's career, it is this conservative stance that he describes, not Pericles' preferred slogan of refusing to yield.<sup>102</sup> This, however, is not the characteristic policy of the heroic autocrat in Thucydides' conceptual framework. It is rather the policy of the tyrant. As Thucydides says of Greek tyrannies in the *Archaeology*, "Looking out only for their own interests, that is, the aggrandizement of their person and their own household, they made policy with an eye towards doing only what could be done safely and securely, and no action worthy of account was accomplished by them, unless it was against their neighbors."<sup>103</sup>

By prohibiting acts of heroic audacity and expansion, it appears that Pericles introduces a critical tension into his policy.<sup>104</sup> Within a matter of paragraphs, he both exhorts the Athenians to war by pronouncing that "the greatest honors result from the greatest risk (*tôn megistôn kindunôn*)" and demands that they "refrain from extending the empire and taking upon unnecessary risks (*kindunous authairetous*) for yourself while at war."<sup>105</sup> Which is it, then, we might wonder; should the Athenians pursue risk for the sake of glory or play it safe for the sake of victory? Pericles' language is provocative, but the tension that it points to is more apparent than real. Crucially, Pericles' formulations neither suggest that the Athenians should avoid all risks in the war, nor that they ought to pursue all risks for the sake of glory. What Pericles demands of the people is that they avoid *unnecessary* risks, risks that are "self-incurred" (*authairetous*), while resolutely accepting those risks that are necessary, such as the great risks involved in going to war with Sparta.<sup>106</sup> They must, in other words, be intelligent about the risks that they run, eschewing an absolutist policy of either audacity or caution, allowing instead the

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<sup>101</sup> 1.144.1.

<sup>102</sup> 2.65.7.

<sup>103</sup> 1.17.1.

<sup>104</sup> Jaffe 2017: 190-91; Dobski 2017: 78-79.

<sup>105</sup> 1.144.1, 3.

<sup>106</sup> Pericles' articulates a closely related thought in his final assembly speech (2.61.1): "For those whom there is choice and who are otherwise faring well, it would be incredibly stupid to go to war. But if it is a necessity that either by yielding to their neighbors they become subjects or by running risks they prevail, he who flees from risk is more blameworthy than the one who resists."

recognition of what is necessary to dictate their behavior. They must be the hero guided by *gnômê* that Pericles exhorts them to be.

By viewing the solution to this puzzle through the lens of the Archaeology's two autocratic paradigms, we can recognize Periclean policy as an attempt to negotiate between them. Unlike the two Corinthian speeches, which inconsistently move between heroic and tyrannical characterizations of the Athenians, Pericles draws on both paradigms in an attempt to articulate an internally consistent, middle position that is superior to either in isolation. Like the Greek tyrants, the Athenians will pursue a policy that does not unnecessarily put their rule at risk. In this way, they will avoid the actions of an Agamemnon, whose voyage to Troy is glorious, but ultimately destabilizes his own power and that of other heroic kings in Greece. Unlike the tyrants, however, the Athenians will not simply be guided by the material interests of the body. Greatness and glory matter to the Athenians, as they did for the heroic kings. The Athenians must take risks in order to preserve their freedom. In this way, their actions will be great without being reckless.

The ability of the Athenians to supersede the tyrants in the greatness of their actions is not merely tied to the more heroic motives driving these actions. It also stems from the fact that large-scale collective action is inherent even in the conservative policy of Athens. Unlike the tyrants, who were averse to inter-*poleis* coordination and precariously placed within their own city, the Athenians were able to mobilize the entire Athenian citizen body and the resources of a vast empire in their defense. Without further growth, their power already surpassed that accumulated by the heroic leadership of Agamemnon, let alone that of the tyrants. The Athenians did not need to expand to become great or to pursue great action. They already were great. Their mere act of resistance was sufficient to be worthy of account; indeed, *most* worthy of account, according to Thucydides' initial assessment.<sup>107</sup> Pericles' ability to articulate this middle position between the heroic and tyrannical models of autocratic rule, to articulate a policy that is both glorious and conservative, thus stems not merely from his own theoretical nimbleness. It also stems from the peculiar nature of the collective autocrat and the unprecedented empire it was able to establish.

Nevertheless, Pericles is not able to theorize away all tensions that exist between the heroic and tyrannical paradigms in his policy. Latent in his policy prescription is a practical problem that does not appear have a neat theoretical solution. This problem resides in the character of the Athenians, which does not admit of the same balance between heroic and tyrannical tendencies. Rather, it leans decidedly to one side, the heroic, as Thucydides' *Pentekontaetia* demonstrated and the Corinthians first suggested. The problem that this poses for Periclean policy is perhaps best epitomized by the Corinthians' characterization of the Athenians as "risk takers beyond reason" (*para gnômên kinduneutai*), a characterization which gains corroboration in Thucydides' description of the misguided Egyptian expedition.<sup>108</sup> To take risks beyond *gnômê*, however, is exactly what the Periclean balance cannot admit. It will not,

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<sup>107</sup> 1.1.1.

<sup>108</sup> 1.70.3, 104.1-2, 109.1-110.4.

therefore, only be the passions unleashed by the changes of fortune that will test the Athenians' heroic resolve to follow *gnômê* during the war. It will also be the very habits that constitute their heroic character; the same habits that were responsible for their initial rise to greatness.

### *An Empire Like a Tyranny*

Pericles continues to insist on a balance between heroic greatness and tyrannical conservatism even after his first speech. This chapter will not attempt to trace the negotiation between these two paradigms through the Funeral Oration and second policy speech in detail. There is, however, one notable instance of Periclean rhetoric that merits discussion in this context: the striking remark in his final speech that “you [i.e. the Athenians] already hold your empire like a tyranny, one that seems unjust to take but perilous to let go.”<sup>109</sup> This is a passage that has proved both puzzling and controversial among Thucydides' commentators, and it may look like an exception to the balancing act between autocratic paradigms that this chapter has suggested. In this statement, Pericles appears to jettison the heroic overtones of Athenian policy in order to provoke his compatriots into compliance by foregrounding the danger inherent in their situation as rulers of a quasi-tyrannical empire. Absent in this assertion is the compelling force of the noble, while the demands of mere self-preservation come to the fore.

Pericles' claim clearly reveals a shift in his rhetorical strategy. Speaking in the wake of the plague and a widespread disaffection with his war policy, the statesman faces a very different audience than in his first speech. Sensing that the Athenians are suffering, and that their minds have turned from the sublime to the somatic, Pericles allows his message to mirror these concerns.<sup>110</sup> In doing so, we might worry that Pericles falls into the same trap that the Corinthians did in Book I, allowing rhetorical demands to draw him into inconsistent policy. However, Pericles' change of emphasis proves to be importantly different from the Corinthians' move from the heroic to the tyrannical. Pericles' move does not represent a change in his policy or an abandonment of the larger emphasis on the heroic effort that the Athenians are involved in. Rather, it draws out the extent to which his policy is overdetermined by the respective needs of material preservation and Athenian honor. He alludes to this in the remark immediately preceding his characterization of the empire as “like a tyranny”: “Do not suppose that you are fighting for a single reason only,” he states, “for freedom instead of slavery; rather, it is also on account of the preservation of empire and the danger posed by those who hate you within the empire.”<sup>111</sup> It is not that the Athenians are no longer fighting for freedom, or for the glory and the greatness bound up with this labor. It is to say that both freedom and self-preservation demand the same course of action from them: they must persevere in the war.

Pericles addresses his audience in multiple registers. He speaks to them as heroes in pursuit of glory, but also as tyrants who must act to preserve themselves and their rule,

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<sup>109</sup> 2.63.2.

<sup>110</sup> One effect of the pestilence, Thucydides says, was that “none were ready to endure hardship for the pursuit of what was considered fine, believing it unclear whether they might perish before they achieved it” (2.53.3).

<sup>111</sup> 2.63.1.



recognizing that the heroic appeal may not be sufficient to motivate his entire audience. Even as he allows himself to appeal to the baser instincts of some, however, he attempts to raise them again to more noble concerns. In one of his final exhortations to the Athenian people, he demands that they recognize the unparalleled grandeur that the Athenian collective hero has achieved:

Know that your city has the greatest name among all mankind because of the refusal to yield (*mê eikein*) to misfortunes, having instead spent the most lives and labors in war, and that she has acquired the greatest power yet known, the memory of which will remain for posterity evermore, even if we should suffer some loss in the present generation (for it is in the nature of everything also to decline); they will remember that we, being Greek, ruled the most Greeks, we held out against them all together and individually in the greatest wars, and we lived in the wealthiest and greatest city.<sup>112</sup>

It is a sentence in which every adjective is a superlative (seven in total) and “greatest” appears four times. Having recognized the desperate mindset of many of his compatriots, Pericles will acknowledge and address their concerns for preservation. But he will not give up on the heroic vision driving his policy for the city, and he will not allow his audience to give up on it either.

The autocratic balance that Pericles strikes can thus be seen in the promise that his policy will fulfill both heroic and tyrannical imperatives. But it is also discernable within the claim that Athens possesses her empire “like a tyranny.” While Cleon will later speak more bluntly to the Athenians, stating that their empire *is* a tyranny, Pericles is careful to frame his comment as a simile.<sup>113</sup> In his formulation, the Athenians hold their empire *like* a tyranny (*hôs turannida*). Many commentators efface this difference in order to emphasize the similarity between the formulations of the two orators, or note the difference without attempting to explain it.<sup>114</sup> The above discussion, however, gives us reason to think that there may be an important conceptual distinction being signified by the inclusion of *hôs* in Pericles’ formulation. Periclean policy assumes that there are important similarities between Athenian rule over its empire and the rule of a tyrant over a city. Most of all, democratic empire and tyranny share a precarious rule over bitter subjects, exposing them to a constant source of danger and animosity, thereby demanding a more conservative policy than would be necessary if their subjects were ruled willingly. But in addition to these similarities are important differences. Athens, most importantly, is a city, not a single individual or family. The danger it faces comes not from within the city, but from other cities that the Athenians collectively rule over. The collective nature of the Athenian autocrat, as well as the inter-*poleis* nature of its domination, means that Athens is able to achieve magnitudes of power inaccessible to the tyrant. Such power allows the city to concern itself with greatness, not just preservation. Pericles has good reason therefore not to endorse Cleon’s formulation. The Athenian empire is in important respects like a tyranny, but it is not in fact a tyranny. It is, in the end, something new: a sort of culminating synthesis of the autocratic tradition.

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<sup>112</sup> 2.64.3.

<sup>113</sup> 3.37.2.

<sup>114</sup> E.g. McGlew 1993: 184; Orwin 1994 17 n. 3; Saxonhouse 1996: 73; Monoson and Loriaux 1998: 286-87. Cf. Connor 1977: 97; Euben 1990: 179; Hornblower (1991: 337); Raaflaub 2003: 77-81; Kallet 2003: 120.

Part II:

The Hero as a Democracy

## Chapter 4: Equality, Autocracy, and Democracy: The Funeral Oration

Thucydides' first book considers Athens almost exclusively as a single agent, constructing it as a member of the Greek autocratic tradition and investigating its relationship to heroic and tyrannical precedents. While doing so, the internal organization of Athens as collectivity is glossed over. The reader is left to wonder how the autocratic orientation of Athenian political culture squares with its democratic institutions. Is Athens a *polis tyrannos* abroad while upholding egalitarian institutions at home? Or does this penchant for autocracy penetrate even the democracy itself? If so, what does this mean for Athens' status as a democracy? Book I raises these questions in the attentive reader's mind, but it offers little in the way of an answer. This will be a task left to Book II and beyond.

The tension between Athenian democracy, autocracy, and equality comes closest to the surface of Book I with Pericles' criticism of the Spartan alliance for lacking a "single executive counsel" (*bouleutêriôi heni*) and instead allowing each of its members an equal vote (*isopsêphoi*).<sup>1</sup> As mentioned in the last chapter, Pericles asserts that the egalitarian constitution of the Spartan alliance will prove crippling in the face of a drawn-out war. Communities built on such principles, he states,

make a habit of getting nothing done. For in fact some want as much vengeance as possible against some enemy, while others want as little damage done to their possessions as possible. Coming together only rarely, a fraction of their time together is spent considering what is of common concern, while the greater part is spent attending to personal matters; each thinks that their own negligence will not suffice to do any harm, and someone else will take care to look after [the common good] on their behalf; as a result, because everyone individually entertains the same delusion, the collective destruction of the common goes unnoticed.<sup>2</sup>

Pericles' criticisms of equal voting rights would appear to be a double-edged sword.<sup>3</sup> In relation to its allies, the Athenians could certainly identify their city as a single executive power, the *hen bouleutêrion* that the Spartans lacked, capable of making decisive, unilateral decisions. Within the city itself, however, Athenian organization was comparable to that of the Spartan alliance, featuring deliberative bodies composed of equal vote-bearing members. In articulating this Athenian imperial advantage, Pericles also suggests a crippling domestic weakness.

So much appears to be implicit in Pericles' comments, but the consequences of egalitarian associations described do not align with what the reader has thus far seen of the Athenians. Rather than paralysis and partiality, Book I depicts a frenetically active people efficiently achieving their collective interest. Either Pericles must be wrong about the effects of

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<sup>1</sup> 1.141.6.

<sup>2</sup> 1.141.7.

<sup>3</sup> This is a point that the ancient scholiast appears to recognize, writing: ἰστέον ὅτι τὴν τῆς δημοκρατίας διαβολὴν πᾶσαν ἐνταῦθα ἔθηκε, "One must see that he levels the complete charge against the democracy here." As in Gomme 1945: 456. See also Samons 2016: 142-43.

equality, or the equality of the Spartan alliance and that of the Athenian democracy must be importantly different in some way. This latter suggestion opens up an assortment of possibilities. Could it be the national character of the Athenians that makes them an egalitarian anomaly? Or possibly it is the institutions of Athens that account for their exceptionality, most specifically the existence of a council (*boulê*) with agenda setting powers for the Assembly? Or maybe the relative homogeneity of their population makes for a greater concurrence of interests? Perhaps the greater frequency with which a city conducts deliberative meetings allows it to spend more time on collective business? Any or all of these might be considered possible solutions to the problem, and the final two are even insinuated by the precise wording of Pericles' criticism. And yet, in what follows Pericles' first speech, Thucydides foregrounds for his reader an altogether different solution to this puzzle, identifying the quasi-autocratic leadership of Pericles as the antidote to the pathologies of deliberative equality.

This is a solution that raises a host of further problems similar to those arising out the identification of Athens as an autocratically-oriented political culture. Some of these are conceptual and explanatory: How does an egalitarian deliberative body produce the quasi-autocratic leadership of Pericles? Can leadership of this type coexist with equality in the deliberative sphere without effectively cancelling it out? Put somewhat more bluntly, can a democracy abide such a leader, or is the quasi-autocratic rule of a Pericles an indication that Athens is not really democratic? Compounding these concerns is a further set of problems concerning the manner in which Thucydides addresses these questions: how does he construct Pericles as a leader with autocratic elements? How might we assess his understanding of the relationship between Periclean leadership and democracy? And, in particular, how are we to assess his thinking about Pericles' own understanding of the role of his leadership within the democracy?

These questions can be addressed as they arise in the final pages of Book I and the first half of Book II by focusing on particular moments within Thucydides' narrative and Pericles' speeches until the announcement of the latter's death at 2.65. Pericles' Funeral Oration, for example, offers a nuanced account of the relationship between democracy, equality, and quasi-autocratic leadership in Athens that sets each of these elements in harmony with one another. Rather than resulting in something undemocratic, Pericles suggests that Athenian greatness is dependent on the democratic mixture between popular, egalitarian, and autocratic elements. The explanatory power of this account is largely endorsed by Thucydides as well, but not before he has qualified it and delimited the circumstances in which it might come to be. Thucydides recognizes that the Periclean balance is far more fragile than suggested in the Funeral Oration, and that it does not exhaust the possibilities of democracy.

Before turning our attention to Pericles' analytic intervention in the text, it is necessary to trace the ways in which Periclean leadership is being constructed by Thucydides' narrative in the first pages of Book II and to consider the questions that are implicit in such a presentation. This will provide the appropriate background against which to read Pericles' unique understanding of the harmony between equality, autocracy, and democracy.

## *Pericles' Leadership as Solution and Problem*

In both the introduction of Pericles as a speaker, and in the description of Athenian approval of Pericles' First Speech, Thucydides suggests that the possession of an equal vote and the existence of a locus of executive leadership coexisted in Periclean Athens. In Thucydides' introductory words, Pericles is identified as the "first man of the Athenians at that time, most capable in both speaking and acting."<sup>4</sup> With this formulation, Periclean preeminence is asserted, explicitly confirming what is implicit in omitting all other speakers from the debate. Supreme in both speech and action, Pericles is everything that an idealized leader should be, even in the face of an egalitarian audience.<sup>5</sup> The Athenian response to his speech reinforces this dominance:

The Athenians, believing [Pericles] to have given them the best advice, voted in favor of what he instructed (*ekeleue*), and they answered the Lacedaemonians according to the policy (*gnômêi*) of that man, both in the particulars of what he declared and in general: they would do nothing while they were being dictated to (*keleuomenoi*), but they were ready to resolve the complaints made against them by means of adjudication on equal and like terms (*epi isêi kai homoiai*).<sup>6</sup>

The apparent unanimity with which the Athenians approve of Pericles' policy underlines the singular influence of the statesman, an influence that at once appears as a solution to the challenges of egalitarian deliberation and a problem for the democracy. Thucydides' striking repetition of the verb *keleuô* underlines this tension. Forms of this verb are used to describe both what the Athenians accept from Pericles and what they reject from the Spartans, pointing towards an apparent double standard in the Athenian position. They refuse to be dictated to by the Spartans due to an unwillingness to be treated as anything less than equals—treatment described by Pericles in terms of slavery. Yet, in doing so, they appear to be accepting orders at home from the preeminent leader of Athens.

This tension is perhaps mitigated by the semantic range of the verb *keleuô*, which can mean both "to advise" and "to command." We might think that Thucydides simply moves between these meanings in this paragraph, accepting this as an adequate way of defusing the tension. But this is a specious solution to the problem, not only losing something important in translation, but indeed using the compromises that one is forced to make in the process of translation as a way of avoiding the richness and ambiguity of the original text. Verbal repetitions such as this one are often used by Thucydides to suggest parallels and conceptual relationships that the reader might otherwise not suspect. Other verbs might easily have been used to signify the acts of either advising or commanding. Ancient Greek provides an extensive vocabulary for both, and many of these alternatives have a less expansive and suggestive

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<sup>4</sup> 1.139.4.

<sup>5</sup> Cf., for instance, Kenneth Dover's (1974: 161) observation that "an archaic mode of indicating that man was all that a man should be confined itself to two aspects of his character, his valour on the battlefield and his wisdom in discussion."

<sup>6</sup> 1.145.1.

semantic range. Thucydides chose, however, to repeat *keleuô*, and this linguistic reverberation provokes the reader into further reflection.

As we consider this repeated use of *keleuô* more carefully, the distinction drawn between Periclean “advice” and Spartan “command” becomes harder and harder to define. If the difference between the two is thought to reside in the authority of the Athenian people to accept or deny the exhortation, this distinction looks more apparent than real. As the Athenians demonstrate, the Spartans do not in fact have the ability to command their behavior. The Athenians can reject the Spartans’ demands, and they do, leaving the Spartans with less *de facto* authority than Pericles in the creation of Athenian policy. It is perhaps, then, the presumption of dictatorial authority rather than the actual possession of it that differentiates Spartan command from Periclean counsel. Even this, however, is more complicated than it immediately appears. It is not the case that Pericles’ makes no presumptions about his authority among the Athenian people. He is the first man of Athens and, as he explicitly states in his second policy speech, believes himself uniquely capable of guiding the Athenian people toward correct policy.<sup>7</sup> The authority thus claimed does not differ greatly from that which the Spartans assert. Is it then the threat of punishment that marks Spartan speech as a command and differentiates it from Periclean advice? If Pericles is correct about the respective military capabilities of the two powers, the Spartans do not actually possess the capacity to punish the Athenians in such a way as to command their obedience. They can do damage to Athenian interests, destroying significant amounts of property outside of the Athenian walls. But they cannot bring the Athenians to their knees by such means; they cannot compel Athens to act in line with their demands. Nor is it entirely true that Pericles’ advice is offered without any accompanying threat. The consequence of disobeying his advice, he claims, will be the enslavement of Athens. It is not advice that can be disregarded without consequence, even if Pericles will not himself be enacting the resultant punishment.

Rather than reinforce the distinction between the egalitarian advice of a preeminent politician and the dictatorial impositions of a foreign power, Thucydides’ repetition of *keleuô* serves to draw the reader’s attention towards the flimsiness of such a distinction. The reader is encouraged to consider that Pericles is more than just an equal among equals and that the Athenians have escaped the debilitating effects of egalitarian deliberation only by uniting behind his autocratic authority. He is, in effect, the single executive counsel of the Athenian people, just as Athens is the single executive counsel of the empire. How we are to make sense of this leadership within a democratic environment is yet unclear. Given the opposition between egalitarian and autocratic rule thus far presented in Thucydides’ work, the immediate temptation is to see Periclean leadership as an anti-egalitarian force within Athens. If this is right, however, are we therefore also to see him as an anti-democratic force? Popular support for Periclean leadership makes it difficult to offer a simple response. For now, at least, Periclean authority and egalitarian authorization of his policy appear perfectly consistent with one another. Such consistency, however, appears precarious at best.

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<sup>7</sup> 2.65.5.

As the reader moves into Book II and Thucydides' narrative of the outbreak of war, questions surrounding the relationship between Periclean leadership and Athenian democracy continue to loom large. Two separate episodes reinforce this theme with particular urgency. The first relates to Pericles and democracy only indirectly, but it suggests further the connection between Athenian greatness and autocratic rule in the reader's mind. In a digression notionally meant to explain the difficulty with which many Athenians exchanged their rural homes for makeshift dwellings within the city walls, Thucydides describes Attic *sunoiikismos*, the process whereby the region was united into a single city. From the time of Cecrops to that of Theseus, Thucydides records, the inhabitants of Attica dwelt in various, semi-autonomous cities (*poleis*), each having their own civic centers and officials. We can recognize in the relationship between these various communities one similar to that between members of the Spartan alliance: in the absence of any common threat requiring united action under the leadership of the king, each governed itself and made its own decisions.<sup>8</sup> Theseus, however, is said to have introduced a more centralized system:

When Theseus reigned, being a capable (*dunatos*) man in addition to one with intelligence (*xunetou*), he reorganized the country in a variety of ways, but especially, by dissolving the council chambers and magistracies of the other cities into the city that now exists, appointing a single executive council (*hen bouleutêrion*) and civic center (*prutaneion*), he combined everything into one city; and although each inhabited their territory as before, he compelled (*ênankase*) them to use Athens as their single city, one which, since all were now contributing resources to it, became the great city imparted by Theseus to those thereafter.<sup>9</sup>

Thucydides departs from the explicit subject of his digression in this passage, the habituation of most Athenians to rural living, to explain domestic factors contributing to Athenian greatness in further depth. In doing so, his concern for the consolidation of power into a single center picks up directly on Pericles' criticism of the Spartan alliance and the larger diagnosis of the difference between Spartan and Athenian power. When Pericles criticizes the Spartan alliance for lacking a single executive council, the implicit contrast is with Athens' unilateral control over its imperial dependents. Here, however, Thucydides reinforces the centralization of Athenian power by demonstrating the parallelism between the city's rule over Attica and the city's rule over the empire. The reader is now encouraged to recognize that the greatness of Athens is built upon multiple, reinforcing patterns of centralized rule and that the Athenian inclination for autocratic authority goes deeper than their collective rule over the empire.

Primed already to be thinking about Periclean leadership, the reader cannot help but suspect that a third layer of autocratic rule is implicated in Athenian greatness, that of the "first man" in the assembly. Such suspicions are encouraged by Thucydides' description of Theseus. The legendary king is said to be "capable" (*dunatos*) and in possession of intelligence, calling to

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<sup>8</sup> 2.15.1. According to Athenian tradition, there were twelve Attic cities, though different accounts vary as to what these cities were. See Rusten 1989: 121.

<sup>9</sup> 2.15.2.

mind Thucydides' previous characterization of Pericles.<sup>10</sup> The stated action of Theseus is also analogous to the Periclean action which initiated the digression: Theseus transfers the authority of the rural *dêmes* to the city of Athens, while Pericles is in the midst of transferring the actual population to the city.<sup>11</sup> Thucydides' description of Theseus' action is framed in conspicuously strong terms, however, perhaps suggesting a crucial difference between the two figures. Theseus reigned as king (*ebasileuse*) and compelled (*ênankase*) the Athenians to centralize power. Such a description would appear beyond Pericles, whose dominance in the assembly was dependent on his ability to persuade his audience to accept and enact his policy.

Yet, Thucydides' diction again encourages the reader to think critically about the nature of Periclean leadership. Without the title of king, he did not possess the formal power to compel the Athenian people as Theseus did. But what did this formal power amount to in practice? It was the ability of Theseus to use his status and authority to persuade the Athenian people to act in line with his policy. (Thus Theseus' remark in Euripides' *Suppliant Women* is apt: "I desire the whole city's approval for this plan, and it will approve because I want it to."<sup>12</sup>) There is no suggestion on Thucydides' part that Theseus physically compelled the people to unite as a single city through the force of arms. Rather, the royal compulsion of Theseus resembles that of the preeminent democratic politician to a surprising degree, and Thucydides appears to be asking his reader to reflect on this similarity. Theseus' status as king gave his words an immediate authority that a democratic politician did not have, at least formally. However, the fact that Pericles relied on democratic persuasion to move the people to action does not preclude his ability to compel them, as noted in the last chapter's discussion of necessity. Because compulsion is a matter of belief, Pericles' ability to convince the Athenians that they were compelled meant that he could, in fact, compel them. We find Thucydides once again leading the reader to recognize the significant ways in which the authority of Periclean speech resembled that of an actual or potential autocrat.

Another, related set of questions surrounding the ability of Pericles to compel the people and the status of his rule as a democratic leader come to the fore just paragraphs later. At this point in the narrative, the Peloponnesian forces are laying waste to Acharnae, a large deme north of the city, in full view of those cloistered behind the walls. Enraged by the sight, many Athenians itch to confront the aggressor. The Acharnians especially turn against Pericles and his policy of non-engagement, holding him responsible for their misfortunes and trying to instigate a battle against the Spartans. Pericles, however, keeps the city on his prescribed course:

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<sup>10</sup> 1.139.4; cf. 2.34.6. Also, compare Thucydides' characterization of Themistocles as 1.138.3.

<sup>11</sup> According to Walker (1995: 199) and Mitchell (2008:20), this action represents Pericles' completion of the work that Theseus began. Framing this in terms of "completion," however, seems to overstate the relationship between the two. Though we might certainly see a strong parallel between the actions of the two leaders, and we might note that Theseus' policy made it possible for Pericles achieve what he did, there is no suggestion that Theseus saw the abandonment of Attica as the natural or desirable outcome of centralizing Attic institutions. Likewise, Pericles' relocation of the population of Attica within the city walls not meant to have the same sort of permanence as Theseus' centralization of institutions. Attica was to be reinhabited as soon as the Spartan threat was no longer imminent.

<sup>12</sup> *Suppliant Women* ll. 349-50.



While observing that they were violently angry at the present situation and not mindful of what was best (*ta arista phronountas*), but trusting in the correctness of his own judgement (*orthôs gignôskein*) not to attack, Pericles did not summon an assembly or a military meeting, lest they should somehow err through passion rather than judgment when assembled, but he watched guard over the city and kept it as subdued as he was able.<sup>13</sup>

Pericles' outmaneuvering of the people appears at once prudent and problematic. It had been Archidamus' strategy to draw the Athenians out of the city and into a battle in which the Spartan hoplites had the advantage.<sup>14</sup> Previously, when cooler heads prevailed, the Athenians had seen the folly of such an attack. Now, in the throes of emotion, the Athenians have abandoned what they previously recognized was best. Pericles' efforts thus save the Athenians from potential disaster and keep them on the course that they previously decided upon. In doing so, however, it may appear that Pericles has overstepped the proper boundaries of democratic leadership. Trusting in his own assessment of the situation, he has silenced the people of Athens.

As is so often the case, the democratic status of Pericles' actions is in fact more complicated than it initially seems. It is undeniable that Pericles interfered with the ability of the people to translate their collective will into public policy. But Pericles did not necessarily exceed his formal powers as an elected general (*stratêgos*) of Athens by refusing to call an assembly or instigate other military meetings. With the council's approval, a period of over two months might elapse between obligatory meetings of the assembly (*ekklêsia kuria*). As the Peloponnesian invasion lasted less than 40 days, it may have been perfectly legal not to call an *ekklêsia kuria* during that time. The same goes for other formal meeting of the Athenian people. Additional assemblies and military meetings might occur between sessions of the *ekklêsia kuria* at the discretion of the council and the generals, but they did not have to. Such meetings could have been avoided if Pericles refused to instigate one himself and persuaded the council and the other generals to follow his lead.<sup>15</sup> The ability to accomplish this speaks volumes about the influence that Pericles wielded over the board of generals and the council, but it does not signal that he has overstepped his constitutionally-granted powers.

All of this can be determined from the study of Athenian democratic procedures, but Thucydides does not directly dwell on (or even mention) the constitutional niceties of Pericles' actions. His portrayal of the leader instead emphasizes the singular control that he exercised in keeping the Athenians from marching out to meet the Spartans, dramatizing Pericles ability to act as a metaphorical "single executive council" of Athens and to check the private grievances of equal individuals from overriding the collective good in the deliberative body. The entire narrative to this point has prepared the reader to accept that it would be potentially catastrophic for the Athenians to face off against the Spartans in a decisive land battle. Not least, Thucydides provides a precedent for such a battle during the *Pentekontaetia*, when the Athenians march out

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<sup>13</sup> 2.22.1.

<sup>14</sup> 2.20.1-5.

<sup>15</sup> Christensen and Hansen 1989: 195-98.

*en masse* to face a fraction of the Spartan army and suffer a defeat.<sup>16</sup> There appears little doubt that Pericles' unilateral disabling of the change in popular sentiment is conducive to the democratic good, and perhaps even necessary for the continued existence of the democracy. But this good can only be achieved through the denial, or at the very least the delay, of the deliberative procedures of democracy. Must we therefore conclude that Pericles' refusal to indulge the people's change of mind was anti-democratic?

The ability to answer this question is further problematized by the democracy's previous approval of Pericles' policy of non-engagement, and indeed of Pericles' warning that they must remain resolute in this policy even as they are affected by the misfortunes of war.<sup>17</sup> The conflict thus becomes one not only between democratic procedure and pursuit of the collective good, but about the implications of popular changes of opinion for policies previously chosen through democratic procedures. Must a leader, to be democratic, respond to every alteration in the public's sentiment? Or is it their democratic duty to follow through on policy already adopted, thereby holding the people accountable for the choices that they have made?<sup>18</sup> Pericles clearly follows the latter route, but the reader is left to wonder on what basis he does so. Is it out of a sense of duty to previously made democratic policy? Is it because of a sense of his own superior understanding of what is good for the democracy? Or must we also consider the emotional state driving this change in policy preference? With Pericles' previous privileging of the intellect over emotion in his construction of Athens' heroic war policy and his warning that the true test of their heroic resolve will their ability to stand firmly by this policy as their emotions change, we are primed to question whether a democratic leader must be indifferent to the emotional state driving a particular manifestation of the popular will. Is Pericles able to legitimately disregard changes in Athenian popular will when they are driven by high emotion (*orgê*)? If so, can he do so only under these circumstances? Would the democratic status of occluding the popular will be different if their change of mind was occasioned by an intelligent reassessment of the choices available to them? Or does the emotional state driving the creation of policy only matter to the extent that some states tend to produce better decisions, and some worse? To state this question differently, is the concern for emotional state nothing more than an indirect means of insisting that the Athenians pursue the better rather than the worse policy?

Thucydides' account of the Athenian reaction to Pericles' First Speech, his digression on the Attic *sunoikismos*, and his narrative of the Spartan invasion leave the reader convinced of Pericles' unique influence over Athenian policy but deeply uncertain about what this means for Athenian democracy. While raising manifold questions about the essential and incidental in democratic government, these sections of Thucydides' text offer little in the way of answers. This changes abruptly with Pericles' Funeral Oration, where the reader is met with the only systematic account of the Athenian *politeia* in Thucydides' text. Understanding the nuances of

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<sup>16</sup> 1.107.2-108.1.

<sup>17</sup> 1.140.1, 143.5, 145.1.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Diodotus' later call that the people be held responsible for their choices in the same manner that leaders are at 3.43.4-5. Pericles is arguably able to meet this institutional deficit by holding the Athenians accountable for what they have previously chosen.

this account will be critical for grappling with Thucydides' evolving discussion of the relationship between equality, autocracy, and democracy in Athens, not just for what it reveals about Thucydides' Pericles and Athenian greatness, but also for what Thucydides will ultimately say about the eventual decline of the democracy. Given the crucial importance of this passage, the following three sections of this chapter will treat it in particular depth.

### *Making Sense of Pericles' Politeia*

In a move uncustomary for an Athenian Funeral Oration, Pericles rushes through the former glories of Athens to focus on the present.<sup>19</sup> He does not wish to dwell on what is already well known, he states, but rather seeks to make clear the principles (*epitêdeuseôs*) underlying the rise of Athenian power and “the institutions (*politeias*) and way of life (*tropôn*) from which the city became great.”<sup>20</sup> Such a preamble suggests that this speech will offer not only an encomium of the Athenian dead but also a public explanation of Athenian exceptionalism. Pericles seeks to teach the city about its own greatness, and the reader is encouraged to consider whether he or she might also learn something as well. At the same time, Pericles underlines the extraordinary rhetorical demands placed upon him. His task will be a careful balancing act, he suggests, between the wishes and desire of a heterogeneous community, differing both in their relation to those who have died and in their understanding of the circumstances in which they died.<sup>21</sup> We must, as readers, also negotiate this balance between the desire to explain and the need to accommodate.

As Pericles begins his exposition, the word *dēmokratia* immediately comes to the fore, marking the first use of the word in Thucydides' text to describe the political institutions of Athens.<sup>22</sup> Earlier, in the *Pentekontaetia*, Thucydides casually notes that a group of “men” (*andres*) had tried to depose the *dēmos* from power in Athens by inviting the Spartans into the city.<sup>23</sup> Little is learned about the domestic institutions of Athens by this episode, however, not least because nothing further is said about who these men were or why they opposed the rule of the *dēmos*. All we are told is that the Athenians marched out “in full force” (*pandēmei*) to oppose the Spartans, and part of their reason for doing so was that they suspected revolutionary intentions.<sup>24</sup> Pericles' account of Athenian *dēmokratia* promises to be more illuminating, as it

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<sup>19</sup> For a detailed account of the crucial role that the past glories of Athens played in the genre of Athenian funeral orations, see Loraux 1986: Ch. 3.

<sup>20</sup> 2.36.4. For the senses of *politeia*, *epitêdeusis*, and *tropoi* adopted here, see Hornblower 1991: 298.

<sup>21</sup> 2.35.2-3.

<sup>22</sup> The word *dēmokratia* appears once prior to this point in Thucydides' text to describe the government established by the Athenians in Samos (1.115.3). This is, however, the first mention of Athenian *dēmokratia*.

<sup>23</sup> 1.107.4, 6.

<sup>24</sup> 1.107.5-6. The use of *pandēmei* here is suggestive of comprehensive support for the continued rule of the Athenian *dēmos*. Literally, it means “with the whole people,” but this can either be considered in reference to the city or the army. If the former, it suggests that the revolutionary conflict was one between individuals and collective, some men and the city as a whole, not between socio-political classes (“the few” v. “the many”). If the latter, however, the meaning appears less politically suggestive: it simply implies that the Athenian leaders held nothing back in terms of the troops at hand when confronting the Spartan threat.

addresses the specific institutions of Athens in some detail. And yet, the fulfillment of this promise is far from straightforward. Pericles' description of the central institutions of the *dēmokratia* occurs in a single sentence notoriously fraught with interpretive challenges. Scholars continue to argue over significant points of diction, the force of certain syntactical constructions, and the general sense of the sentence as a whole.<sup>25</sup> Before recognizing the way in which Pericles' account of democracy contributes to Thucydides' analysis of Athenian institutions, a certain amount of interpretive work is necessary to determine what it is that Pericles is saying.

In coming to terms with this sentence, one must begin by acknowledging its intricate structure. Like Pericles' larger rhetorical project in the Funeral Oration, this sentence is an extraordinary balancing act, built as it is around nested *men . . . de* constructions.<sup>26</sup> Within these nested constructions, a series of further contrasts occur, resulting in a dizzying succession of interlaced juxtapositions. To make matters more difficult still, Pericles' diction often strays into the ambiguous, resulting in at least three moments where the exact sense of what he is saying is debatable. The whole, as a result, amounts to something of an interpretive minefield, with each philological problem carrying with it significant theoretical implications.

For over half a century, philologists have offered competing claims as to what the "correct" translation of the passage is. Such efforts are helpful in fleshing out the interpretive possibilities of the passage, but the continued disagreement among commentators suggests that the very effort to identify a "correct" translation of the passage may itself be misguided. Rather than clarify the exact sense of Pericles' words, these scholars appear to obscure the multivalence of Pericles' account, and thereby the political effect of the passage. The ambiguity of Thucydides' Pericles is doubtfully the result of verbal sloppiness; we should rather suspect that, at least in parts of his analysis, he is being deliberately equivocal. We must remember that the task at hand, he claims, is to speak to multiple audiences at once, offering an exhortation and encomium that speaks differently to different people with the same words, yet nevertheless draws them all towards a common end. The interpretive task before us is therefore one of recognizing and appreciating the multivalence of the speech where it occurs, not of explaining it away by preferring one legitimate construction at the expense of another. In other words, the interpreter must be prepared to follow Pericles in his rhetorical balancing act if he or she is to appreciate the theoretical commitments articulated.

Pericles' one-sentence account of the Athenian *politeia* contains four distinct statements. Far from being isolated utterances, each statement is grammatically and theoretically dependent on the others. Only one of these relationships, however, is immediately clear from the particles used to indicate their syntactic interdependence. Temporarily setting aside the points of controversial diction, it will be helpful to give an initial indication of what these statements say. The first identifies "democracy" as the customary name of the Athenian *politeia* and offers an

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. Gomme 1956: 107-8; Grant 1971; Loraux 1986: Ch. 4; Rusten 1989: 144-46; Hornblower 1991: 298-301; Harris 1992; Andrews 2004; Winton 2004.

<sup>26</sup> In the words of the authoritative grammarian of Ancient Greek, Herbert Weir Smyth (1920: 656), *men* and *de* are used in coordinated statements "to mark stronger or weaker contrasts of various kinds, and [are] sometimes to be rendered by *on the one hand . . . on the other hand, indeed . . . but*; but [they are] often to be left untranslated."

explanation for why it is so called. Through the use of a *men . . . de* construction, it stands in juxtaposition with the rest of the sentence, though it is unclear whether this indicates a strong contrast or merely a connected sequence.<sup>27</sup> The second statement asserts that equality according to the law governs the differences and disputes between individuals. Sitting in contrast with the first statement, it also forms the first leg of a second *men . . . de* contrast. As with the first, the antithetical force of this second contrast is not immediately obvious. The third statement, set in juxtaposition to both the first and the second statements, identifies prestige and merit as the determining factors in public preferment. The fourth statement asserts that poverty will not disqualify any citizen from doing some service to the state, following closely on the third statement and acting as an addendum to it.

A brief turn towards the fifth-century context of thinking about democracy proves to be a helpful starting point for making sense of the relationship between Pericles' first three statements. As Edward Harris has pointed out, there is a pattern to be found in the way that fifth- and fourth-century political thinkers described the central features of democracy.<sup>28</sup> This pattern is stated abstractly in Aristotle's analysis of the fundamental elements of a *politeia* in the *Politics*.<sup>29</sup> "There are three parts of all constitutions (*politeiôn*)," he states, "and constitutions differ from one another as they differ in each of these parts. One of these three is what is to be the deliberative body for public affairs, the second concerns magistracies (*tas archas*), . . . and the third is what judges disputes."<sup>30</sup> Aristotle states the outline of this pattern with unique analytical clarity, but this tri-partite schema is not an Aristotelian invention. Rather, it appears to be a customary way of interpreting *politeiai* in Greek thought at least as far back as the late-fifth century. We find these same elements—the deliberative, the magisterial, and the judicial—also forming the backbone of Otanes' advocacy of popular rule in Herodotus and Theseus' defense of democracy in Euripides' *Suppliant Women*.<sup>31</sup>

From this starting point, Harris moves on to suggest that each of Aristotle's three parts can be found in Pericles' initial three statements. Despite the failure of this suggestion to gain widespread traction among the philological community, it is a promising insight.<sup>32</sup> The most obvious congruence between Pericles' remarks and the tripartite schema concerns the statesman's second statement: "All have an equal share according to the laws in private disputes."<sup>33</sup> This is a relatively clear statement of the equal rule of law in the Athenian judicial sphere, and it closely resembles Otanes' invocation of *isonomiê* and Theseus' assertion that, "when the laws have been written, the weak and the rich have equal recourse to justice."<sup>34</sup> Harris' account stumbles,

<sup>27</sup> As Denniston (1954: 370) notes, "The strength of the antithesis varies within wide limits. Sometimes μὲν . . . δέ conveys little more than τε . . . καί."

<sup>28</sup> Harris 1992: 160.

<sup>29</sup> This pattern also serves as a principle of organization for much of the Aristotelian *Constitution of the Athenians*: 42.3-49 (Deliberation), 50-62 (Magistrates), 63-69 (Judiciary).

<sup>30</sup> *Politics* 1297b35-1298a3.

<sup>31</sup> For a close comparison of these two passages with the Aristotelian schema, see Harris 1992: 160.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Hornblower 1991: 299; Winton 2004: 31 n. 16.

<sup>33</sup> 2.37.1.

<sup>34</sup> *Suppliant Women* ll. 433-34.

however, in delineating which of Pericles' statements correspond to the other two parts of the *politeia*. He assumes that Pericles' first statement describes the deliberative sphere in Athens and his third the magisterial. We get a far more compelling vision of the Athenian regime, however, if we view it the other way around.

The precise sense of Pericles' first statement is a point of enduring philological controversy. In accounting for why the Athenian *politeia* is called a democracy, Pericles employs a verbal construction that some have considered to be deliberately vague.<sup>35</sup> Attempting to capture its ambiguity, we might start with the following translation: "In name it is called a democracy because it distributes to (*es . . . oikein*) not a few but many."<sup>36</sup> The verb *oikein*, which most frequently means "to dwell" or "to inhabit" takes on the extended sense of "to manage" or "to govern" here. This much is uncontroversial, but the same cannot be said of the force of the preposition *es* when used in conjunction with *oikein*. Authorities such as Martin Ostwald, J. S. Rusten, and Simon Hornblower have argued that *es . . . oikein* points towards the beneficiaries of government, suggesting that *es pleionas oikein* means that Athens is ruled in the interest of (but not necessarily by) many rather than few.<sup>37</sup> Others, Harris included among them, have opposed this translation, insisting that the phrase describes the distribution of rule itself, not the fruits of rule, thereby making "rule by many" the actual sense of the phrase.<sup>38</sup> In terms of Pericles' articulated conception of Athenian government, the difference between the two interpretations is tremendous. The first sees Pericles offer a rather unconventional definition of democracy, omitting altogether any explicit mention of who it is that wields power in Athens. Such an interpretation may suggest that Pericles is deliberately glossing over a hidden reality of power that looks to be less than democratic. If the phrase is instead "rule by many," however, all of these concerns fall to the side, and we get a much more conventionally democratic Pericles. Rather than offering a potentially subversive re-definition of democracy, he does little more than to reformulate the literal meaning of *dêmo(s)-kratia*.<sup>39</sup>

While many partisans of each interpretation insist that Pericles' formulation is clear, we ought to entertain the possibility that it would have been no less ambiguous for Thucydides'

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<sup>35</sup> For commentators who approach the translation of *es oikein* along these lines, see Grant 1971: 104; Vlastos 1973: 196 n. 123; Ober 1998: 86-87.

<sup>36</sup> There is a second point of philological controversy in this phrase concerning the precise sense of *pleionas* (translated here as "many") following on the comments of Gomme (1956: 107-8). While Gomme argued for an expansive translation of the term as "the whole city," Grant (1971: 104-5), following J. T. Kakridis, insists that the term rather means "the many," thereby introducing a contrast in the sentence between two different socio-political groups (the rich/the poor), not just between a part and the whole. Literally, the term means "more," making the contrast between "few and more (than a few)". This seems to be vaguer than either Gomme or Grant suggest, indicating either the majority or the whole, especially as neither "few" nor "more" have articles. This militates against Grant's suggestion that this term is a clear indication of "the many" as opposed to "the few", though it's not unlikely that the formulation would have encouraged its audience members to think about this sociological contrast.

<sup>37</sup> Ostwald 1986: 183 n. 29; Rusten 1989: 145; Hornblower 1991: 298. See also, Vlastos 1973: 196 n. 123; Sheppard and Evans 1895: 190.

<sup>38</sup> Edmunds 1975: 48; Harris 1992: 164-65; Robinson 1997: 57; Winton 2004: 26-30.

<sup>39</sup> The conventionally understood meaning of this term is simply "rule of the people," but it should be noted that Josiah Ober (2008) has argued for a slightly more expansive definition in an important work on the original meaning of *dêmokratia*. He argues that we should understand this term to mean not only the possession of offices, but also "the collective capacity of a public to make good things happen in the public realm" (8).

original audience than for us today. This consideration gains greater weight when we recognize that the two ideas, “ability to rule” and “ability to benefit from rule,” often bleed together in fifth century thinking. When describing the fact that the *dēmos* (rather than the elite) possesses most of the political offices in Athens, for instance, the Old Oligarch simply uses the formulation “to have more” (*pleon echein*), noting that these offices bring with them a certain amount of pay and other benefits.<sup>40</sup> In addition, he assumes that by holding office the common people will do good for themselves and those like them, just as the elite would do if they held office.<sup>41</sup> For the Old Oligarch, to occupy public office is therefore “to have more” in both senses: it is to have a greater ability to rule and a greater ability to benefit from rule. To strive for greater precision from Pericles’ formulation may therefore be to ask for something that his language will not give.

This does not mean that we cannot arrive at a more precise sense of what Pericles is saying. It only means that this precision will not be had by clearly delineating and deciding between “by” and “for.” Keeping the Old Oligarch’s similarly ambiguous language in mind, it is helpful to turn to a suggestion made by James Andrews. Building on Gomme and E.R. Robinson, Andrews has argued that *es* “expresses the idea of distribution” in this passage as it does in parallel usages elsewhere in Thucydides. More specifically, he argues, used with *oikein* it indicates “the distribution of public office.”<sup>42</sup> Andrews’ suggestion is convincing not only on philological grounds, but also for its theoretical implications. According to this interpretation, Pericles ties the name “democracy” to the manner in which offices are distributed within the *politeia*. This accords nicely with Aristotle’s later contention in the *Politics* concerning the naming of *politeiai*, and it also appears to mesh with fifth-century convention as well. For both Euripides’ Theseus and the Old Oligarch, the distribution of offices among the many appears as the first feature of Athenian democracy that merits discussion.<sup>43</sup> While neither explicitly ties the name “democracy” to this (or any) aspect of the Athenian *politeia*, it is clear that both treat it as democracy’s signature feature.

If this is correct, Pericles’ first statement concerns the distribution of public offices, not the locus of deliberation, as Harris suggested. This leaves us finally with Pericles third statement, which we would expect to describe deliberation. This is not, however, the conventional interpretation. Literally, this statement reads: “in accordance with esteem—as one is thought to excel in something—an individual receives public preference not by class affiliation but by excellence.” Harris assumes, as many others have, that the language of public preferment (*es ta koina . . . protimatai*) is a clear nod to election for public office.<sup>44</sup> This interpretation, however, leads to an awkward relationship with the historical reality of Athens, as the majority of offices were not elective.<sup>45</sup> It is an awkwardness that further increases when one considers in turn Pericles’ fourth statement, the connected thought that poverty will not disqualify an individual

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<sup>40</sup> 1.2-3.

<sup>41</sup> 1.4.

<sup>42</sup> Andrews 2004: 552.

<sup>43</sup> Old Oligarch 1.2-4; *Suppliant Women* ll. 404-8.

<sup>44</sup> Harris 1992: 161. See also Loraux 1986: 188; Rusten 1989: 146; Hornblower 1991: 300-1.

<sup>45</sup> As many have noted, the historical problems of this statement increase further if one translates *apo merous*, here “by share,” as “by lot” *pace* Gomme (1956: 108) and Rusten (1989: 145-46).

capable of some service to the city from public preferment. Poverty, however, did in fact disqualify some Athenians citizens from holding certain public offices.<sup>46</sup> If Pericles is indeed describing the distribution of offices within Athens, his account distorts reality to such a degree that it becomes fantastical. It is hard to believe that his audience would have recognized their *politeia* within it.

But what reason is there to believe that *es ta koina . . . protimatai* should be understood as election to public office? Though frequently assumed, the case for this belief is never articulated explicitly. One might suspect an etymological basis for this assumption, as offices were often called *timai*.<sup>47</sup> It is notable, however, that the lexicon does not suggest such a connection either for Thucydides' usage of *protimaô* or for that of any other Greek writer.<sup>48</sup> Whatever role etymological suspicions may play, it appears that the assumed meaning of *protimaô* in this passage is deeply connected to the meaning of the proximate *apo merous*. Scholars have long disagreed over whether this *apo merous* (literally "by share" or "by part") means "by lot" or "based on socio-economic class" in this context, with many of the authoritative commentators on Thucydides' Greek text arguing for the former.<sup>49</sup> If this is a reference to sortition, then the interpretation of *protimaô* as preferment in public office is not only understandable but altogether likely, just as an assumed translation of *protimaô* as preferment in public office makes the reference to sortition much more plausible. However, as the philological debate surrounding *apo merous* has made clear, it is far from obvious that it does mean "by lot" in this context, and there are even greater reasons to doubt that "preferment in public office" is an adequate translation of *es ta koina . . . protimatai*.

If we look at the other uses of the verb *protiamaô* in Thucydides' text, we see that it is never used to indicate election to public office. It is, however, twice used to describe the selection of leaders in a deliberative setting.<sup>50</sup> This gives some indication that, contrary to widespread belief but consistent with the tri-partite model of regime components, the preferment described by Pericles is not concerned with the few elected offices that existed in Athens, but rather the ability to speak successfully in the assembly and win acceptance for one's policy.<sup>51</sup> Such success brought with it widespread public recognition, more indeed than that which accompanied most public offices, and it was the essential starting point of a successful political career in Athens.<sup>52</sup> The deliberative focus of this statement gains even further support by another key part of Pericles' claim. It is according to "esteem" (*axiôsis*), he says, that public preferment is distributed. We can note that, in Thucydides' final remarks on Pericles career, he uses this

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<sup>46</sup> (Ps.) Aristotle *Constitution of the Athenians* 7.4; Rhodes 1998: 220. Cf. Raaflaub 2008: 140.

<sup>47</sup> See the LSJ entry for *timê* (I.3) and Aristotle's *Politics* (1281a31).

<sup>48</sup> For this passage, the LSJ offers the more general translation, "to be preferred to public honors" (A.2).

<sup>49</sup> Gomme 1956: 108; Rusten 1989: 145-46; Hornblower 1991: 300-1. Cf. Grant 1971: 106; Loraux 1986: 187-88; Harris 1992: 166; Andrews 2004: 546-50; Winton 2004: 31-33.

<sup>50</sup> 1.120.1, 6.9.1.

<sup>51</sup> Winton (2004: 32-33), arrives at a similar conclusion concerning the meaning of this statement following a different and complementary line of arguments than those presented here.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Euripides' *Suppliant Women* ll. 438-41: "Freedom is this: 'What man, having useful counsel for the city, would like to make it public?' He who is willing to answer the call becomes illustrious (*lampros*), while he who is unwilling is silent."



same word, *axiôsis*, to account for the basis of Pericles' power.<sup>53</sup> In this passage, it is clear that Thucydides is referring to Pericles' ability to exercise consistent leadership in the assembly, not the ability to win office.<sup>54</sup> This not only further supports the idea that Pericles is indeed speaking about deliberative leadership here, not the distribution of offices. It also suggests that this remark is a significant point of reference for making sense of Thucydides' final verdict on Periclean leadership. (More on this below.)

By reading Pericles' third statement as a comment on deliberative leadership in Athens, we see that Pericles' account of the Athenian regime fits neatly with the theory of *politeia* described by Aristotle: the first statement concerns the distribution of offices, the second concerns the judiciary, and the third concerns public deliberation.<sup>55</sup> At the same time, we are able to save Pericles from offering a grossly inaccurate description of Athenian political institutions. While not all Athenian citizens were able to hold all offices, especially those that were elective, it was a fundamental feature of Athenian governance that any citizen could vie for leadership in the assembly. Moreover, if Pericles is speaking about deliberative leadership in his third statement, there is no reason to believe that *apo merous* might mean "by sortition," thereby saving him from the equally fanciful claim implied by this interpretation that public office in Athens was determined by excellence rather than lot. Instead, the claim appears to be that leadership in the assembly is determined by esteem and excellence, not simply based on the speakers' class affiliation.<sup>56</sup> Interpreted in this way, Pericles not only offers a more plausible description of the democracy, he directly contests the common elite criticism that, by offering each citizen an equal right to speak in the assembly, deliberative decisions will follow the partisan desires of the poor rather than the advice of the most qualified.<sup>57</sup>

### *Equality, Autocracy, and Athens*

With the sense of each statement established, it is possible to return to the interpretive problem posed by the nested antithetical relationships between them. The first antithetical sets Pericles' opening statement against the rest of the sentence. The explicit crux of this juxtaposition appears to be between collective and individual relations within the city. Pericles' first statement concerns the relationship between the distribution of offices, and thereby also elements of collective rule and benefit, with the name given to the *politeia*, democracy. It works

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<sup>53</sup> 2.65.8.

<sup>54</sup> 2.65.9.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Thus, Saxonhouse's (1996: 64) claim that "the regime of Athens as it appears in Pericles' speech seems . . . devoid of political institutions" rings hollow, even as the focus of the speech shifts away from these institutions and towards the daily practices of democratic citizens after 2.37.1.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Winton 2004: 32.

<sup>57</sup> A criticism found in the Old Oligarch (*Constitution of the Athenians* 1.6-9). The Old Oligarch also offers a defense of the Athenian Constitution against these criticisms, however he takes a different tack from Pericles in doing so. Unlike Pericles, the Old Oligarch concedes that the result of allowing the poor an equal right to speak in assembly lends itself to policy that favors this socio-political class over the elite. However, he argues that, in doing so, the democracy is better able to preserve itself than if it followed the advice of those possessing excellence, as they will naturally oppose the interests of the people and the continued rule of the *dêmos*.

entirely at the level of aggregate social groups, if not quite at the level of what we would call distinct social classes.<sup>58</sup> The next two statements set aside this focus on groups to instead consider the relationship between individuals within the *politeia*. These individual relationships are characterized in two distinct ways: equality is characteristic of the sphere of private disputes (a capacious category that includes all manner of legal actions citizens might take against one another), whereas the sphere of leadership of the common policy is marked instead by meritocratic preferment.

The specific placement of the *men* particle in Pericles' first sentence has understandably suggested to some that there is more to his initial juxtaposition than this transition from collective to individual relations. The *men* appears immediately after the word for "name," triggering some readers' sense that what will follow is a variant of a *logos/ergon* contrast.<sup>59</sup> The paradigmatic form of this contrast pits speech (*logos*) against reality (*ergon*), unmasking for the reader a truth that is conventionally hidden by the language used to describe it. Beginning as it does with *onoma men*, and furthermore underlining that *dēmokratia* is what the *politeia* is "called" (*keklētai*), many commentators have suspected that what follows the *de* will undermine the specious, conventional name applied to democracy by revealing a dramatically different reality.<sup>60</sup> Two points quickly detract from this possibility, however. First, there is a lack of an *ergon*-word adjoined to the *de* corresponding to *onoma*, a *logos*-word. Second, the feature of the Athenian *politeia* that Pericles' immediately presents, equality before the law in private disputes, does not suggest anything anti-democratic. While *isonomia* was not exclusive to democracy, it was considered to be characteristic of it. Rather than undermining the conventional name applied to the Athenian *politeia*, Pericles' second statement serves to reinforce its appropriateness, utilizing the *men . . . de* construction to indicate a series of interrelated (but not antithetical) points.<sup>61</sup>

The same cannot be said, however, for Pericles' third statement, and it is this consideration that has been at the crux of those arguments suggesting that Pericles' description of Athenian democracy is Janus-faced. By tying preferment in the assembly to *aretē*, Pericles invokes one of the buzzwords of the elitist opposition to democracy. He appears to suggest that the Athenian assembly is ruled aristocratically, not democratically. This allusion is given significantly greater force, and perhaps made significantly more subversive, when read in the larger context of Books I and II, and especially in the context of Thucydides' description of Periclean leadership. As we have seen, Thucydides describes Pericles as preeminently capable in speech and action, the first man among the Athenians.<sup>62</sup> It is significant that, when describing the pan-Athenian approval for Pericles' first speech, Thucydides' language gestures toward the *aretē* exhibited by his advice. The Athenians voted for his policy, he states, because they believed his

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<sup>58</sup> It is important to note that Pericles' language juxtaposes "few" and "many/more" in this statement, not "the few" and "the many." Cf. Ober 1998: 86-87.

<sup>59</sup> Adam Parry's Harvard dissertation, posthumously published (1981), remains the fundamental work on this contrast in Thucydides. See p. 11 for an introductory list of the various words associated with the contrast. Cf. 162.

<sup>60</sup> E.g. Edmunds 1975: 48-49; Loraux 1986: 186. Cf. Harris 1992: 162.

<sup>61</sup> For this usage of the *men . . . de* construction, see Denniston 1954: 370.

<sup>62</sup> 1.139.4.

advice to be best (*arista*).<sup>63</sup> The use of *protimaô* here adds further weight to this suggestion. In addition to the generally elitist connotations of the verb, the reader has already encountered its use at this point of the text to describe the hegemonic leadership of the Spartans over the Peloponnesian League.<sup>64</sup> With some subtlety, Pericles' description of the deliberative element of the Athenian *politeia* thus looks to be a defense of his own quasi-aristocratic dominance: while claiming that the *politeia* is called a democracy, he is asserting that it is led by the most excellent man—a view that Thucydides will forcefully endorse in his final comments on Pericles' leadership.<sup>65</sup>

Thucydides clearly gives his reader incentive to pause to consider the implications of what Pericles is saying. It is far from obvious, however, that the effect of Pericles' initial *men . . . de* contrast is to unmask an anti-democratic reality for his audience. We might take the force of his contention to be that democracy properly conceived admits of a balance between popular, egalitarian, and aristocratic—or even quasi-autocratic—powers and practices, and that the latter are essential to the greatness that Athenian democracy has achieved. All this is possible while nevertheless maintaining that democracy is an appropriate designation for the *politeia* on account of the way that offices are distributed.

Even while justifying his quasi-autocratic hold on power in the assembly, Pericles' description of the basis of deliberative leadership remains fundamentally democratic, highlighting the significant difference between his own rule and that of a hereditary king or tyrant. Within the process of preferment that Pericles describes, there is an essential role to play for the citizenry at large. The basis of preferment identified by Pericles is “esteem” (*axiôsis*), a quality that is conceptually similar to honor in that no individual can possess it in isolation or inherently, but only in the eyes of others. Pericles' formulation brings this quality of *axiôsis* into focus by offering a gloss of the word: “as each is considered to be eminent in something (*en tôi eudokimeî*).”<sup>66</sup> The verb used here, *eudokimeî*, emphasizes the extent to which *axiôsis* is based on *popular perception* of one's success in a particular endeavor, not one's inherent ability in the field. In other words, *axiôsis* is not simply recognized by popular opinion, it is actually constituted by it. In this way, it is a deeply democratic phenomenon even if it produces something akin to autocratic leadership.

In suggesting the intersubjective foundation of *axiôsis*, however, Pericles is careful to distinguish democratic judgement from complete subjectivism. The people's judgment of merit will not be divorced from reality in the way that Thucydides asserts that popular judgment of historical fact routinely is.<sup>67</sup> Rather, Pericles' formulation suggests a direct relationship between the actual possession of *aretê*, the recognition and valuation of this excellence by the people, and preferment on account of this recognition in the deliberative sphere. All of this is packed into the

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<sup>63</sup> 1.145.1.

<sup>64</sup> 1.120.1. For a more general treatment of the connotations of *protimaô* within the context of elitist ideology, see Graham and Forsythe 1984: esp. 34-40.

<sup>65</sup> 2.65.9, discussed in greater depth at the end of this chapter and throughout the next.

<sup>66</sup> 2.37.1.

<sup>67</sup> E.g., 1.20.1-3.

taut expression, “in accordance with esteem—as one is thought to excel in something—an individual receives public preference not by class affiliation but by excellence.” By suggesting the causal force of excellence in preferment and the congruence of this with esteem, Pericles thus marries the public recognition of merit to the actual possession of it. In this way, deliberative leadership in Athens will be awarded to the best man not in spite of his being democratically chosen, but because of it. Through the vehicle of aristocratic preferment, Pericles is able to achieve a dominance in the assembly that approaches autocracy while remaining fully democratic, and while coexisting with equality in the judicial sphere.

The attempt to blend the supposedly antithetical elements of autocracy and equality, it should be noted, is not merely limited to this single *men . . . de* construction in the Funeral Oration’s description of Athenian *politeia*. Nor, indeed, is it merely a sly justification for Pericles’ own monopoly on rule in the assembly. Rather, Pericles’ larger vision of democratic citizenship in the Funeral Oration is a striking synthesis of autocratic and egalitarian ways of living.<sup>68</sup> Much of what Pericles is doing, it has been widely noted, is structured around a contrast between Athenian and Spartan ways of life. This contrast is formed, however, by allowing Athenians to indulge in goods and practices thought previously to be the exclusive province of an autocrat. Rather than developing a simple contrast with Sparta, Pericles is playing a double game, situating Athens between a traditional autocracy and hyper-egalitarian Sparta, demonstrating that the Athenians are able to achieve the benefits of each form of rule while also avoiding their respective pitfalls.

Nowhere is this double game more apparent than in Pericles’ celebratory depiction of the freedom (*eleutheria*) that Athenian citizens enjoy. To modern eyes, it is tempting to read this praise of Athenian *eleutheria* in terms of liberal individualism, which clearly contrasts with Spartan collectivism. Such an identification runs the risks of teleological anachronism, and thus should be treated with caution. But it may not be entirely inappropriate, so long as we acknowledge that the first shoots of liberal individualism grew from the soil of ancient Greek tyranny.<sup>69</sup> As commentators such as James McGlew and Victoria Wohl have recognized, Pericles’ vision of democratic freedom ascribes to the Athenians a model of autonomy and autarky previously attributed only to autocrats and gods.<sup>70</sup> Living a life of easy pleasure, enjoying the best things that the world has to offer, and being wholly self-sufficient, each

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<sup>68</sup> A number of commentators have arrived at a similar conclusion concerning the Funeral Oration, though none frame this juxtaposition specifically in terms of “autocracy” and “equality.” Nicole Loraux (1986: esp. Ch. 4), perhaps the most influential proponent of this reading of the Funeral Oration, identifies the juxtaposition as one between “democracy” and “aristocracy.” McGlew (1998: 187-90) prefers “democracy” and “tyranny.” The reasons for my use of “autocracy” and “equality” arise out of the internal logic to Thucydides’ text that has thus far been developed.

<sup>69</sup> For an excellent account of early modern theorists using ancient tyranny as a model for conceptualizing sovereignty, see Hoekstra 2016.

<sup>70</sup> McGlew 1993: 187-90; Wohl 2002: 53. Cf. the remarks of Kallet (2006: 131-37), who asserts that Pericles’ strategy is rather one of implicitly denying that the rule of the *dēmos* in Athens can be likened to that of a tyrant, a sentiment she finds wholly inappropriate for the generic constraints of the Funeral Oration. While she is right to insist that Pericles distances himself from any hint that the *dēmos* rules as a tyrant over other socio-political groups within the city, Pericles does suggest that each citizen in democratic Athens is able to equally enjoy certain goods that are conventionally associated with tyranny.

democratic citizen becomes a Croesus or a Xerxes. By absorbing this autocratic model of freedom and making it the centerpiece of Athenian life, Pericles is able to draw a sharp distinction between the practices of his compatriots and the ways of the Spartans. But, concurrently, Pericles transforms this autocratic freedom by insisting that it is equally distributed among the Athenians, in this way appropriating the characteristic feature of the Spartan regime as well. Thus, Pericles' Athens strikes a balance between autocratic and egalitarian elements that, when supplemented by the uniquely courageous and intellectual Athenian nature, allows for each Athenian to enjoy the benefits of both the autocratic and Spartan ways of life while suffering none of their attendant defects. Like a tyrant but unlike the Spartans, for example, Athenian citizens are able to pursue whatever pleasures they like in their private lives. Unlike a tyrant, however, this hedonism does not lead to transgression, for, as with the Spartans, the Athenians respect the laws out of fear.<sup>71</sup> According to Pericles, the Athenian way of life is characterized by the best features of both its worst enemies.

This delicate balance between autocratic and egalitarian ways of life is also manifest in Pericles' elegant if paradoxical claim that, "we are lovers of what is beautiful (*philokaloumen*) with frugality (*met' euteleias*)."<sup>72</sup> The apparent meaning of *philokaloumen* here is that the Athenians cultivate a taste for fine, beautiful objects and buildings such as those that adorned the Acropolis.<sup>73</sup> These objects were, however, anything but cheap, placing Athenian love for them in direct tension with their accompanying possession of frugality. Commentators such as Rusten and Hornblower have attempted to defuse this tension by insisting on a different meaning of the verb, preferring instead, "we are lovers of what is noble."<sup>74</sup> While we might wonder just how far this actually defuses the tension, it is beside the point.<sup>75</sup> For an apparent tension is exactly what Pericles wants to suggest here, and specifically the tension between characteristic traits of autocratic and egalitarian regimes. As we saw in Chapter 2, the cultivation of fine building projects was strongly associated with tyrannical and kingly rule in the fifth century, while austerity and frugality were hallmarks of the egalitarian way of life that the Spartans exemplified. Pericles is again situating the Athenians between these two models, insisting that the Athenians can love what is beautiful without being profligate, while they can be frugal without being philistines. They can, in other words, have their cake and eat it too. (*How* exactly they do this is a question that Pericles does not address.)

For Pericles, Athenian democracy is not undermined by the presence of autocratic elements in its *politeia* or daily habits. Rather, he presents these elements as essential to democratic life. Just as the *politeia* is a mixture of egalitarian and autocratic parts, so too is the everyday existence of a democratic citizen. And yet, there is an important distinction to be made

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<sup>71</sup> 2.37.2-3.

<sup>72</sup> 2.40.1.

<sup>73</sup> Here, I follow the suggestions of Kallet (2006: 131-33). Cf. Rusten (1989: 153) and Hornblower (1991: 304-5).

<sup>74</sup> Rusten 1989: 153; Hornblower 1991: 304.

<sup>75</sup> The ability to appreciate what was noble was, in part, thought to be a product of an elite education, which also was not cheap. So, for instance, consider the Old Oligarch, *Constitution of the Athenians* 1.5: "For poverty leads [the common people more than the elite] towards what is shameful (*aischra*; i.e. the opposite of *kala*), and lack of education and of learning is due to a lack of money for some people."

between the parts of the *politeia* and the everyday life of the citizen in the way that equality and autocracy work together. In the democratic lifestyle, the two are synthesized, as each citizen enjoys equally the best parts of the autocratic way of being. In Pericles' description of the *politeia*, however, the two are carefully separated and set next to one another. Equality has its place in the judicial sphere, while aristocratic autocracy takes its place in Pericles' assembly. Equality does have some place here too. As Pericles is careful to note, each citizen is equally eligible to put himself forward for deliberative leadership, even if he should be among the lower property classes. But an equal opportunity for consideration does not entail equal preferment. Only the best will actually be able to lead, and in the Athens of Pericles, that meant "the first man."

Not everyone can equally be Pericles in the assembly, but there is a further egalitarian lining to Pericles' democratic autocracy worth addressing. Despite his monopoly on deliberative leadership, all might not only benefit from but also participate in the singular excellence that wins Pericles preferment. By recognizing his excellence, awarding him esteem on its account, and thereby supporting his policies in the assembly, these policies become the policy of all. It will not be the case that, in voting for Pericles' policy, each individual citizen acquires for himself the excellence that allowed their leader to formulate these policies. Pericles' description of deliberative preferment does not even imply that each citizen will or can fully comprehend why his policy is best. But it does suggest that they are able to recognize that Pericles is himself best, and they follow his lead and vote for his policy as a result. This is sufficient for each citizen to possess an excellent common policy, and also to be responsible for its adoption.

It is a mistake, therefore, to understand or interpret Pericles' first antithetical contrast in his description of the *politeia* as an unmasking of the undemocratic reality lying behind the name of democracy. Rather, Pericles is attempting to demonstrate to the Athenians that the reality of democracy is, in part, essentially autocratic. This is not to deny that equality is also essential to Athenian democracy. Indeed, in its embrace of equality we find what makes democracy distinct within the larger autocratic tradition that Thucydides identifies in the *Archaeology*. Therein we also find the reason why Athenian democracy was able to surpass all previous autocratic forms in its greatness. Equality meant greater inclusivity, which meant a widened scope for cooperation and collective action towards a common end, which meant greater power. But the greatness of Athenian democracy could not be reduced to equality, nor simply to the widespread distribution of offices throughout the populace. It was rather the way in which equality and autocracy reinforced one another that allowed Athenian democracy to reach the heights that it did.

### *Excellence and Agonism*

Thus far it has been suggested that the force of Pericles' second antithetical contrast is one between egalitarian and autocratic domains within the *politeia*. There is, however, a further, related element of this contrast that needs to be drawn out: that between the competitive and noncompetitive spheres of the *politeia*. This contrast is perhaps only hinted at by Pericles'

language, but it is intimately related to the larger contrast between equality and autocracy in Thucydidean political thought, and it will come to take on greater significance as Thucydides' text proceeds. Pericles notes that individual differences (*idia diaphora*) will be confined to the juridical sphere, where each citizen will receive equal treatment before the law. This formula, *idia diaphora*, is capacious, suggesting not only "individual disagreements" but also "distinctions between individuals," such as those of class, merit, and opinion. Set within the context of the judicial sphere, the language alludes to the idea of conflict and contestation between citizens. It is to be a realm of interpersonal competition. Leadership in the assembly, at least according to the analysis thus far developed, is paradoxically described in such a way as to set it outside this realm. The seamless relationship between excellence, esteem, and preferment imagines a sphere of political life dominated by the recognition and ranking of merit. Preferment becomes a matter of quantitative comparison rather than active competition. When one individual possesses greater *aretê*, the formulation implies, they are preferred on account of this possession. The dynamic that results is effectively depicted by Thucydides' account of Pericles' first speech. Without hearing any competing opinions, we see the Athenians identify Periclean advice as best. This identification, we can now see, is derivative of their recognition that Pericles himself was best. Thucydides tells us that others did speak, but, as he presents it, the outcome of the "debate" is never in doubt.

There is nothing surprising about Pericles' suggestion that the judicial sphere of Athenian political life was one of difference, conflict, and, as a result, competition. Indeed, the Athenians often explicitly referred to court cases as contests (*agônes*) and to its participants as contestants (*agônistai*).<sup>76</sup> There is something paradoxical, however, about Pericles' implicit identification of deliberative leadership as noncompetitive. In the first instance, this appears to directly contradict the actual procedures of the assembly, where multiple different speakers would rise before the assembly and champion their competing policies. Having heard the speakers, the Athenians would then vote by raising hands as to who had spoken best and which policy they would adopt. We get a better sense of this deliberative agonism in Thucydides' depictions of the Athenian assembly after Pericles has exited the narrative. Even the contests between Cleon and Diodotus or Nicias and Alcibiades, however, present dramatized abstractions of assembly debates and make no attempt to depict the messier historical reality of Athenian deliberation. Thucydides' accounts of Athenian assembly are always distillations, focusing his reader's attention on the fundamental dynamic that he sees at work in the particular moment of deliberation in question.<sup>77</sup> In the age of Pericles, this dynamic is one of the seamless preferment of superiority.

In addition to these historical concerns, there is something of a conceptual paradox in Pericles' suggestion that deliberative leadership will be outside of the sphere of competition. In much of heroic, archaic, and fifth-century Greek thought, there was an interdependence between the concepts of excellence, honor, and competition. Excellence was thought to be developed and demonstrated through competition, with honor being the prize of victory in competitions of

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<sup>76</sup> On the inherently competitive aspects of Athenian juridical life, see Allen 2000: 59-62.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Zumbrunnen 2008.

excellence. Pericles himself alludes to this close conceptual relationship in the final lines of the Funeral Oration: “For those whom the competition-prizes (*athla*) for excellence are greatest, the best men will be citizens.”<sup>78</sup> This conclusion picks up on Pericles’ larger exhortation to the living Athenians to contend with those who have died for Athens, those whom he is presently eulogizing, in an attempt to match their excellence and thereby win a comparable share of honor.

In his description of deliberative leadership, however, Pericles adopts two members of this conceptual sequence while replacing the third. The ultimate prize for the possession of excellence remains the winning of honor in his account. (Here, it is important to note that the verb Pericles uses for “preferment,” *protimaô*, literally means “to honor before” in the sense of “to honor more than.”) But competition falls out as the intermediary term. Achievement of honor is no longer the consequence of successful competition—competition that is won through the possession of excellence—but rather through the distribution of esteem. *Axiôsis* thus replaces the *agôn* as the medium through which *aretê* achieves *timê*. In this way, preferment becomes a consequence of excellence, not merely of victory in the deliberative contest.

This distinction may appear to be specious. If excellence is a matter of performance, we might doubt that the possession of excellence could be meaningfully distinguished from victory in competition. It is not merely that such victories are the primary way in which one is able to recognize the possession of excellence, but rather that it is the act of outdoing others in such competitions that constitutes excellence. We cannot know who is the better runner, for instance, without a race. But there is a crucial difference between a race and the competitive deliberation of public policy. While a race directly tests the skill of running, a debate tests one’s ability to speak persuasively about the matter under discussion, thereby only offering an indirect measure of excellence. One’s superior technical expertise may play a significant role in one’s ability to speak persuasively about the topic at hand, or it may not. When debating policy pertaining to some building project, for instance, the preferred speaker is not the one who builds the better structure before the deliberating crowd. It is the one who convinces the crowd that his structure will be better. Whether or not the promised structure is in fact superior from a technical point of view, or whether the speaker is able to actually build what has been promised, may be immaterial so long as the crowd is convinced that this will be so (or convinced that they should make their judgment based on another set of factors entirely). Deliberative victory therefore often goes to the more excellent rhetorician, not the most excellent technician.

Herein lies the importance of Pericles’ substitution of esteem for competition as the medium of deliberative preferment. Pericles suggests that by recognizing and rewarding the possession of excellence the Athenians are able to bypass the problem that specious rhetoric poses for making excellent policy. In Athens, he is stipulating, people make policy decisions based on the actual competence of the speaker rather than the ways in which they are moved by his speech or in which they might identify with him along socio-political lines. This does not mean, however, that the relevant excellences for deliberative leadership exclude those that pertain to speaking well in Pericles’ estimation. When he outlines the reasons for his leadership

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<sup>78</sup> 2.46.1.



in the assembly at the beginning of his final speech, included within the list are his preeminent abilities both “to recognize what must be done and to articulate it (*hermêneusai*).”<sup>79</sup> He asserts that this latter ability is a necessary aspect of effective political leadership, “for the man who knows (*gnous*) what must be done and cannot clearly explain (*didaxas*) it may as well have thought nothing.”<sup>80</sup> Political excellence, then, is not devoid of a communicative element in Pericles’ account, but this excellence is not the same as the competitive excellence that seeks only persuasion and discursive victory. The two verbs that Pericles uses, *hermêneuô* and *didaskalô*, instead suggest the clear transfer of knowledge. The first is often used to describe the process of translation, while the primary meaning of the second is “to teach.” The deliberative leader, Pericles asserts, must be a skilled educator, not merely a skilled persuader.<sup>81</sup> By being such, and by possessing a devotion to his city and an imperviousness to bribery, persuasion will naturally follow.<sup>82</sup>

### *The Limits of the Periclean Ideal*

The Funeral Oration offers a potential answer to the question posed by Pericles’ earlier criticism of egalitarian deliberative bodies. Athens is able to bypass the problems of partiality and neglect that (supposedly) cripple the Peloponnesian League due to Pericles’ quasi-autocratic leadership in the Athenians assembly, all despite the fact that this democratic body allows each citizen an equal vote, gives each citizen equal status in the courts, and distributes offices widely. On account of his unrivaled excellence and esteem, Pericles himself is the “single executive council” that the Peloponnesians lack, while the Athenian deliberative body remains recognizably democratic. From this Olympian height, he can attend to the good of the whole community, a good which does not sit in tension with his own advantage, but rather precedes and reinforces it.<sup>83</sup>

Or so Pericles claims. As is always the case in Thucydides’ text, one cannot assume that the author endorsed what his speakers say, even when that speaker is Pericles. Rather, we must turn to Thucydides’ first-person narrative and analysis to judge the extent to which it reinforces, qualifies, or contradicts the proposition in question. We have already seen that there is initial Thucydidean support for Pericles’ account of deliberative leadership prior to the Funeral Oration. In the Athenian endorsement of Pericles’ first speech, Thucydides’ narrative coheres with Pericles’ account of excellence-based preferment in the assembly. Thucydides identifies Pericles

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<sup>79</sup> 2.60.5.

<sup>80</sup> 2.60.6.

<sup>81</sup> We must hesitate, however, before sliding from the idea of Pericles as a skilled educator and interpreter of policy to the idea of Pericles as a skilled educator of the historical interpretation required to formulate such policy (cf. Farrar 1988: 158), at least as far as the deliberative audience (as opposed to Thucydides’ reader) is concerned. It is an open question at this point in the text just how much the Athenians are able to learn about the process of excellent policy formation from Pericles. This is a question that Thucydides will soon turn to, and that this study will soon address.

<sup>82</sup> For the addition of a “love of city” and an inability to be bribed as necessary qualities of effective political leadership, see 2.60.5-6

<sup>83</sup> 2.60.2-4.

as the first man of Athens, and the Athenians endorse Pericles' policy of confrontation and endurance with apparent unanimity, judging that he gave the best advice. Moreover, Thucydides uses a verb, *keleuô*, to describe Periclean speech that flirts with the nomenclature of autocratic command. But this is not Thucydides' final, nor most revealing word on the matter. For this, we must turn to the reaction to Pericles' second speech and Thucydides' subsequent analysis of the leader's career, both of which follow closely on the Funeral Oration. Here, we are able to see that Thucydides recognized at once the explanatory value of Pericles' account and its limitations as a general statement about Athenian political life. While neither fully endorsing nor rejecting Pericles' vision of deliberative leadership in the democracy, Thucydides at once qualifies and deepens it.

Coming immediately between Pericles' Funeral Oration and these passages is the plague. Many commentators have seen in Thucydides' vivid description of the plague's deleterious effects on Athenian society the dramatic subversion of the Funeral Oration's idealized portrait of Athenian democratic life.<sup>84</sup> It appears beyond doubt that Thucydides intended the plague to contest and reverse certain aspects of the Funeral Oration, as there are repeated verbal echoes between the two passages that underline the inversion of the Periclean ideal. In a contrast to the Funeral Oration's insistence that each Athenian citizen lived a "self-sufficient life" (*sôma autarkes*), for instance, Thucydides negates this formulation to insist that no particular physical constitution in itself was capable of defying the plague (*sôma autarkes on ouden diephanê pros auto*).<sup>85</sup> Whereas Pericles described the Athenians as frugal lovers of beauty (i.e. what is *kalon*), Thucydides states that, amid the onset of the plague, "none were ready to endure hardship for the pursuit of what was considered fine (*kalôi*), believing it unclear whether they might perish before they achieved it." Instead, he notes, the Athenians became prodigal in the pursuit of whatever gave them immediate pleasure.<sup>86</sup> In Pericles' account, the pursuit of individual pleasure was held in check by fear of the law. In Thucydides' description of the plague, "neither fear of gods nor the laws of men" restrained the Athenians from the temptations of immediate gratification.<sup>87</sup> The force of the plague upends Athenian life, dramatically and tragically, demonstrating the fragility and contingency of the democratic way of life analyzed and extolled by Pericles in the Funeral Oration.

In judging the plague's reversal of the Funeral Oration, we must nevertheless be careful to differentiate between Pericles' account of Athenian political institutions and his account of the habits of Athenian life. Thucydides' description of the plague clearly subverts the latter, but there is no explicit indication of how it affects the delicate institutional balance described by Pericles. The reader doesn't have to wait long for the subject to come to the fore. Just paragraphs after the plague episode, Thucydides notes that Athenian resolve buckled under the combined weight of the plague and the annual Spartan invasion of Attica. The people turn on Pericles, holding him

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<sup>84</sup> Macleod 1983: 150-52; Connor 1984: 62, 73; Foster 2010: 204-10.

<sup>85</sup> 2.41.1, 51.3. In each instance, this phrase is rather unusual Greek for what Thucydides is trying to say, further drawing the reader's attention to its reoccurrence. See, e.g., Hornblower 1991: 324. Cf. Foster 2010: 204-6.

<sup>86</sup> 2.40.1, 53.3.

<sup>87</sup> 2.37.3, 53.4.

responsible for all that they have suffered, and send a diplomatic mission to their enemies.<sup>88</sup> It is the most serious threat to Periclean leadership that the reader has encountered, directly challenging not only Pericles' war policy, but also his vision of Athenian deliberative preferment. As the anger born of personal misfortune overrides the authority of the first man, the tidy distinction between deliberative and judicial spheres that Pericles articulated is on the verge of collapse.

In the face of mutiny, Thucydides' Pericles calls an assembly and confidently reasserts his claim to legitimate authority. He is better able to understand and articulate what must be done than any man in Athens, he declares; he is a patriot and impervious to bribery.<sup>89</sup> In one fell swoop Pericles reminds the people why they voted for his policy in the first place and why they should continue to support him and it. It is a daring rhetorical strategy, and one that few can realistically imagine a politician pulling off successfully. Whether or not Pericles did actually pursue this line with the Athenian people, however, the effect of Thucydides' description here is to refocus the reader's attention on what is at stake in the present vote. We are reminded that it is not merely Athenian war policy that is at issue in this decision; it is the proof of Pericles' vision of excellence-based deliberative preferment within Athenian democracy.

Even under the intense strain of the plague, Pericles' vision of the Athenian *politeia* survives intact. Thucydides describes the Athenian reaction to Pericles' speech in a characteristically complex sentence:

In matters of public policy (*dêmosiai*), they were persuaded by his words--they stopped their overtures to the Lacedaemonians and applied themselves more to the war; but individually (*idiai*), they were distressed by their sufferings: the people (*ho dêmos*) because they had been deprived of the little that they had to begin with; the elite (*hoi dunatoi*) because they had lost fine property along with expensive buildings and furnishings throughout the countryside, and most of all because there was war instead of peace. Indeed, as a whole, they did not give up their anger until they punished [Pericles] with a fine.<sup>90</sup>

This sentence is structured by nested *men . . . de* constructions in a syntactic echo of the Funeral Oration's account of the *politeia*. In the latter of these antitheses, Thucydides juxtaposes the different reasons that the people and the elite had for being upset with Pericles, alluding for the first time in an Athenian context to the socio-political fault line along which civil war arose in Epidamnus and would later spread throughout Greece.<sup>91</sup> The first antithesis, however, looks back to Pericles' differentiation between the formation of public policy and the resolution of individual disputes. The Athenians' dual response aligns neatly with the different institutional orders that Pericles had identified. In the deliberative sphere, the Athenians follow excellence where it leads. Despite their anger towards Pericles, his policy continues to win the day, and his authority remains intact. As Thucydides notes immediately following the above quoted passage,

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<sup>88</sup> 2.59.1-2.

<sup>89</sup> 2.60.5.

<sup>90</sup> 2.65.2-3.

<sup>91</sup> On this point, see Ober 1998: 91-2.

at some point after this speech the Athenians again “elected him general and turned over to him all the affairs of the city . . . since they believed him most worthy (*pleistou axion*) in respect to the needs of the city as a whole.”<sup>92</sup> In the deliberative sphere, excellence (*aretē*) and esteem (*axiōsis*) trump even the most extreme states of anger. But in the judicial sphere, the proper home of individual disputes and grievances according to Pericles’ scheme, the superlative statesman is on equal terms with the rest of the citizenry.<sup>93</sup> Excellence and esteem offer no shield, and it is here that the people quench their thirst for retributive punishment. As a man, Pericles does not walk away from the episode unscathed. But as a political leader and, what is more, a theorist of the Athenian *politeia*, he appears vindicated.

The Athenian reaction to Pericles’ second speech is written so as to draw the reader’s attention to its congruence with Pericles’ vision of the *politeia*. Unlike Pericles’ portrait of democratic life, Thucydides confirms that the delicate balance between egalitarian and autocratic political institutions described by Pericles survived the tremendous strain of the plague. Thucydides, however, does not leave it at that. Having described the Athenian reaction, he immediately offers a synoptic analysis of Pericles’ career as leader of Athens and the effects that his death would have on Athenian politics. In this passage, Thucydides’ direct engagement with the Funeral Oration’s account of the *politeia* continues.

It will be the focus of the next chapter to offer a detailed account of Thucydides’ analysis of Periclean leadership and the post-Periclean turn in Athenian politics. Before turning to this, however, two points from this analysis should be considered briefly as bearing directly on the present discussion. First, Thucydides explicitly echoes and endorses the Funeral Oration’s account of deliberative preferment by merit-based esteem. Thucydides identifies *axiōsis* as the foundation of Periclean power in the assembly, noting that this allowed him to lead the people in the creation of policy rather than to be led by them. The foundation of this esteem, in turn, is identified not with mere rhetorical capacity, but with Pericles’ intellectual superiority, his formidable status, and his exceptional incorruptibility.<sup>94</sup> The result was a rule that approached autocratic control.<sup>95</sup> Another result was the unprecedented achievement of greatness that the city achieved.<sup>96</sup> Yet, while endorsing the basic outline of Pericles’ vision, Thucydides’ analysis also modifies it. The list of virtues that constituted Pericles’ esteem-based rule differs in Thucydides’ analysis from those articulated by Pericles at the beginning of his second speech. Thucydides, for instance, includes the material and social capital (*axiōmata*) that Pericles possessed as the leader of an aristocratic Athenian family within his analysis, a factor that Pericles omits in his own list

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<sup>92</sup> 2.65.4.

<sup>93</sup> It is important to note that the distinction drawn between the deliberative sphere and the judicial sphere does not always map neatly onto a distinction between the assembly and the law courts. In certain circumstances, such as cases of treason and abuse of office, the trial could be held in the assembly. Edwin Carawan (1987: 177-79) suggests that the relevant fining of Pericles was an instance of this sort, though his contention appears to be based on a fairly speculative reading of Plutarch’s account in the *Life of Pericles* (35.4). Carawan is convincing on the *possibility* of an assembly-held trial for Pericles at this time, but we cannot conclude from Plutarch’s evidence that this was certainly, or even most likely, the case.

<sup>94</sup> 2.65.8.

<sup>95</sup> 2.65.9.

<sup>96</sup> 2.65.5.

and in the Funeral Oration explicitly denies the relevance of for preferment in the assembly. Thucydides' analysis suggests that the separation between socio-political class, excellence, and deliberative leadership was perhaps not as absolute as Pericles wanted to suggest.

At the same time, Thucydides drops from his list Pericles' focus on the ability to clearly articulate one's ideas and to teach them to the audience. This does not mean that Thucydides' account neglects the communicative virtues entirely. He suggests that a fundamental feature of Periclean dominance in the assembly was his ability to instill confidence in the people when they were unnecessarily fearful and to mitigate their exuberance when they were excessively confident.<sup>97</sup> But, in this, one can detect an important change of focus. According to Pericles, the necessary quality of the statesman was his ability to impart his ideas clearly and efficiently. His vision was fundamentally one of the transfer of knowledge. For Thucydides, however, it is rather the ability of Pericles to moderate the emotional states of the people in line with his understanding of what was called for.<sup>98</sup> The suggestion is that the people did not so much learn from Periclean speech as they were affected by it. Thus, if Pericles saw himself as a superior mind instructing inferior minds in what was called for, Thucydides rather presents us with an image of Pericles as the mind of the city controlling an emotional, irrational body.

Thucydides also qualifies Pericles' vision of the Athenian *politeia* in a second, even more fundamental way. Pericles' account, though allusive of his own rule, is presented as an abstract statement about Athenian political institutions. It is a theory of the Athenian democratic regime. Thucydides' analysis, however, recognizes that, as an abstract theory, it is incomplete. For its success, Pericles' vision of merit-based preferment and the clear separation between competitive and noncompetitive spheres within the *politeia* requires the presence of a uniquely qualified leader. In the presence of a Pericles, in other words, everything worked as Pericles suggested it should. Without a Pericles, however, the regime took on a very different character. Thucydides notes that the post-Periclean leaders were "more equal to one another" yet nevertheless all desired the leadership.<sup>99</sup> This equality among potential leaders brought about the end of merit-based preferment in the assembly, as there was no longer a clear favorite in the metric of esteem. The result was to introduce individual competition into the assembly and to allow the caprice of the people the upper hand in the making of policy. The delicate balance between competitive judicial and non-competitive deliberative spheres that Pericles' outlines collapses, and the individual disputes (*idia diaphora*) that had previously been kept out of deliberative politics come to dominate the making of public policy.<sup>100</sup> Without its "single executive council," Athenian democracy comes to resemble the Peloponnesian alliance in all of the ways that Pericles criticized, and the consequences are catastrophic: "they governed themselves and their

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<sup>97</sup> 2.65.9.

<sup>98</sup> There is a striking similarity to what Thucydides says of Pericles in this respect and what Plato (*Phaedrus* 267c9-d1) has Socrates say of the sophist Thrasymachus: "He was a man formidable both at provoking the anger (*orgisai*) of the many and at soothing and charming them when angered." Edmunds (1975: 14) notes, "In this respect Pericles has achieved one of the goals of sophistic rhetoric, the ability to sway the passions of the mob from one state to its opposite."

<sup>99</sup> 2.65.10.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. 2.37.1 with *idias diaphoras* at 2.65.12 and *idias diabolos* at 2.65.11.

tributary allies badly according to personal ambition and private profit, concerning themselves with matters that appeared unrelated to the war and which, when they succeeded, provided honor and advantage primarily to private individuals, but, when they failed, harmed the city in the war.”<sup>101</sup>

Preferment of the best in the deliberative sphere was one of three essential elements to the democratic *politeia* in Pericles’ account. In Thucydides’ assessment, however, Pericles’ quasi-autocratic leadership in the creation of policy became the keystone of democratic greatness, while the other elements receded from view. Setting aside the distribution of offices and the organization of the juridical sphere, Thucydides focused his analysis on the making of deliberative policy. It was here, not in the other elements of the *politeia*, that he located the central causal mechanism of the democracy’s rise and fall. By this route, he arrived at his most notorious assessment of Periclean Athens: “It was in name a democracy, but in fact rule by the first man (*hupo tou prôtou andros archê*).”<sup>102</sup> With its striking use of a *logos/ergon* contrast, many commentators have again assumed that Thucydides is contesting the appropriateness of *dêmokratia* as the name for the *politeia*.<sup>103</sup> This study, however, suggests that Thucydides was making a rather different move. What is said in this statement coheres with the principles that Pericles had more delicately laid out in the Funeral Oration—if constitutions are conventionally named after the way in which offices are distributed, than Athens was indeed a *dêmokratia*. What Thucydides challenged, rather, was that the distribution of offices was the primary element of Athenian domestic rule. For Thucydides, it was the *archê* of Pericles in the deliberative sphere, not the distribution of *archai* among the people, that was crucial for understanding the fate of the democratic hero. The latter may well have given the regime its name, but it was the former that accounted for its success.

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<sup>101</sup> 2.65.7.

<sup>102</sup> 2.65.9.

<sup>103</sup> To note just one recent example, Zumbrunnen (2008:2-3) suggests that this formulation describes an “insidious” change in Athenian politics whereby democracy became “merely nominal,” and he uses this interpretation of Thucydides’ comment as the starting point for his work on democratic silence in Thucydides.

## Chapter 5: The Tragic Science of Democratic Defeat

Commentators often characterize Thucydides as a tragic thinker, and his text as the tragedy of Athenian democracy.<sup>1</sup> There is an intuitive coherence between such a characterization and the thesis thus far developed in this dissertation. If Thucydides understands the Athenian democracy as a sort of hero, it only seems right that it should suffer the hero's characteristic fate. And yet, the account of Athenian defeat glimpsed at the end of the last chapter appears to undercut such a suggestion. Thucydides' analysis of post-Periclean decline and eventual Athenian defeat features a causal story that foregrounds the shifting dynamics of deliberation after the loss of a superior leader, not one in which vengeful gods intervene in human affairs to punish the prideful. The understanding of causation featured in this explanation is recognizable as that of emergent Greek scientific thought.<sup>2</sup> This is an understanding of causation that is not only distinct from the moralized conception of causation characteristic of mythologizing poets, but one which is often thought to be fundamentally incompatible with it. It would appear that Thucydides is either not ultimately wedded to a tragic explanation of democratic defeat, or his text is inconsistent.

Appearances, however, are deceptive. Thucydides' adherence to a scientific understanding of causation places him at odds with certain aspects of the tragic explanatory model, but it does not set him in fundamental opposition to it. Rather, a more complete account of Thucydides' explanation of the post-Periclean turn in Athenian politics reveals an attempt to reinvent the tragic logic of *hybris*-driven reversal for a democratic hero by establishing it on a securely scientific footing. Replacing the overdetermination of supernatural forces with the overdetermination of deliberative dynamics, Thucydides accounts both for the fully human causes behind democratic reversal. This accounting leads him to suggest that individual and collective heroes do not suffer *hybris*-driven reversal in the same way, but that the logic of democratic reversal is deeply bound up with the features that make democracies distinctive within the autocratic tradition: its superior power and its collective manner of producing political judgments.

The suggestion that Thucydides' explanation is both tragic and scientific goes against the grain of over a century of scholarly commentary, which has been polemically divided along these lines for over a century.<sup>3</sup> The belief that scientific and tragic modes of explanation are fundamentally incompatible, however, is neither conceptually necessary nor heuristically valuable in interpreting Thucydides' text. Rather, it has often hindered scholarly interpretation of his historical perspective and political thought by encouraging commentators on both sides to

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<sup>1</sup> For example, see: Cornford 1907; Stahl 2003 [1966]; Parry 1972; de Romilly 1977; Macleod 1983; Euben 1990: Ch. 6; Bedford and Workman 2001; Lebow 2003: Ch. 4; Balot 2015: 23-26.

<sup>2</sup> See especially Cochrane 1927. For modern partisans of this scientific reading of Thucydides, though not necessarily with a focus on this reading of post-Periclean reversal, see especially Ober 2006; 2010; Ober and Perry 2014. Also, Doyle 1990; Tritle 2006.

<sup>3</sup> This modern debate can be traced back to Cornford's 1907 work, *Thucydides Mythistoricus*, which challenged the consensus identification of Thucydides as a scientific historian by arguing that the explanatory theory guiding his narrative was essentially that of Aeschylus.

adopt a partial and insufficient lens through which to view Thucydides' explanatory project. As with his understanding of autocratic democracy, Thucydides' explanatory project negotiates between apparent opposites and offers a synthesis. Indeed, the two projects were intimately related. As will be seen in depth below, there were distinct political projects associated with both tragic and scientific modes of explanation. Put briefly, tragic explanation is at home in the world of the heroic king, while scientific explanation is a product of egalitarian community.

As with Thucydides' initial construction of Athens as an autocratic power in the *Archaeology*, the subtlety with which Thucydides moves between contemporary traditions in his explanation of Athenian defeat is not easily recognized out of context. Before undertaking a careful consideration of Thucydides' analysis of the post-Periclean decline in Athenian politics, it will therefore be necessary to turn away from his text and consider the relevant intellectual context at some length. In addition to establishing a baseline for understanding the moves Thucydides is making in his account of Athenian defeat, such a consideration will offer an important corrective to the stipulative and formalistic understandings of tragic and scientific modes of explanation that commentators, especially in political theory, often bring to their readings of Thucydides. These ahistorical understandings of tragic and scientific explanation enable further adherence to the prevailing assumption that tragic and scientific modes of explanation were (and still are) incompatible with one another. Furthermore, a consideration of the relevant context will help to demonstrate that there was more at stake in Thucydides' negotiation between tragic and scientific perspectives than explanatory innovation. There was also a profound political upshot to Thucydides' syncretic explanatory perspective that reinforces the larger project that this dissertation has tracked. Thucydides' analysis undermines the long-held belief that equality was the democratic antidote to tragic reversal, finding this instead in the autocratic leadership of Pericles.

### *Tragedy and Tragic Explanation*

Though often introduced without explicit definition, the sense of "tragedy" and "tragic" as applied to Thucydidean political thought is rarely self-evident. These are terms that bear various meanings, both in scholarship and in everyday discourse, many of which are complementary to one another, but some of which are not.<sup>4</sup> In the literature on Thucydides, "tragic" can indicate adherence to a particular explanatory perspective that foregrounds the causal relationship between greatness, *hybris*, transgression, and reversal; this causal relationship has variously been called the "tragic theory of the passions," or simply the "tragic pattern," and is heavily indebted to traditional Greek beliefs about supernatural punishment.<sup>5</sup> Alternatively, the

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<sup>4</sup> For an exploration of the various possible senses of "tragedy" in the context of literary criticism, see Eagleton 2003: Ch. 1.

<sup>5</sup> The "tragic theory of the passions" appears in Cornford 1907: esp. 129-243. De Romilly (1977: 5, 7, 46-58) uses the terminology of "a tragic pattern"; cf. de Romilly (1963 [1947]: 323-329), where this explanatory pattern is called the "Law of Hybris". For other notable uses of this sense of tragedy in the recent literature on Thucydides, see Lebow 2003: 116-18; Foster 2010: 4, 121. Cf. Connor (1984: 161-162), who prefers the term "mythic" to "tragic" in



language of tragedy can be used to suggest the distinct lack of an explanation: particular events are called tragic when great suffering appears undeserved and incomprehensible, and we refer to a “tragic mindset” or a “tragic vision of humanity” when describing an intellectual perspective that is skeptical about humans’ ability to access and understand the forces that determine their lives.<sup>6</sup> Though scholars often move freely between these two senses of tragedy when speaking about Thucydides, it should be clear that they are incompatible.<sup>7</sup> If Thucydides explains Athenian reversal according to the “tragic pattern,” he could not adhere to a “tragic vision of humanity,” which abides no such explanatory closure.

What follows will focus on the explanatory pattern linking *hybris*, transgression, and reversal in speaking about tragedy and tragic explanation. In doing so, it does not deny that there is something valuable to be learned from Thucydides about the limitations of abstract theory in political life, or that social scientists might particularly benefit from considering these limitations more seriously than they habitually do. The motivation to focus on tragic explanation is instead textual and historical. To insist that Thucydides comprehensively embraced a tragic pessimism requires his interpreter to overlook or explain away crucial parts of the text where he seriously engaged with *hybris*-driven reversal, as well as his use of exploratory tools characteristic of fifth-century Greek science. By focusing on tragic explanation rather than tragic pessimism in Thucydides’ text, it is possible to foreground Thucydides’ complex negotiation between these two modes of explanation when accounting for Athenian defeat in the Peloponnesian War, especially as it occurs in his analysis of the effect that Pericles’ death had on Athenian deliberation.

Though the terminology is conventional, there are certain hazards in calling the pattern of *hybris*-driven reversal “tragic.” It is customary to associate this pattern with a fixed narrative arc exemplified by Aeschylus’ *Persians*, Euripides’ *Bacchae*, or another work of Athenian tragedy. In doing so, however, one runs the risk of suggesting that the pattern was simply a formal literary construct specific to tragic drama. The historical record, however, indicates that it was a far more wide-ranging and dynamic tradition of thinking about the causes and consequences of *hybris* than a formalist treatment can account for. Though there is a literary bias to the sources that remain for us, it is possible to identify the pattern of *hybris*-driven reversal as a deeply ingrained and intuitive part of the ideological apparatus of archaic and classical Greeks. It was a central feature of how they made sense of the world that they lived in, not simply how they reconstructed mythological stories for the stage. Alongside Athenian tragedy, it can be found doing explanatory work in didactic poetry, historical narrative, political and judicial

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referring to this mode of explanation, and who generally restricts the term “tragedy” to describe those plays staged as tragedies in fifth-century Athens.

<sup>6</sup> For descriptions of particular events in Thucydides as tragic, see: Stahl 2003 [1966]: 6, 17, 108, 118, 135-136, 206; Parry 1970: 19; Parry 1972: 47-48; Parry 1981 [1957]: 27, 109; Rood 1998: 198; Balot 2001: 149; Zumbrennen 2008: 73; Foster 2010: 52 n. 20, 65 n. 55. For the attribution of a tragic intellectual perspective to Thucydides, see: Parry 1981 [1957]: 89, 175; Stahl 2003 [1966]: 152; Foster 2010: 64; Ponchon 2017: 13. Cf. Euben 1990: 199.

<sup>7</sup> In moving between incompatible senses without reflecting on the implications of doing so, the worst offender is Lebow 2003: esp. 20-25.

rhetoric, and political-theoretical analysis.<sup>8</sup>

One must also specify clearly what it means to identify *hybris*-driven reversal as a “pattern.” This tradition of explanation is constituted by a set of fairly stable elements, relationships, and characters, and any given instance of tragic explanation will utilize some of these. But any instance will also differ from others in which elements, relationships, and characters they use, and how they use them. Extending Wittgenstein’s concept, we might say that the tradition of tragic explanation is held together by a family resemblance between particular instances, not a formal identity among all instances. As with any dynamic intellectual tradition, this family resemblance allows for the production of difference and debate over and above a basic level of agreement and consistency. Each author used the pattern in his own way and for his own ends, drawing upon ideas that had a common-sense association for fifth-century Greeks in order to create dramatic depth and nuance of meaning for its audience through the use of allusion and the upsetting of expectations. Just as a tragedian might depart from a customary version of a myth in his own presentation of it, so too could an author upset a conventional element of the tragic pattern in order to focus the audience’s attention on what was unexpected and the effect it created.

The capacity for individual authors to innovate in a recognizable way depended on a recognized network of relationships that were deeply intuitive for archaic and classical Greeks. It is helpful to begin by sketching the basic pattern of associations. The most central and enduring relationship was the connection between a transgressive cognitive state (most commonly *hybris*), the accomplishment of injustice, and its punishment.<sup>9</sup> Such cognitive states, especially *hybris*, are frequently traced back to the conditions of excessive good fortune and unaccountability.<sup>10</sup> Autocrats, who combine both of these conditions, are the ideal candidates for *hybris*-driven reversal, and *hybris*-driven reversal is often considered to be the natural outcome of autocracy.

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<sup>8</sup> At the same time, it is important to underline that the pattern of *hybris*-driven reversal did not form the narrative blueprint for all Athenian tragic dramas. Not all tragic heroes were full of *hybris*, nor did all of their tales end unhappily, and when the pattern of *hybris*-driven reversal did appear in Athenian tragedy, it is often in order to subvert some of the pattern’s expectations, not simply to rehearse a well-known formula. For a general overview of the different plot-structures to be found in Athenian tragedy, see Burian 1997: 186-190.

<sup>9</sup> There is a debate among classicists concerning whether *hybris* can adequately be called a cognitive state, or whether it is instead a particular type of action, or whether it incorporates both (see MacDowell 1976; Dickie 1984; Fisher 1992; Cairns 1996). Despite the rigor of Fisher’s challenge to *hybris* as a cognitive state, I take issue with his willingness to impose retrospectively a definition of *hybris* grounded in the *graphê hybreos* and its juridical context to poetic uses of the term. For passages in support of *hybris* as a cognitive state within the pattern of tragic explanation, see especially: Homer, *Odyssey* 1.368, 4.321, 15.329, 17.487, 17.565; Hesiod, *Works and Days* ll. 213-224; Solon, 1.7-25, 3.5-16, 5. 9-10 (Campbell 1969); Aeschylus, *Persians* ll. 821-28; Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* ll. 763-71; Aeschylus, *Eumenides* l. 533; Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannos* ll. 873-82; Euripides, *Bacchae* ll. 516-18. Of the significant related cognitive states, most prevalent is *atê* (see especially Homer, *Iliad* 19.88; Homer, *Odyssey* 4.261; Solon 1.11-13 (Campbell 1969); Sophocles, *Ajax* ll. 121-24). Notable also is the more general state of “madness” (*mania/mainomai*) (see especially Euripides, *Bacchae* ll. 326-27, 358-59, 882-87, also Herodotus 8.77.1) also *lussa* (see especially Euripides, *Heracles* ll. 823ff.).

<sup>10</sup> On the link between *hybris* and excessive good fortune, see especially Solon 5.9-10 in Campbell (1967), 6.3-4 in the Loeb (Gerber, 1999); Theognis ll. 153-54; Pindar, *Olympian* 13 l. 10 Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* ll. 1044-45; Herodotus 1.32.1, 7.10.e, 8.77.1. For the addition of unaccountability, see: Herodotus 3.80.3-4; Aeschylus, *Persians* ll. 211-14.

Herodotus' Otanes, for instance, contends that even the "most-excellent man" (*ariston andrôn*) would become transgressive once placed in a position of autocratic rule.<sup>11</sup> *Hybris* and related cognitive states dispose individuals towards transgression as passion eclipses reason and the individuals believe themselves exempt from normal human limits and conventions.<sup>12</sup> The passions and a distorted self-conception work together to bring about an individual's reversal: misguided belief is frequently encouraged by hope, lust, and pleasure-inducing persuasion and in turn encourages moral and cognitive error (*hamartia*).<sup>13</sup> Cognitive states such as *hybris* also dispose individuals to disregard the advice of those who try to dissuade them from such errors, figures that are often called "tragic advisors" or "tragic warners."<sup>14</sup> Hybristic individuals prefer advisors who flatter and speak to please, and thus who encourage them further along their wayward course.<sup>15</sup> Authors of error and injustice bring about their own demise through sudden and unexpected reversals of fortune, usually in line with the predictions of the tragic advisor.<sup>16</sup>

These naturalistic elements are frequently complemented by a supernatural explanatory logic that takes one of two different forms. The first is a tit-for-tat logic, where supernatural causes overdetermine the transgressive individual's punishment. In this version, the initial psychological state of *hybris* originates at the naturalistic level, resulting from a combination of an individual's circumstances and character. Reacting to *hybris*-driven transgressions, the gods are strictly retributive agents who react to the wicked deeds of men.<sup>17</sup> The other form of supernatural logic is more thoroughly overdetermining. In this scenario, the gods cause all stages of the process, creating two simultaneous and overlapping paths to tragic reversal, one supernatural and one natural. Here, the gods are not merely reactive, but bring about the initial

<sup>11</sup>Herodotus 3.80.2-5, quote at 3.80.3. See also R.D. Dawe's (1982: 182-83) controversial edit of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannos* at l. 872.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example: Euripides, *Bacchai* ll. 635-36; Herodotus 7.35.1-3.

<sup>13</sup> See especially Herodotus 8.77.1, which brings together all of these elements in an oracle presaging the *hybris*-driven reversal of Xerxes. For hope (*elpis*), see also: Euripides, *Bacchai* l. 617. For lust (*erôs*), see also: Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* ll. 341-42. For persuasion (*peithô*), see also: Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* ll. 385-86.

<sup>14</sup> For statements about the dismissal of good counsel, see: Hesiod, *Works and Days* ll. 295-97; Aeschylus, *Persians* ll. 752-58; Euripides, *Suppliant Women* ll. 229-37. For vivid examples of tragic warners, consider Halitherses in Homer's *Odyssey* (2.155-176), Haemon in Sophocles' *Antigone* (ll. 683ff.), and Teiresias and Cadmus in Euripides' *Bacchai* (esp. ll. 309-313, 330-41, cf. the chorus' lyric at 387-401). In Herodotus, see Solon (1.32.1-33.1), Artabanus (7.10.1-11.1), and Demaratos (7.101.1-105.1).

<sup>15</sup> Mardonius is the exemplar of such advisors. See Herodotus 7.9.1-10.1; cf. Aeschylus, *Persians* ll. 753-58. For a more general discussion of the relationship between pleasurable speech, frank speech, and tyrannical counsel, see Kurke (2011: esp. Chs. 3, 11) and Landauer (2012: 189-94).

<sup>16</sup> The focus on *hamartia* is largely lacking in archaic literature, but it increases in prevalence in the fifth century. See especially Herodotus' Croesus, who initiates a self-destructive war with the Persians based on a misunderstanding of an oracle (1.53.2-56.1, 73.1), and Aeschylus' Xerxes, who brings about his ruin by invading Greece and initiating the Battle of Salamis based on faulty information (ll. 360-74). The best study on *hamartia* remains Bremer (1969), though it is conducted through the lens of Aristotelian poetical theory and is not a general word study.

<sup>17</sup> This pattern is most vividly demonstrated by the story of Capaneus. One of the seven Argive warriors attacking Thebes, he boasts that he will sack the city even if Zeus should oppose him. Zeus, in turn, struck Capaneus down by a thunderbolt while the hero was trying to scale the city's walls with a ladder (See Aeschylus, *Seven Against Thebes* ll. 423-431; Sophocles, *Antigone*, ll. 126-37; Apollodorus, *Library of Greek Mythology* 3.6.7). This is also the pattern described by Hesiod (*Works and Days* ll. 213-224) and exemplified by tragic heroes such as Creon, at least in Sophocles' *Antigone*, and Pentheus in Euripides' *Bacchai* (esp. ll. 515, 18).

state of *hybris*, the subsequent error and injustice, and the retributive punishment.<sup>18</sup> These more thoroughly overdetermined instances of tragic reversal are often embedded within a larger story of multi-generational family curses, thus accounting for the gods' initial antipathy.

*Hybris*-driven reversal utilizes a conception of cause (*aitia/aition*) that is similar to, but also importantly different from, the post-Newtonian conception that we habitually employ. Although certain Greek thinkers did eventually use *aitia/aition* to signify necessary, material causation, this was not the conventional meaning of the word within the context of tragic explanation.<sup>19</sup> Rather, the word that would come to mean "cause" initially referred to moral and judicial responsibility, not impersonal, mechanistic causation, and is often best translated as "blame," "guilt," or, at times, "motive."<sup>20</sup> Though this notion of causation may appear more primitive or simplistic than material causation, it is in some sense more complex than the scientific conception. The idea of efficient causation – one phenomenon directly leading to another – is contained within the tragic conception of causation, but it is overlaid with a sense of moral responsibility, thus limiting the sphere of its applicability to a particular type of human action. To act as a cause in the tragic sense, one must not only act as the cause in a scientific sense, but also act in such a way as to incur praise or blame.

### *Democracy and Tragic Explanation*

Tragic explanation precedes the inception of the Athenian democracy by centuries, however exactly we date this. Originating in the world of heroic autocracy, it frames Agamemnon's encounter with Chryses in the opening pages of the *Iliad*, for instance, and the story of the Ithacan suitors in the *Odyssey*. Its pre-democratic existence is also manifest in Hesiod's exhortation to the kings of *Works and Days*, where the logic connecting *hybris*, injustice, divine retribution, and reversal is assumed, as is the continued governance of kings.<sup>21</sup> A testament to its deep embeddedness in Greek culture, tragic explanation survived the transition from kingly to collective political rule, both in Athens and outside of it. Whereas it had once

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<sup>18</sup> Exemplars of this pattern are Xerxes in Aeschylus' *Persians* and Croesus and Xerxes in Herodotus' *Histories*. Oedipus' case in Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannos* exhibits the same pattern of over-determination, though in other ways it is importantly different from the examples of Croesus and Xerxes.

<sup>19</sup> In Homer, this word appears only in its adjective form to describe a person or god who is responsible for an action or course of events. The abstract noun first appears in the fifth century in Pindar (*Olympian* 1 l. 35), but in most cases it continues to refer exclusively to moral responsibility. We first see this word extended to natural causes in Herodotus (2.25.5-26.1, 7.125.1) and Thucydides (2.48.3, 3.89.5), but it is not until the Hippocratic corpus that it comes to resemble our modern, scientific notion of causation (esp. *Ancient Medicine*, 19.3). For a helpful account of this conceptual development during the fifth century, as well as a demonstration of the fluidity with which fifth-century authors moved between the noun, *aitia*, and the substantive neuter adjective, *aition*, see Vegetti 1999.

<sup>20</sup> In the context of epic, lyric, and tragedy, see for example: Homer, *Iliad* 1.153, 3.164, 19.86; *Odyssey* 11.559, 22.48; Aeschylus, *Persians* l. 896; *Choephoroe* ll. 69, 117, 273, 836; *Eumenides* ll. 99, 579; Sophocles, *Ajax* l. 28; *Antigone* ll. 1173, 1312, 1318; *Oedipus Tyrannos* ll. 109, 656, *Philoctetes* ll. 1404, 1426. This sense is especially common in the context of judicial discourse, as one might expect. It occurs over forty times in the surviving speeches of Antiphon (for example: 1.20; 2.1.2, 2.10, 2.11) and there are over one hundred instances in the speeches of Lysias (for example: 1.3, 7, 15, 36; 3.20, 36, 40, 47). See also: Democritus DK 55 B 83; Herodotus 1.1.0, 1.45.2, 1.87.2, 191.4.

<sup>21</sup> See *Works and Days* ll. 213-266.

served to warn kings against the temptations of their position, in the city-state it reinforced the central political virtues of moderation (*sôphrosunê*) and justice (*dikê/dikaïosunê*), as well as the superiority of egalitarian association to autocratic rule.<sup>22</sup> In democratic Athens, tragic explanation offered a means of asserting both that *hybris* and injustice were morally contemptible and that they were instrumentally self-defeating. It thus served as a pointed deterrent for those who aspired to something more for themselves than political equality. The individual who unjustly rose to a position of dominance over his fellow citizens could expect not only to be shamed in the eyes of gods and men; he could expect to destroy his city and himself.<sup>23</sup>

We find the clearest evidence of this in the didactic poetry attributed to Solon, which is imbued with allusions to tragic explanation.<sup>24</sup> In what remains of Solon's poetical corpus, the relationship between excess (*koros*), the desire for material gain, and *hybris*-driven reversal is repeatedly invoked, most directly in his pithy observation that, "Excess (*koros*) gives birth to *hybris* whenever great fortune accompanies people not of perfect mind."<sup>25</sup> Cautionary verses such as this foreground the need for moderation as a means of inhibiting the causes of self-destruction. Solonian didactic poetry does not limit itself to moral exhortation, however, or suggest that individual self-restraint and abstention from injustice are the only means of avoiding tragic reversal, as we find in Hesiod. It also suggests an institutional cure, marking a move beyond the exclusively monarchical world of the *Works and Days*:

*Eunomiê* renders everything orderly and perfect,  
and often places fetters around the unjust.  
It smooths what is rough, stops excess (*koron*), weakens *hybris*,  
withers the burgeoning flower of madness (*atês*),  
straightens (*euthuneî*) crooked verdicts (*dikas*), and arrogant deeds  
it tames, stops acts of sedition,  
stops the rancor of grievous strife, and because of it  
everything is perfect and sensible throughout mankind.<sup>26</sup>

The presence of and adherence to a well-ordered government (*Eunomiê*), it is insisted, can curb

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<sup>22</sup> There is a regrettable dearth of explicit and systematic characterizations of democratic virtue in the fifth century (though cf. Thucydides 2.37.3). Evidence from the fourth century is easier to come by, and some of this evidence suggests a pedigree that extends back into the fifth century. See, for instance, Protagoras' Great Speech and argument for the widespread distribution of political excellence in Plato's *Protagoras* (322c1-d6, 323b1-c1), which may or may not be based on arguments Protagoras actually made in the fifth century. See also Plato's *Phaedo* (82a11-b2) and *Symposium* (209a6-7).

<sup>23</sup> One must be careful not to reduce the transition from the ideology of heroic kingship to that of collective rule as one of moving from self-interested aggrandizement to the moral concern for the community as a whole (for an example of this mistake, see Balot 2001: Ch. 3). Democratic ideology also appealed to the self-interest of citizens, but it privileged the long-term stability of moderated self-aggrandizement over the instability of unrestrained acquisitiveness.

<sup>24</sup> In Campbell (1967), see especially 1.7-25, 3.5-16, 5.9-10. These appear in the Loeb (Gerber, 1999) as 13, 4, and 6, respectively. If we possess the actual verses of Solon, they would have been composed in the opening decades of the sixth century BCE. However, for a convincing argument to the effect that Solonian verse continued to develop during its oral transmission in the sixth and fifth centuries, see Lardinois 2006.

<sup>25</sup> 5.9-10 in Campbell (1967), 6.3-4 in the Loeb (Gerber, 1999).

<sup>26</sup> 3.32-39 in Campbell (1967), 4.32-39 in the Loeb (Gerber, 1999).

the cognitive causes of injustice and tragic reversal, providing for a more stable and beneficial political existence. While the exact meaning of *Eunomiê* is vague, it is clearly opposed to the unaccountable rule of a single individual and suggestive of egalitarian community.<sup>27</sup>

In the fifth century, the pattern of *hybris*-driven reversal appears with even greater regularity in the historical record to problematize autocratic excess and unaccountability, and thereby to reinforce the superiority of Athenian democratic institutions. Herodotus, for instance, provides a vivid example early in his *Histories* when recounting Solon's confrontation with Croesus, the king of Lydia, who desires to have himself pronounced the most fortunate man on Earth.<sup>28</sup> Herodotus' Solon bluntly refuses the dynast's wish, preferring the stable life of an Athenian citizen to that of the king. Solon goes on to play the role of the tragic advisor: he warns Croesus of the possibility of his own imminent reversal, pointing to the precarious position of men who achieve great prosperity.<sup>29</sup> Croesus myopically rejects Solon's counsel. In due course, he finds himself without an heir, without a kingdom, and very nearly without his life. Only as Croesus is about to be burnt on a pyre by a triumphant Cyrus does he realize the wisdom of Solon's reluctance to pronounce him fortunate.<sup>30</sup>

Herodotus builds on this early episode by making the juxtaposition between the arrogance, transgression, and reversal of autocrats and the successes of the egalitarian Greeks a central theme in the *Histories*. This theme finds its narrative climax in Xerxes' catastrophic invasion of Greece.<sup>31</sup> But long before Xerxes crosses the Bosphorus the reader is offered an abstract account of the tragic tendencies of autocratic government and the potential for egalitarian political association to act as a corrective. In the Persian Constitutional Debate of Book III, Otanes bases his support for a democratic regime in its ability to correct for the causes of autocratic *hybris*, which he ties to the institutional structure of autocratic rule:

How might one-man-rule be a sound thing when it allows for [the autocrat] to do whatever he wants without accountability? Autocracy would cause even the most virtuous of men to depart from normal thoughts when placed in this position. For *hybris* springs up in him from the good things at hand, while envy is implanted in humans from the very beginning. Having these two, he has every wickedness. For he does many reckless things because of *hybris* when in a state of excess (*kekorêmenos*) and many

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<sup>27</sup> In this way, it is much like *isonomia*, though by the late-fifth century at least it likely suggested a much more limited group of equals than *isonomia*.

<sup>28</sup> *Histories* 1.29.1ff. On the relationship between Herodotus and Athenian democratic ideology, see Forsdyke 2001.

<sup>29</sup> *Histories* 1.32.1-9.

<sup>30</sup> *Histories* 1.86.1-5.

<sup>31</sup> It is interesting to note, however, the ways in which Herodotus' narrative of Xerxes' invasions both fits and upsets the pattern of tragic explanation. In the debate scene prior to the invasion, for instance, we see a perfectly traditional episode: Xerxes states his intention to invade, Mardonius encourages him out of a desire to gain from the invasion, and Artabanus acts as the straight-talking tragic warner who is angrily dismissed (7.8-11). However, on either side of this episode we see unexpected departures from the pattern of *hybris*-driven reversal. Initially, Xerxes does not want to invade the Greeks, and he is only convinced to do so by the bidding of Mardonius and various Greek exiles (7.5-6). Even more strikingly, Xerxes reconsiders his rejection of Artabanus' advice and changes his mind during the night after the debate. Determined now not to invade Greece, he is only convinced to do so by the repeated threats of a spirit that appears to him (and Artabanus) in the night (7.12-18).

others because of jealousy.<sup>32</sup>

Otanes suggests that the Persians embrace popular rule as a means of avoiding the pitfalls of autocratic rule. He identifies such a regime with *isonomiê*, a more explicitly egalitarian institutional solution than Solon's *Eunomiê*.<sup>33</sup> A regime of this type, Otanes insists, will have officials who are many and accountable, and all policy will be made in common. Following along Solonian lines, Otanes argues that egalitarian political association will solve the structural problems leading to autocratic *hybris*, transgression, and instability. Egalitarian government is therefore understood and justified by reference to its ability to solve the powerful problems that tragic reversal pose for autocratic regimes: democracy, perhaps uniquely, might allow a city to proceed safely and stably through time, escaping *hybris*-driven reversal.

A similar relationship between autocracy, tragic reversal, and egalitarian rule is also prevalent in the surviving works of Athenian tragedy. At times, references to this relationship are made in passing, as when Medea's nurse remarks:

Fearsome is the resolve of tyrants,  
ruled in few matters, but master over many,  
it is very hard for them to control their anger.  
To become accustomed to living on equal terms  
is better. May it be for me, in any case, without greatness or excess  
to grow old securely. ...  
Moderation in action is by far  
the best thing for humans. That which is excessive  
holds sway with no proper measure for mortals,  
and gives greater ruin in return  
whenever a god becomes angry at a house.<sup>34</sup>

In *Medea*, this reflection serves to create an initial distance between Medea and the crowd, a distance that will only grow as the play proceeds. Elsewhere in Athenian tragedy, the relationship between royal transgression and democratic correctives is more central to the play's narrative. Aeschylus' *Persians*, for instance, depicts Xerxes as the exemplar of a *hybris*-driven autocrat who transgresses, commits a great error (*hamartia*), and is duly punished by the gods with reversal. At a naturalistic level, this reversal comes at the hands of the Athenian navy; the egalitarian antithesis of the tragic autocrat.<sup>35</sup> Aeschylus' *Oresteia* goes one step further, developing this relationship over the course of a trilogy. Though its politics and narrative structure are complex and controversial, the *Oresteia* tells of an intergenerational cycle of autocratic transgression and punishment that spirals desperately out of control. This spiral meets its final, stabilizing end only once judgment is handed over to the Athenian law courts. Though

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<sup>32</sup> 3.80.3-4.

<sup>33</sup> 3.80.6. For a bibliography and summary of the debate over whether *isonomia* means "equality before the law" (thus coming from *iso-nomos*) or something like "equal distribution" (from *iso-nemein*), see Asheri, Lloyd, and Corcella, 2007: 474.

<sup>34</sup> ll. 119-30. For grammatical justification of this translation, see Mastronarde (2002:185-88).

<sup>35</sup> See pp. 22-24 of this dissertation.

initially the symbol of primordial vengeance, the vindictive Furies are eventually transformed by Athena into protectors of civic health.

The relationship between fifth-century Athenians and tyranny was in many ways more complicated than this summary description suggests. Athenians were fascinated by autocratic brilliance even as they were terrified of tyrannical ambitions.<sup>36</sup> Athenian audiences at the City Dionysia reveled in both the incredible heights and the catastrophic lows of legendary Greek royal families. Many fantasized about what it would be like to wield such unlimited power themselves, even if it were to end badly. A lurid example of this can be found in Solonian poetry, where an Athenian rebukes the poet for his refusal of tyrannical control:

For I'd have been willing—if I had gained power, taken unlimited wealth,  
and ruled over Athens as a tyrant for only one day—  
then to be flayed as a wine-skin and my family to be utterly destroyed.<sup>37</sup>

But the tension between tyrannical ambition, the possibility of tragic reversal, and democratic ideology was not only the stuff of fantasy for fifth-century Athenians. As we have already seen by way of Thucydides' Pericles, it was also a pressing issue for Athenian political policy. The tribute-paying empire placed the city of Athens in a position of autocratic rule directly comparable to their former enemy and anti-type, the Persian King; an association we've seen Thucydides' Athenians themselves embrace.<sup>38</sup> We might therefore not be surprised that fifth-century Athens took such an active interest in the fates of autocrats, heroic or otherwise, despite living in a democratic *polis*.

Though there may have been some pride felt by the Athenians in their tyrannical rule over others, this was accompanied by a significant unease about their future. The sense that the Athenians were a collective autocrat created the expectation, at least among some, that the Athenians were headed down the self-destructive path of *hybris*, *hamartia*, and reversal. In both Aeschylus' *Persians* and Herodotus' *Histories*, the point of recounting Xerxes' tragic fate was as much about warning the Athenians where they might be headed as it was to celebrate the Greeks for their victory.<sup>39</sup> Both Aeschylus and Herodotus appear to have taken it upon themselves to act as tragic warners for the Athenians. As we might expect, however, both were ignored by the ascendant imperial power.

### *Scientific Explanation, Democracy, and the Peloponnesian War*

The Athenians did not ignore these voices out of simple obstinacy. The intellectual

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<sup>36</sup> Compare Connor 1977; Raaflaub 2003: esp. 77-81; and Hoekstra 2016. For an exploration of this tension specific to Athenian tragedy, see: Vernant 1990; Griffith 1995.

<sup>37</sup> 23. 5-7 in Campbell (1967), 33.5-7 in Loeb (Gerber, 1999).

<sup>38</sup> See pp. 72-73 of this dissertation.

<sup>39</sup> Scholars of Greek tragedy have long debated whether *Persians* should be read as a celebratory ode to Athenian victory or as a cautionary tale for the emerging Athenian empire. Rosenbloom (2006: 139-46) offers a good summary of this debate and the sound conclusion that it must be, to some extent, both. For Herodotus as Athenian warner, see especially Raaflaub (1987) and Moles (1996). See Kurke (2011) for an investigation of the indirect, Aesopic manner in which Herodotus offers advice.



revolutions of the latter half of the fifth century fostered a new, “scientific” manner of explaining the world that coexisted with and contested the traditional pattern of tragic explanation.<sup>40</sup> “Science,” though the conventional label among scholars for referring to the fifth-century tradition of natural inquiry (*historia peri phuseos*), is as multifaceted and problematic a term as tragedy, and the beliefs associated with fifth-century science were diverse. A few aspects of the emergent tradition of natural inquiry and the changing beliefs about political explanation that it helped to foster can be usefully isolated, however. Most important was an increased skepticism concerning the existence and efficacy of supernatural causes and the traditional moral strictures that supernatural authorities were thought to uphold.<sup>41</sup> Rather than look to the divinely ordained moral order, scientific thinkers began to identify causal explanation exclusively with aspects of the world that were directly perceptible to human beings.<sup>42</sup> Within this causal field, however, a wider variety of phenomena came into play, as the notion of cause (*aitia/aition*) attained some independence from the idea of moral and judicial responsibility.<sup>43</sup> Impersonal causes such as natural phenomena and institutional arrangements increasingly became the stuff of social and political analysis.<sup>44</sup> Cognitive states were not disregarded as a result, but the explicit normative valence that accompanied the consideration of these states fell away. The most notorious such theory accepted that humans were simply interest-seeking creatures by nature, and thus there was nothing blameworthy in self-aggrandizement, even when doing so meant breaking the conventions of justice established in one’s city.<sup>45</sup> The instrumental and the moral were thus decoupled in the consideration of cognitive causes, and the most radical thinkers destigmatized the limitless pursuit of self-interest even to the point of valorizing the tyrant’s life as the ideal.<sup>46</sup>

This new, scientific manner of political explanation gave commentators resources for prognosticating a very different future for the Athenians from what followed according to the pattern of *hybris*-driven reversal. One thinker to elaborate such a future was the Old Oligarch, who bluntly criticized the moral failings of the Athenian democracy while offering a nuanced

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<sup>40</sup> Of the many excellent works on the emergence of Greek science in the fifth century, see especially Lloyd 1989.

<sup>41</sup> On the inefficacy of supernatural punishment, see especially Euripides’ *Bellerophon* (fr. 286) and the *Sisyphus* fragment attributed to Critias, though possibly of Euripidean origin as well (DK 88[81] B25). Compare the apparent agnosticism of Protagoras: “Concerning the gods I do not have knowledge, neither that they are or that they are not, nor whatsoever they are like in form. For many are the obstructions to knowing—both the uncertainty [of the matter] and the brevity of human life” (DK 80[74] B4). See Kerferd’s (1981: 163-72) careful discussion of the relationship between skepticism, agnosticism, and atheism in the period. Intimately related to skepticism about divine retribution for injustice was the naturalization and politicization of justice’s origins (cf. Hesiod *Theogony* ll. 901-2). On this point, see Antiphon (DK 87[80] 44a) and the arguments that Plato attributes to Thrasymachus (*Republic* 338c2ff.; cf. Glaucon’s recapitulation at 358b1ff.) and Callicles (*Gorgias* 483b4-484b1), in addition to the *Sisyphus* fragment.

<sup>42</sup> This is a position most famously suggested by Protagoras’ man-measure doctrine: “Man is the measure of all things--of the things that are, that they are; of the things that are not, that they are not” (DK 80[74] B1);

<sup>43</sup> See note 19 above. Consider also Plato’s Socrates (*Phaedo* 96a6-10) when he describes his early fascination with the inquiry concerning nature (*peri phuseos historian*).

<sup>44</sup> For an analysis of the effects of both natural phenomena and institutional structures on the character of peoples, see the Hippocratic treatise *Airs, Waters, Places*, 23.2-41.

<sup>45</sup> See especially Antiphon DK 87[80] 44a; Lysias *Defence Against a Charge of Subverting the Democracy* (XXV) 7-12; Plato’s Callicles (*Gorgias* 483b4-484b1),

<sup>46</sup> For example, see Plato’s Thrasymachus (*Republic* 344a1-c9).

analysis of its capacity to perpetuate popular rule.<sup>47</sup> Speaking to an imagined audience of elitist critics who assume that the moral failure of the Athenian political system will bring about its demise, the Old Oligarch suggests that those facets of democratic rule that look to be conducted in error (*hamartanein*) actually ensure their continued governance of the city and the empire.<sup>48</sup> Among these are the single-minded pursuit of popular interest and the elevation of those who behave in a shameful and undisciplined way over those who possess the least licentiousness and injustice.<sup>49</sup> The Athenian democrats, in his analysis, discount traditional political virtue and “good government” (*eunomia*) in order that the people will augment their power base and will not become slaves of the elite.<sup>50</sup> Such measures run directly counter to the advice of Solonian poetry, and the Old Oligarch sees these democratic practices as perverse. But he underlines that they will not bring about the ruin of Athens as a result. Instead, he suggests, they are the very measures that will ensure the stability of the imperial democracy for the indefinite future.

We cannot assume that most Athenians thought along the lines of the Old Oligarch in the final decades of the fifth century, nor that they shared in his scientific perspective on the practical prospects of a comprehensive pursuit of self-interest. As we see parodied in Aristophanes’ *Clouds*, for instance, this was a period of intense ideological conflict in Athens between new and old ways of thinking. The debate was not, however, purely intellectual: the fate of tragic and scientific political analysis in Athens was intimately bound up with the city’s successes and failures in the Peloponnesian War. With Cleon’s triumph in Pylos and the Peace of Nicias, confidence in the new mode of political explanation likely surged, for the democratic city appeared to survive its conflict with the Spartans, the standard-bearers of political virtue. With the disastrous expedition to Sicily, there is evidence that the Athenians took a conservative turn against the autocracy of the *dēmos*.<sup>51</sup> But Athenian perseverance after Sicily amid ever increasing internal turmoil challenged any easy identification of the *polis tyrannos* with the tragic autocrat and his expected fate. Like most modern readers of Thucydides’ text, fifth-century Greeks would have struggled to know how to explain both the successes and the failures of the Athenian democracy.

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<sup>47</sup> The compositional date of this text has long been a matter of controversy, though there is a general scholarly consensus that it was written in the final four decades of the fifth century (an important exception being Hornblower 2000). For a helpful overview of the scholarly discussion, as well as an argument for composition in the first seven years of the Peloponnesian War (431-424 BCE), see Marr and Rhodes 2008: 3-6, 31-32.

<sup>48</sup> 1.1, 8.

<sup>49</sup> 1.5.

<sup>50</sup> 1.8-9.

<sup>51</sup> The clearest evidence of this was the creation of the *probouloi* in the autumn of 413 to act as an advisory board to the council and assembly. Members of the *probouloi* had to be over the age of 40, and the two members we know of were much older still (Hagnon was at least in his 60s and the poet Sophocles was in his 80s). Further evidence of this conservative spirit comes from fragments of Eupolis’ comedy *Demes* (probably 412), where heroes of the Athenian past such as Solon, Miltiades, Aristides, and Pericles were resurrected to save the city in crisis. See Munn 2000: 134-36.

## *Scientific and Tragic Explanation in Thucydides*

The opening pages of Thucydides' text quickly establish him as a practitioner of the new, scientific mode of investigation and explanation. Using a verb associated with the writing of technical treatises, *xungraphô*, to describe his authorial practice in the first sentence, Thucydides signals this affiliation to his reader and thereby distances himself from both poetic song and Herodotean *historiê*.<sup>52</sup> This affiliation with scientific discourse becomes more explicit in the Archaeology, where Thucydides extends scientific analysis to the reconstruction of Greek political development to extraordinary effect. The Archaeology employs the indicative language of scientific analysis, its rationalistic and inductive mode of explanation, its naturalistic and material causal focus, and its amoral model of self-interest. Thucydides' utilization of this new perspective is crucial for his ability to contest many aspects of the traditional account of the Greek past and to offer his radically new vision of the Greek past.

Thucydides' departure from Homeric epic and Herodotean *historiê* becomes increasingly explicit in the methodological statements that closely follow the Archaeology. Thucydides criticizes prior authors of great wars for prioritizing embellishment and entertainment over accuracy, thereby distorting their descriptions of events.<sup>53</sup> In what appears to be a decisive break with the Greek literary tradition, Thucydides states that he will be the first to commit himself to writing accurately about great war. In so doing, he suggests, he will abstain from telling fabulous and legendary stories (*to muthôdes*) and thereby be less pleasing to read.<sup>54</sup> But he hopes that his text will redeem itself by being more useful to its readers. For many, this comment is emblematic of Thucydides' positioning of himself as the first "scientific historian" of the western tradition, though it is a claim that has been fiercely contested.<sup>55</sup>

Though the Archaeology appears to set a scientific trajectory for Thucydides' work, this creates an interpretive puzzle for the reader attempting to make sense of Thucydides' text as a whole. As Francis Cornford first demonstrated, the narrative leading the Athenians from unexpected success in Pylos to catastrophic disaster in Sicily in Books IV-VII closely follows the explanatory pattern of *hybris*-driven reversal: riding good fortune in Pylos to a position of superiority, the Athenians become hybriistic and transgressive, especially in Melos, then undertake an ill-advised and wanton invasion of Sicily, which results in utter disaster and eventual defeat.<sup>56</sup> Despite the opening commitment to scientific revisionism, it thus appears that Thucydides did not reject traditional, tragic explanation in the manner we would expect from a fifth-century scientific thinker.

Commentators have suggested a number of solutions to the puzzle posed by Thucydides' inclusion of both scientific and tragic explanation in his narrative, though few hold up to great scrutiny. In first noting the problem, Cornford argued that Thucydides intended to write a

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<sup>52</sup> On *xungraphô*, see: Hornblower 1991: 5; Kurke 2000: 149-50.

<sup>53</sup> 1.21.1.

<sup>54</sup> 1.22.4.

<sup>55</sup> See especially the discussion in Stahl (2003: Ch. 2).

<sup>56</sup> Cornford 1907: 82-109, 153-220.

scientific history of the war, but this intention was crippled by the inadequacy of the intellectual tools that he had available. As a fifth-century Athenian, Cornford argued, Thucydides did not have access to a truly scientific conception of causation. He was instead forced to employ the traditional, moralized, and exclusively psychological notion of cause in his work. Thucydides therefore unconsciously molded the facts that he documented into a tragic narrative pattern resembling Aeschylean drama, undermining his scientific endeavor by inadvertently framing Athenian defeat according to the supernaturally-grounded pattern of *hybris*-driven reversal.

Cornford's analysis is often fascinating, learned, and provocative, and his recognition of tragic explanation at work in Thucydides' text counts among the most significant contributions to the modern study of Thucydidean political thought. Nevertheless, the thesis that Thucydides molded his narrative into the pattern of *hybris*-driven reversal because he lacked a naturalistic, amoral conception of causation is unsupportable. Not only does fifth-century Greek scientific thought contain such a conception, as we've seen, Thucydides employs it repeatedly in his text.<sup>57</sup> In the *Archaeology*, for instance, Thucydides explains that relatively few Greeks made the expedition to Troy because of a scarcity of money (*achrêmátia*), using the impersonal, amoral sense of cause (*aition*) that Cornford denies him.<sup>58</sup> Elsewhere, Thucydides suggests that the cause (*aition*) of a tsunami striking the Malian Gulf in 426 BCE was an earthquake, offering the first naturalistic explanation of this phenomenon in antiquity.<sup>59</sup>

Cornford's assertion that Thucydides applied the explanatory pattern of *hybris*-driven reversal to his narrative unconsciously is also at odds with the text. The pattern appears explicitly in a number of Thucydides' speeches, and it is clear that he believed his readers would be quick to identify it at work in the progress of the war.<sup>60</sup> When the Spartans approach the Athenians in an attempt to make peace after their debacle at Pylos, for instance, their envoys begin by insisting that the pattern of success-driven *hybris* did not explain the reversal they had undergone. "We suffered this," they say, "neither due to a lack of power nor due to becoming hybriatic (*hubrisantes*) when our power increased."<sup>61</sup> The Spartans' denial of *hybris*-driven reversal as an explanation for their defeat demonstrates the extent to which Thucydides perceived it to be a default explanation for the sudden fall of great powers. What was true of the Spartans in Pylos would have been true *a fortiori* for the Athenians in Sicily, as the Athenians' experience (at least in Thucydides' presentation of it) more closely and elaborately resembled the pattern of arrogant overreaching. If Thucydides' conscious intentions were to disavow entirely the pattern of *hybris*-driven reversal in his account of the Athenian Sicilian expedition, we would at the very least expect some explicit dismissal of its explanatory purchase by the Athenians or Thucydides himself comparable to that made by the Spartans. We get none.

There is also positive evidence in the text indicating Thucydides' awareness of his tragic

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<sup>57</sup> This was a point that Cornford's contemporaries were quick to point out. For the most significant rebuttal, see Cochrane 1929.

<sup>58</sup> 1.11.1.

<sup>59</sup> 3.89.5. For Thucydides' seminal contribution to the scientific discussion of tsunamis, see Smid 1970.

<sup>60</sup> In addition to the Spartan example to follow, see especially the speeches of Cleon (3.39.4) and Diodotus (3.45.4); consider also passages from the Melian Dialogue (5.90.1, 5.104-5.105).

<sup>61</sup> 4.18.2.

framing of the Sicilian Expedition. In concluding this narrative episode, Thucydides writes:

This was the greatest event of any to occur in the present war, and indeed (it seems to me, at least) of any Greek event we've heard of, being both most brilliant for the conquerors and most unfortunate for the defeated; for being utterly overcome in everything and having suffered little in nothing, both army and navy were truly and completely annihilated (as the saying goes) and everything was destroyed; few of many made the journey back home.<sup>62</sup>

While easy to overlook in translation, Thucydides' Greek clearly frames Athenian defeat in tragic terms. In the phrase "and most unfortunate for the defeated" (*kai tois diaphthareisi dustuchestaton*), for instance, Thucydides "implicitly likens tragic events to tragic myth in drama" by adopting a "a perfect, sombre iambic trimeter," according to Kenneth Dover.<sup>63</sup> While it is possible that Thucydides could have adopted this meter unconsciously, as it is the closest meter to everyday speech, the same cannot be said for his use of *panôlethria* to describe Athenian defeat, here translated as "completely annihilated."<sup>64</sup> *Panôlethros*, the related adjective, was a favorite Aeschylean word for divinely-sponsored, retributive destruction.<sup>65</sup> In the dative noun form that appears in Thucydides, *panôlethriai* directly recalled Herodotus' tragic explanation of Trojan defeat, the only other instance of this noun in Greek literature.<sup>66</sup> By parenthetically adding "as the saying goes," *to legomenon*, Thucydides explicitly marks the allusion.

Dismissing these aspects of Cornford's thesis, we might instead suggest that Thucydides' movement from scientific to tragic explanation in the course of his text evinces a change in the author's intellectual orientation over the course of the war. When the war began, Thucydides was a young man who had been trained in the cutting-edge intellectual currents of his day, and he perhaps shared the optimism of those Athenians who believed that there was a sound scientific argument to be made for imperial democratic stability and success in the Peloponnesian War. Twenty-seven years of brutal warfare and eventual Athenian defeat may well have disillusioned the once-optimistic scientist, encouraging him to resort to a more traditional understanding of political success and stability. He would hardly have been the only Athenian to do so after the catastrophic defeat in Sicily.

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<sup>62</sup> 7.87.5-6.

<sup>63</sup> Dover (1997: 169).

<sup>64</sup> Concerning the possible inadvertence of Thucydides' use of iambic trimeter, see Hornblower 2008: 744.

<sup>65</sup> In *Agamemnon* (l. 535), the word is invoked to describe Troy's destruction as a matter of just retribution for Paris' transgression. In *Persians* (l. 563), the word is used to describe the defeat of Xerxes' navy at Salamis, which is also (though less explicitly in the lines surrounding) framed as a moment of just retribution for transgression. In *Eumenides* (l. 552), the word appears in a more analytic comparison between the fates of the just and the unjust man--the just man does not suffer destruction of this type, while the transgressive man does. See also *Seven Against Thebes* l. 71; Sophocles *Electra* l. 1009. This was a distinctly tragic term in classical Greek, appearing only outside of Athenian tragedy in Aristophanes and Herodotus.

<sup>66</sup> "Some divine spirit prepared it," Herodotus opines, "so that they, by being completely annihilated (*panôlethriêi apolomenoi*), should make it manifest to human beings that retribution from the gods for great injustices is great as well" (1.120.5). For a short but intriguing consideration of the parallel between the use of *panôlethria* in Thucydides and Herodotus, see Kopff and Rawlings (1978).

Speculative as it is, such a story of Thucydides' intellectual development over the final three decades of the fifth century is intuitively plausible. Indeed, it is much harder to imagine that Thucydides experienced twenty-seven years of war without undergoing some disillusionment. However, if the suggestion is that Thucydides' wrote about the war as it happened, thus preserving in his war narrative his changing interpretive outlook as both evolved over the course of the war, one runs into immediate problems. It is impossible to determine exactly when different parts of the history were written, but references to Athenian defeat make clear that Thucydides either wrote or significantly edited the first books of the text after the war had concluded in 404 BCE. The *Archaeology* contains numerous such references, meaning that its scientifically justified account of greatness cannot *merely* be the product of Thucydides' naïve optimism at the beginning of the war.<sup>67</sup> Even if the *Archaeology* was substantially written in the early period of the war, the decision to leave its scientifically-driven analysis intact was one made after the war's conclusion.

There is, however, a more sophisticated version of this story that does not rely on an unsupportable compositional theory. One might argue that Thucydides retrospectively wrote or edited his text so as to replicate for the readers the intellectual development he experienced over the course of the war, thus encouraging them to undergo a similar transformation. Thucydides may have believed that this approach was more likely to change the beliefs of his readers than an abstract disquisition on the failures of a scientific perspective to account for the fate of Athens.<sup>68</sup> Such an approach to Thucydides' rhetorical strategy has recently found favor among astute students of Thucydides' political thought, and has been most persuasively and subtly developed by Connor.<sup>69</sup>

Connor's Thucydides, however, is not ultimately a tragic reactionary against scientific rationalism. As with the use of scientific explanation, Connor suggests that there are tensions, ambiguities, and paradoxes internal to Thucydides' use of tragic explanation as well. Perhaps the most obvious of these problems is the final book of Thucydides' text, Book VIII. Despite expectations, Thucydides' *Peloponnesian War* does not end with the tragic defeat of Athens in Sicily, as the tragic pattern of *hybris*-driven reversal might suggest that it should.<sup>70</sup> Rather, immediately following the dramatic conclusion of the Sicilian expedition discussed above, Thucydides describes how the shock of this defeat and the fear that it produced reinvigorated the Athenian war effort.<sup>71</sup> The Athenians refuse to give in and continue to endure for another nine years—a full third of the war's total length. Sicily thus becomes a notable turning point in the

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<sup>67</sup> See, for instance, 1.13.3, 1.18.1.

<sup>68</sup> Lebow (2003: 109-12) draws a direct connection between this rhetorical strategy and the techniques of sophistic rhetoric.

<sup>69</sup> Connor 1977, 1984. Cf. Lebow (2003) and Ober (2001), which claim inspiration from Connor, but also depart from his analysis in important respects to draw their own conclusions about Thucydides' explanatory perspective.

<sup>70</sup> The "might" should be stressed here, as it was not always the case that autocrats experiencing *hybris*-driven reversal suffered a loss of all power in doing so. Xerxes remains King of Persia after his defeat in Greece, and it is a recurring anxiety in Aeschylus' *Persians* that his autocratic status will foreclose his being held accountable for the disaster (ll. 211-14).

<sup>71</sup> 8.1.3-4.

war, and its greatest single episode, but it is not the efficient cause of Athens' final defeat.

Even before we get to the aftermath of the Sicilian expedition, however, Thucydides' account of Nicias in Books VI and VII subtly departs from certain expectations created by the tragic framework. In the debate that precedes the expedition, Nicias plays the recognizable role of the tragic counselor who fails to dissuade the overly-ambitious tyrant (the Athenian people) from an erroneous endeavor. As the debate proceeds, however, Nicias abandons the frank style of counsel with which he begins, and which is characteristic of the warner, in a desperate attempt to sway Athenian opinion, adopting a subtler rhetorical maneuver that ultimately contributes to the magnitude of Athenian error.<sup>72</sup> At the same time, Nicias is not able to walk away from the misguided endeavor of the *dêmos turannos* after it rejects his advice, as Herodotus' Solon had been able to do in Croesus' Lydia. As a democratic politician, Nicias is part of the tyrannical *dêmos* even as he opposes it, and he is chosen to lead the expedition he counseled against despite its incongruence with his just and moderate character.

The tension between Nicias' opposition to and participation in Athenian error comes to a head as the expedition unravels on the plains outside of Syracuse. With disaster imminent, Nicias continues to believe that his own piety and justice will save the army from complete annihilation, employing a traditional belief in the power of political virtue to ward off tragic reversal.<sup>73</sup> Nicias' hope proves unfounded, however, as he is subsequently captured and put to death in an undignified manner. Thucydides underlines the inconsistency of Nicias' life and his death, stating that he "least deserved to meet such misfortune (*dustuchias*) of any Greek in my day on account of his having devoted his life to conventional virtue (*es aretên nenomismênên*)."<sup>74</sup> Thus we find that Nicias' traditional *aretê* is insufficient to protect the Athenians from reversal, either as a counselor in the assembly or a general in the field.

Connor suggests that these tensions impel the reader to recognize that the tragic explanatory perspective is reductive and simplistic, and to move beyond it, just as she has moved beyond the scientific perspective of the text's first books. The point of Thucydides' text, Connor argues, is "to lead his reader beyond clichés and conventionalities to a deeper understanding of the war," not to champion any preexisting ideology or explanatory frame.<sup>75</sup> This deeper understanding resists generalization or paraphrase and consists in a recognition of "the

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<sup>72</sup>Connor (1984: 162-64, 166-67) astutely notes this departure from the pattern of the tragic counselor.

<sup>73</sup> 7.77.2-4. At the same time, Nicias suggests that the Athenians will not be punished further by the gods for their transgressive invasion of Sicily on account of the amount of suffering that they have already endured. Connor (1984: 202) suggests that this is an oblique reference to the Persian invasion of Greece, which resulted in Xerxes' defeat but not the total annihilation of his army.

<sup>74</sup>This is a notoriously difficult passage to translate on account of the ambiguity surrounding the string of feminine accusatives with which the sentence ends. Contrary to Dover (1965: 70-71), Rood (1998: 184 n. 9), and Hornblower (2008: 741-2), but following the scholiast Aelius Aristides, I take *nenomismênên* with *aretên* rather than *epitêdeusin*. Grammatically, the participle may be taken with either, and it's possible that its ambiguity was calculated on Thucydides' part. However, I am sympathetic to Connor's (1984: 205) concern that it is unclear what *nenomismênên* adds to *epitêdeusin* in terms of sense. It appears far clearer what it adds to the sentence—and Thucydides seems to be underlining a much more interesting point—if we take *nenomismênên* with *aretên*: it is Nicias' complete adherence to conventional virtue (i.e. that code of behavior which was supposed to protect one from the type of tragic reversal that the Athenians were presently suffering) that makes Nicias' misfortune so undeserved.

<sup>75</sup>Connor 1984: 230.

complexity and irreducibility of events.”<sup>76</sup> For Connor’s Thucydides, historical reality continually subverts expectations and challenges “conventional antitheses and categories.”<sup>77</sup> Neither a scientific nor a tragic explanatory perspective sufficed to make the historical process intelligible in anything but a limited and incomplete way. Rather than a partisan tract, Connor concludes, Thucydides’ text should be read as a piece of art, as literature, but literature in a very different sense from Aristotelian poetry.<sup>78</sup> Rather than reveal the universal principles that explain what is probable and necessary in human affairs, Connor’s Thucydides creates a form of historical literature that reveals that there are no such principles at work.

### *Thucydides’ Science of Democratic Tragedy*

One is hard pressed to find a commentator that better accounts for Thucydides’ narrative complexity and intellectual subtlety than Connor. Nevertheless, his final judgment on Thucydides’ explanatory perspective fails to appreciate the flexibility of the tragic explanatory tradition, and it is grounded in an inadequate assessment of Thucydides’ negotiation between scientific and tragic explanation in his central analytic digressions. There is truth in Connor’s conclusion that Thucydides’ political thought undermines the conventional antitheses between scientific and tragic explanation, but it was primarily the *antithesis* that Thucydides sought to reject, not the entirety of the explanatory perspectives themselves. Thucydides’ text, it will be shown, shows his reader that scientific rationalism can be used to reinvent and reinforce the explanatory purchase of *hybris*-driven reversal while at the same time accounting for the important ways in which collective actors such as democracies foster *hybris* and experience reversal differently from individual autocrats.

To find Thucydides’ scientific analysis of democratic *hybris*-driven reversal we must return to his analysis of the post-Periclean turn. Before this, however, it will be helpful to briefly reexamine the Archaeology in light of present concerns. Though committed to scientific explanation, this opening digression on the development of Greek power is also framed by a highly traditional structure, subject matter, and literary method, some of which has already been discussed. It is not so much a moment of invention as of reinvention, offering a scientific reinterpretation of phenomena that had been the focus of the Greek heroic tradition. As such, it serves as an introduction to Thucydides’ larger explanatory practice and a microcosm of the explanatory project to come.

Though Thucydides’ opening paragraph uses verbal markers such as *xungraphô* to distinguish his practice from his predecessors, it bears repeating that his choice of subject matter and his justification for writing establish deep lines of continuity with Homeric epic and Herodotean history. Thucydides says that he wrote about the war “expecting that it would be great and more worthy of account than what had come before it,” for Athens and Sparta were

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<sup>76</sup> Connor 1984: 231, 236.

<sup>77</sup> Connor 1984: 241.

<sup>78</sup> For the relevant definition of poetry, see Aristotle, *Poetics* 1451b5-10.



both at their height of power, and his own investigations concerning prior events (namely the Trojan and Persian wars) revealed that they were not as great.<sup>79</sup> Here, we see a traditional equation made by Thucydides between greatness and military power, and the traditional assumption that greatness thus conceived is what is most worthy of being accounted for and remembered. Even in the polemical claim that his war is *most* worthy of being talked about, Thucydides is making a quantitative claim that reinforces the qualitative similarity of his subject matter to that of Homer and Herodotus. At the same time, Thucydides introduces a point of analytical clarification in terms of how such power should be quantified: it is the product of two factors, military preparations (*paraskeuai*) and the number of people involved.<sup>80</sup> This clarification does not challenge the line of continuity drawn between his work and those of his predecessors, but simply adds a degree of scientific precision to a deeply traditional subject.

If we look within the Archaeology at specific moments of analysis, we see the same negotiation between heroic themes and scientific explanation. Thucydides' treatment of the Trojan War, for instance, is remarkable for its scientific analyses of the war's central events: Thucydides posits that it was fear of Agamemnon's superlative power, not the oaths of Tyndareus, that enabled Agamemnon to launch the expedition;<sup>81</sup> he establishes that the size of the expedition was limited by a lack of money, as mentioned above;<sup>82</sup> he argues that the war in Troy lasted ten years because the Greeks were forced by this lack of money to introduce a division of labor between fighters, farmers, and raiders.<sup>83</sup> Yet, as strikingly innovative and scientifically-minded as these moments of analysis are, they continue to work within the outline of the Trojan War handed down by tradition. Thucydides takes it for granted that the expedition took place, that Agamemnon was its leader, that Homer's Catalogue of Ships offers a relatively sound account of who went with Agamemnon, and that Greek victory took ten years. Thucydides doesn't use scientific analysis to produce something *completely* new, but to reexamine and reinterpret phenomena that remain deeply traditional in outline. In his efforts, he resembles more the architect retrofitting an old building than an architect building a new one.

Before moving on, it is worth noting that Thucydides' attempt to synthesize tragic and scientific modes of thought in the Archaeology can also be detected in the unique fusion of literary forms that make up this digression. Paralleling the methods of sophistic and Hippocratic analysis, the Archaeology is constructed as a genealogy of the effects of technological advancement on human civilization.<sup>84</sup> At the same time, however, it is written as a masterful piece of ring-composition, raising a characteristic literary frame of epic poetry to a level of

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<sup>79</sup> 1.1.1-3.

<sup>80</sup> 1.1.1.

<sup>81</sup> 1.9.1, 3. We do not find an account of the oath of Tyndareus in Homer's *Iliad*, but fragments of the story remain in the *Catalogue of Women* (fr. 68) attributed to Hesiod. In what remains from the fifth-century sources, the story can be found in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* (ll. 49-70). For a post-classical summary, see Apollodorus, *Library of Greek Mythology* 3.10.8-9.

<sup>82</sup> 1.11.1.

<sup>83</sup> 1.11.1-2. Cf. Apollodorus, *Library of Greek Mythology* Epit. 3.15.

<sup>84</sup> See especially Protagoras' Great Speech in Plato's *Protagoras* (320c3ff.) and the genealogy of diet and sickness in the Hippocratic treatise *On Ancient Medicine* (3.3-6).

complexity never before seen.<sup>85</sup> In this way, the fusion of “old” and “new” not only characterizes the arguments of the Archaeology, but also the ways in which these arguments are being presented to the reader.

The Archaeology prepares the reader to understand Thucydides’ work as a scientific reinvention of certain central strands of tragic/heroic ideology. It is the work of his analysis of the post-Periclean turn in Athenian politics to extend this practice to Athenian defeat in the war. Many commentators reduce Thucydides’ explanation of Athenian defeat to two fairly banal points about the transition in Athenian politics that occurred after Pericles’ death: there was a turn from the consideration of public to private advantage, and there was a loss of intelligent leadership.<sup>86</sup> These points are, of course, true to Thucydides’ words, but, as even the last chapter’s brief glance at this passage suffices to suggest, they do not do justice to the complexity of the analysis offered. What is often treated as a set of loosely related remarks is in fact a tightly constructed explanatory digression that engages directly with the logic of *hybris*-driven reversal. At the same time, however, it is not merely a reiteration and extension of a well-worn pattern.<sup>87</sup> In framing Athenian defeat as an instance of *hybris*-driven reversal, Thucydides is careful to reinterpret this logic in line with his commitment to a scientific understanding of causation and his recognition that democratic communities make judgments differently than individual men.

To demonstrate this, it will be best to move step by step through the explanatory digression, accounting for the ways he is both marking the analysis as an instance of *hybris*-driven reversal and innovating within the tradition of explanation. The analysis is framed by praise for Periclean leadership, beginning, “For as long as he presided over the city during peacetime, he led it moderately (*metriôs*) and guarded it unflinchingly, and it became greatest under his influence.”<sup>88</sup> Notably, this praise is couched in terms of traditional outcomes of political excellence with a focus on moderation and stability through time. Turning next to Pericles’ contribution to the war effort, Thucydides shifts his focus onto Pericles’ virtues, which depart from the traditional template. He praises Pericles’ prescience concerning Athenian power (*prognous tèn dunamin*), and notes that “his foresight (*pronoia*) concerning the war was still more widely recognized” after the war had ended.<sup>89</sup> Thucydides opens the digression at this point, and will close it with a return to praise for Pericles’ ability to prognosticate Athenian power.<sup>90</sup>

Thucydides’ reliance on the pattern of *hybris*-driven reversal to structure the explanatory logic of the digression on Periclean foresight emerges subtly with his first move. He states,

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<sup>85</sup> On ring composition in the Archaeology, see Ellis 1991; cf. Connor 1984: 251.

<sup>86</sup> See, for instance, Ober 1998: 92-94. Farrar (1988: 165) and Orwin (1994: 28) focus exclusively on the decline in leadership. Connor (1984: 60-63) recognizes both points, but argues that this reveals a “paradoxical” aspect to the passage which ultimately makes it “ironic” and a candidate for rejection by the readers as they move through the text. As Connor’s argument stands, “paradoxical” seems to overstate his case.

<sup>87</sup> Jacqueline de Romilly (1977: 50) is to my knowledge the only commentator to recognize the tragic structure of this passage, but her account is brief and does not do justice to the complexity of Thucydides’ analysis, the fluidity of the tragic explanatory tradition, and the extent of Thucydides’ innovation within it.

<sup>88</sup> 2.65.5.

<sup>89</sup> 2.65.5-6.

<sup>90</sup> 2.65.13.

For (*gar*) he said that, if they remained patient, took care of the navy, and neither tried to expand the empire during the war nor put the city at risk, they would win the war; but they did the exact opposite on all these points, and they governed themselves and their tributary allies badly according to personal ambition and private profit, concerning themselves with matters that appeared unrelated to the war and which, when they succeeded, provided honor and advantage primarily to private individuals, but, when they failed, harmed the city in the war.<sup>91</sup>

Beginning as it does with the particle *gar*, Thucydides marks this antithesis between the publicly-minded policies of Pericles and the privately-minded policies of his successors as an explanation for the greater appreciation of Periclean foresight after the war. It is not immediately clear how it performs this role, however, as there is no explicit link between the deterioration in Athenian public-mindedness and the wider recognition of Pericles' good judgment. Indeed, as public-mindedness decreased we might expect Pericles to have fewer acolytes, not more. If we spell the logic out, however, we see certain recognizably tragic assumptions framing the move. Thucydides implies that the Athenians recognized the prescience of Pericles' advice only after it had been disregarded, resulting in their ruin. Such retrospective recognition reminds the reader of Croesus on the pyre calling out Solon's name, and any other number of instances of tragic counsel. Framed in this way, we can see that Pericles is being cast as a tragic warner and the Athenian people as a wayward autocrat—a role the reader is already well-prepared for the Athenian collective to play.

With Pericles cast in this role, we can nevertheless recognize something atypical in his performance of it: during his life, Pericles was able to persuade the Athenians to follow his advice, thus allowing a moderate and stable existence for the city. While alive, in other words, Pericles did not play the tragic warner, but the effective political leader capable of steering the Athenian autocrat away from *hybris*, error, and reversal—in other words, capable of reproducing the supposed effects of *eunomia*. Periclean counsel only became tragic after his death, as it was then disregarded with dire consequences.

In thus framing the Athenians' belated recognition of Periclean foresight as an instance of tragic counsel, Thucydides prompts a number of interrelated questions. How was it that Pericles was able to lead the Athenian autocrat moderately and stably during his lifetime when such counselors were traditionally rejected by hybriatic tyrants? What changed with the death of Pericles? Was the *dêmos* suddenly overcome with *hybris* when previously it had not been? Or had Pericles found a way to neutralize the *hybris* that was supposedly natural to autocrats?

Thucydides' digression immediately responds to this line of questioning. Beginning with the phrase, "the cause (*aition*) of this was," Thucydides' next move articulates another explanatory antithesis to account for the post-Periclean change in policy.<sup>92</sup> The use of the term *aition* at this point in the tragic explanatory frame suggests that a moralized and psychological conception of cause will follow. However, the specific sense of *aition* that he uses here is

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<sup>91</sup> 2.65.7.

<sup>92</sup> 2.65.8-10.

scientific, not tragic, accounting for the movement towards Athenian *hybris* by pointing to the changing power dynamics of the Athenian assembly. It was not moral failure or the intervention of some deity that determined Athenian *hybris*, Thucydides teaches the reader, but rather a change in the competitive dynamic between the leaders due to a change in their relative merit, which in turn changed the relationship between the leaders and the people.

As glimpsed in the previous chapter, Thucydides' Pericles was able to rule the Athenian *dêmos* while alive because he combined three different characteristics: intelligence (*gnômê*), the resources of elite status (*axiômata*), and an insusceptibility to bribery (*diaphanous adôrotatos*).<sup>93</sup> Due to the prestige (*axiôsis*) that this combination brought him, Pericles "ruled the multitude freely" and thereby came to rule Athens as the "first man."<sup>94</sup> Through rule by prestige, Pericles was able to persuade the people to follow his advice even when it was at odds with their emotional states; an ability dramatically depicted in his final assembly speech. Thucydides explains,

he did not acquire his power inappropriately, speaking to please the people, but, having that power by prestige, he even disagreed with them when they were angry. So, whenever he perceived them to be bold at the wrong moment on account of *hybris*, he would knock them down to a fearful state by speaking to them. Likewise, in turn, if he perceived them to be unreasonably afraid, he would return them upright to a state of confidence.<sup>95</sup>

Thucydides reveals that the Athenian people were indeed prone to fits of *hybris*, just as they were prone to irrational fear, but that Pericles prevented these emotional states from being translated into public policy by speaking authoritatively against them. Ruling unilaterally on account of his prestige, Pericles was able to tame the emotional excesses of the *dêmos* and guide the city according to a consistent, stable policy.

As the later narrative demonstrates, the leaders that came after Pericles were inferior to the great statesman in one or more of the constituent aspects of his prestige. Alcibiades lacked his integrity, Nicias lacked his status, Cleon lacked both of these, and his intelligence to boot. Notably, however, Thucydides does not explain the deterioration of Athenian politics in terms of the absolute decline of merit among leaders. Rather, he explains this deterioration according to a change in their relative merit:

Those who came after [Pericles], because they were more equal to one another and each strove to become preminent, were different, even handing over the affairs of the city to the pleasure of the people.<sup>96</sup>

In Thucydides' account, the post-Periclean leadership had to compete for the preference of the people in the assembly, resulting in an inversion of the dynamic between the people and their leaders in the making of Athenian policy. Whereas Pericles had led, now the leaders followed, leaving no check on the people's *hybris* in making policy. Instead, these leaders were left to

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<sup>93</sup> 2.65.8

<sup>94</sup> 2.65.8-9.

<sup>95</sup> 2.65.8-9.

<sup>96</sup> 2.65.10.

pander to the people's desires in hopes of furthering their own power, goading the people's emotional states to still greater extremes and translating them directly into political action. The people were, in turn, given free rein to act as one might expect the tyrant to act, following the advice of flatterers to their own detriment.

This second explanatory antithesis provides a bridge for Thucydides between tragic and scientific explanation. It accounts for the transition towards *hybris* in the determination of Athenian judgment without suggesting that either moral error or supernatural intervention was its cause. Instead, the cause of this shift is identified in the amoral power dynamics of the assembly, which admits of two poles corresponding to the autocracy-equality antithesis. Whereas the unilateral rule of Pericles served to inhibit the translation of popular *hybris* into policy, the competitive situation of post-Periclean equals encouraged this translation. By stacking these antitheses on top of one another, Thucydides not only offers a scientific reinterpretation of democratic tragic reversal, he also presents the reader with a novel, scientific version of overdetermination. Without invoking the gods, Thucydides identifies the variable power dynamics of the assembly as a set of invisible forces at work determining perceptible Athenian action and guiding the turn towards transgressive policy.

Having established the existence and cause of a hybriatic turn in Athenian politics after the death of Pericles, Thucydides' next move is to address the expected outcome of such policy. "Because of this," he writes, again marking an explicit causal connection between sections of the digression, "many errors (*polla hêmartêthê*) were made, as is natural for a great city and one with an empire, and most of all the voyage to Sicily..."<sup>97</sup> Thucydides' logic and vocabulary here overtly pick up on the expectations of *hybris*-driven reversal: hybriatic policy leads the great, imperial city (i.e. the collective autocrat) to *hamartia*, of which Sicily is the prime example. However, Thucydides supplements this move with an unexpected explanation of Athenian failure in Sicily. He writes that Sicily "was not so much an error (*hêmartêma*) of judgment concerning those whom they were attacking, as it was [an error] on the part of those who remained at home."<sup>98</sup> Thucydides does not deny that the decision to attack Sicily was mistaken, but he insists that this erroneous decision was not the primary cause of the voyage's failure, as the pattern of tragic explanation might lead us to suspect.<sup>99</sup> Rather, he states that the expedition failed because of "those who remained at home, men who did not make policy according to the needs of those in the field, but who, through personal attacks (*idias diabolos*) over the leadership of the people, rather weakened the army in the field and for the first time incited the citizens in the city against one another."<sup>100</sup> Again, Thucydides identifies the competitive dynamics of the post-Periclean assembly as the engine driving Athenian reversal, though now the focus is more on the private motives driving the leadership rather than the emotional states of the people.

In Thucydides' final move of the digression, he rounds out the logic of *hybris*-driven reversal, addressing Athenian defeat. This move, however, does not proceed according to a

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<sup>97</sup> 2.65.11.

<sup>98</sup> 2.65.11.

<sup>99</sup> For an excellent discussion of this point, see Westlake 1969: 161-173.

<sup>100</sup> 2.65.11.

causal connection, as the previous had. Instead, Thucydides connects the defeat suffered in Sicily and the final defeat of Athens with a verbal echo, upsetting the causal sequence leading from *hybris* to *hamartia*, and from *hamartia* to ruin.

Having suffered defeat (*sphalentes*) in Sicily, in the greater part of the navy, and in other war materials as well, and with the city already in a state of civil strife, [the Athenians] nevertheless endured against their original enemies for [eight] more years,<sup>101</sup> and with them the Sicilians as well, and against the still greater number of tributary allies who rebelled, and later against Cyrus, the son of the Persian King, who joined as ally against them and provided money for the Peloponnesians to build a navy, and they did not give in until they were led by personal quarrels to attack themselves and were finally defeated (*esphalêsan*).<sup>102</sup>

The first and last word of this belabored sentence are forms of the aorist passive of *sphallô*, a verb with specifically tragic overtones.<sup>103</sup> The verbal repetition calls the reader's attention to the relationship between the two defeats, and all that comes between them, while attenuating the causal link. Though they suffered ruin in Sicily, they were not ruined. Rather, the Athenians continue to endure, even as the odds stacked against them become increasingly extreme, proving their heroic mettle. Even with the whole known world faced off against them, Thucydides explains, defeat does not come until the Athenians turn on themselves. Again, his causal argument returns to the private quarrels (*idias diaphoras*) of the leadership that resulted from the competitive dynamic of the assembly, echoing his previous explanation of the Sicilian *hamartia*.

Like the Archaeology, Thucydides' analysis of the post-Periclean turn and Athenian defeat uses a scientific conception of causation to reinvent a traditional, heroic phenomenon. In offering a modernizing account of traditional themes, Thucydides neither jettisons the tragic explanatory frame, nor does he compromise the scientific nature of his project by relying on a moralizing, supernaturally-driven causal story. Instead, he is able to demonstrate that the "new" mode of fifth-century explanation is able to make sense of and reinforce many of the features of the "old" way of explaining political reversal.

This does not mean, however, that Thucydides' science of tragic explanation is traditional in its politics. In fact, Thucydides' novel perspective on democratic reversal provides him with a number of iconoclastic conclusions that reinforce his larger reconsideration of the nature of democracy, its relationship to equality, and the extent to which an individual tyrant could be analogized to a collective autocrat. Against those contemporaries that championed scientific explanation as a means of liberating themselves from traditional norms of justice and public-mindedness, Thucydides' theoretical intervention acts as both an empirical corrective and cautionary tale. Though endorsing their skepticism of the supernatural causal stories accounting for tragic reversal, Thucydides nevertheless denied that this skepticism gave one grounds to

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<sup>101</sup> There is a corruption in the text as this point. See Hornblower 1991: 348.

<sup>102</sup> 2.65.12.

<sup>103</sup> For the aorist passive form of *sphallô*, LSJ reads "to be overthrown, fall, esp. of persons falling from high fortunes." See Sophocles, *Trachiniae*, ll. 296-97; Euripides, *Fragments*, 262.2. Cf. the active use of the verb in Euripides, *Hippolytus*, ll. 5-6.

reject the correlation between the unrestrained pursuit of self-interest, *hybris*, injustice, error, and reversal. Democratic rule was not inherently stable, Thucydides found, in part because he recognized that the *dêmos* was incapable of consistently recognizing and pursuing its self-interest on its own. As elitist critics had long contended, the *dêmos* was naturally prone to *hybris* and excessive fear, much like an individual autocrat, routinely experiencing extreme emotional states that clouded its practical judgment. Such states were exacerbated by democratic leaders under conditions of egalitarian competition, leaders who did consistently pursue their narrowly-defined self-interest and were willing to sacrifice the public good when it was conducive to their private advantage.

Thucydides also recognized that democratic rule was not inherently stable because it was not a simple phenomenon with just one profile of practical results. The analysis of post-Periclean reversal demonstrates that the democratic *politeia* itself admitted of two different characters depending on the relative merit of the leaders who contended for power. Without changing any of the formal institutional features of the democracy, it was capable of inverse patterns of behavior based on whether it was led by a single individual who could command popular assent through prestige or by a cohort of leaders competing for popular approval. According to this account, analysts such as the Old Oligarch, and even Pericles himself in the Funeral Oration, fundamentally misunderstood how democracy worked when they suggested that the regime type had a single character and trajectory.

For the critics and warners of Athenian imperial democracy, Thucydides' corrective was quite different. In his account, the proponents of traditional democratic ideology had not failed to understand the versatility of the democratic *politeia*, but they had failed to recognize the institutional arrangements responsible for its successes and failures. More specifically, they had failed to understand the ways in which autocratic authority within the deliberative body led to moderate and stable rule, outcomes supposedly brought about through equality, while equal competition among leaders brought about hybriatic, self-destructive policy, the supposed outcomes of autocracy. As we have seen, this does not mean that Thucydides denied the value of egalitarian relationships outside of the assembly. Democratic power and resilience appear to be derived from the inclusiveness of democratic regimes, and this appears to be a result of the broad equality of opportunity and equal access to the law courts described by Pericles in his Funeral Oration.<sup>104</sup> But in the creation of public policy, as Pericles emphasizes in the same passage, the democracy was at its best when it was ruled by the best. It follows from this analysis that proponents of democratic ideology failed to recognize that the salutary effects of equality were specific and limited, and there were also specific noxious effects of equality in democratic political life. Moreover, they had failed to see the value that autocratic relationships might have in stabilizing and preserving such a way of life.

Combining all of these lessons, we can see that they Thucydides demonstrated the error, even the danger in his predecessors' belief that they could analogize between the individual and the collective autocrat without significant qualification. While there may have been some use in

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<sup>104</sup> 2.37.1.

holding up Xerxes as a cautionary tale for the Athenian empire, or in encouraging the Athenians to see themselves in a tragic hero on stage, it was limited and perhaps even nullified by the different causal mechanism driving democratic reversal. Such analogies, rather than offering effective therapy, may have encouraged the Athenians to flee from the very cure that they needed by cultivating the belief that autocratic leadership caused *hybris*-driven reversal. It was only by addressing the particular dynamics of the autocratic democracy directly, not by suppressing them through analogy to an individual autocrat, that the paradoxical need for autocratic leadership within the democracy could be perceived.

### *Explaining Democratic Defeat*

Like many other great intellectual innovators, Thucydides' originality stemmed from his ability to work between two intellectual traditions that had been considered distinct. He recognized that the explanatory tools of fifth-century science could be used to reinvent tragic explanation and to set it on a new footing. As a consequence, he was able to explain to fifth-century audiences why the Athenian imperial democracy suffered a reversal in the war and why this reversal nonetheless differed in important respects from those suffered by individual autocrats. He was thereby able to offer a further, crucial element to his analysis of Athens as a heroic democracy.

Thucydides was able to offer this innovative account in a way that was persuasive to the partisans of both tragic and scientific explanation. Any ends he wished to accomplish by convincing his audience would have been furthered by drawing on both modes of explanation. As shown in the contemporary speeches of Antiphon, in the *agônes* of Euripidean tragedy, and in the speeches that Thucydides himself provides, it was a common feature of the formal discourse of the day to overdetermine rhetorical and practical results by diverse appeals to distinct standards or values. Such rhetorical efficaciousness may seem to leave the question of explanation untouched, for an explanation would seem to be adequate or not regardless of its persuasiveness. But to adopt certain explanatory tools, and to focus on a certain set of phenomena to the exclusion of others, is not simply to augment the persuasiveness of an explanation. It is to change the nature of the explanation.

We should not assume that Thucydides sacrificed explanatory adequacy for persuasiveness. Neither the tragic nor scientific traditions contained an agreed set of criteria for explanatory adequacy, but each included a set of markers that signaled that an explanation was being given. Thucydides' analysis of imperial democratic defeat includes these markers for both traditions and combines them in a coherent way. Consistent with the scientific tradition, Thucydides offers an account that is naturalistic, that assumes the amoral pursuit of self-interest on the part of individuals (if not the collective people) as the default, that employs a scientific conception of cause (*aition*), and that locates this cause in political-institutional structures rather than the moral disposition of any individual actor. Thucydides also includes the naturalistic markers of tragic explanation: a tragic warner whose advice is disregarded with catastrophic



consequences, a hybriatic autocrat, self-serving flatterers who encourage this autocrat in its misguided undertakings, large-scale error, and the total defeat of a previously great power.

Thucydides used his revised conception of over-determination to fuse the components of tragic and scientific explanation together. While the visible process of Athenian reversal adheres largely to the naturalistic components of tragic reversal, a scientific analysis of the changing dynamics of the Athenian assembly tracks the unseen causes of the visible process. We might still wonder whether the absence of divine over-determination undercuts the claim that Thucydides' explanation would have been recognizably tragic. In context, however, Thucydides appears to be furthering an important development in thinking about *hybris*-driven reversal, not subverting this mode of explanation. Solonian poetry, for instance, placed much greater weight on the naturalistic causes of *hybris*-driven reversal than did Hesiod or Homer, and Herodotus' Otares articulates a fully naturalistic account of the *hybris*-driven reversal of autocrats.<sup>105</sup>

Approached from a different angle, we might instead wonder whether Thucydides' adoption of tragic explanatory elements disqualifies it from consideration as a properly scientific explanation. Our ability to respond decisively to this concern is inhibited somewhat by the fact that what counts as a scientific explanation remains a matter of deep dispute among philosophers of science. According to some models, especially those that make scientific explanation a matter of statistical relevance, Thucydides' analysis certainly falls short.<sup>106</sup> But according to others, such as Hempel's Deductive Nomological model, there is scope to consider Thucydides' explanation as adequately scientific.<sup>107</sup> Thucydides' explanation does not immediately satisfy the criteria of Deductive Nomological explanation, which makes explanation the result of a logical deduction from a universal law. However, Hempel argues that an explanation lacking an explicit appeal to this model may still be considered scientific if its success implies a logical structure of this sort.<sup>108</sup> Thucydides' explanation of Athenian defeat appears to imply such a structure, for without an implicit appeal to a universal law describing the effects of autocratic and egalitarian leadership on a democracy, it ceases to act as a paradigm of what will happen to others in the future, thus leaving Thucydides' stated ambition for his text unfulfilled.<sup>109</sup>

But not all modern philosophers of science require that Thucydides' explanation fit universal, historically-disembedded criteria to be deemed scientific. According to pragmatic

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<sup>105</sup> In this context, Haimon's warning to Creon in Sophocles' *Antigone* (ll. 683ff.) also merits consideration. This is not to say that Solon, Herodotus, or Sophocles exclude the causal role of the gods in *hybris*-driven reversal, but that they also allow for explanations that do not include them.

<sup>106</sup> Examples of such theories are Hempel's (1965: 381-83) Inductive-Statistical model and Salmon's (1971) Statistical Relevance model. Thucydides' explanation also appears to fall short according to realist theories of scientific explanation such as Wesley Salmon's (1984; cf. 1994) Causal Mechanical model, where the particularity of Thucydides' explanation means that it is unreplicable and therefore untestable, barring us from understanding whether the causal mechanisms that Thucydides identified really were the ones doing the work. A similar problem occurs with the unificationist model of explanation (see for example Kitcher 1989), where it is the very breadth of phenomena that can be explained that makes an explanation scientific, thus requiring explanations to be cast in generic terms.

<sup>107</sup> Hempel and Oppenheim 1948.

<sup>108</sup> See the criticisms of Michael Scriven (1962) and Hempel's response (1965: 360ff.). See also: Railton 1978, 1981.

<sup>109</sup> 1.22.4. See also 3.82.2.

accounts of explanation, it is not the structure of a statement that makes it a legitimate explanation, but the effect of illumination and understanding that it produces.<sup>110</sup> Explanation is an illocutionary act, on this view, and is therefore context dependent. What will prove illuminating to one audience may prove opaque to another depending on the extent to which their beliefs and experiences overlap. The need to work within the existing traditions of Greek thought was, therefore, more than a matter of mere rhetoric. It was essential if Thucydides was to offer an explanation at all. Thucydides succeeds at this task, and indeed succeeds in offering an account that qualified as an explanation according to two traditions frequently considered opposed to one another. Traditionalists and rationalists alike could recognize the explanatory force of Thucydides' tragic science of the democratic hero.

That Thucydides was able to succeed in this way suggests that—despite a structuring opposition in the scholarship—tragic and scientific modes of explanation may be complementary. Successful political explanation, be it poetic or scientific, tells stories grounded in human experience that offer guidance for the future. Scientific explanation differs from traditional conceptions of tragic explanation primarily in the skepticism with which it approaches the stories that it deems worthy of consideration and the causal forces that it accounted for. It is a difference of degree, not of kind. As Thucydides demonstrated, scientific skepticism and its naturalistic conception of causation can be used to complement tragic explanation, to reinforce its central insights, and to clarify its contribution to thinking about democracy. Rather than requiring him to reject tragic explanation, a scientific perspective may in fact gave him the means to consider more rigorously the self-defeating effects of hybristic public policy.

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<sup>110</sup> For pragmatic accounts of explanation, see van Fraassen 1980; Achinstein 1983.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

For Thucydides, it was not Athenian victory but the suffering endured in defeat that proved Pericles' estimation of the city's greatness. It was also the fall of the greatest hero in the greatest of wars that revealed the paradoxical importance of autocratic authority for the establishment and maintenance of democracy. Athenian democracy reached its apex in Thucydides' analysis when the rule of the first man, not egalitarian competition, characterized deliberative procedure, and this quasi-autocratic rule of Pericles was compounded by the dominance of the city over both Attica and its imperial dependents. Together, these reinforcing layers of hierarchical authority, supplemented by widespread participation, produced the greatest power that Greece had ever seen, eclipsing even those heroes thought to be superhuman.

Pericles plays a central role in Thucydides' explanation of Athenian greatness, but this should not encourage a sense that Thucydides prioritized individual agency over collective dynamics when considering the causes of Athenian success and failure. In Thucydides' understanding, Pericles' causal significance stemmed from the effect that he had on the underlying dynamic of public deliberation in Athens. With his death, the Athenians lost a uniquely capable man. This was indeed a great loss. However, it was in the deliberative power-vacuum that Pericles' absence created, not in the loss of Pericles *per se*, that Thucydides located the underlying cause of Athenian defeat. Likewise, the competitive equality that subsequently characterized the Athenian deliberative dynamic was intimately tied to the various defects of each of Athens' post-Periclean leaders, but it was the structural effects of this equality more than the failures of any individual leader that led to ruin. Consistent with Pericles' previous criticism of the Spartan alliance, Thucydides identified the competitive dynamic among equals in the assembly as the cause of myopic and inconsistent policy serving parochial interests while overlooking the good of the collective. Eventually, the competitive and self-interested dynamic fostered by circumstances of deliberative equality crescendoed into outright civil war. It was this process that brought the imperial democracy to its knees, not the individual actions of any post-Periclean politician. For Thucydides, individuals mattered, but they did so largely because of their ability to alter the political structures within which they acted.

This dissertation focuses purposively on the first third of Thucydides' text, seeking primarily to account for Thucydides' understanding of democratic greatness at its height. However, this account has implications for Thucydides' analysis well beyond these earlier sections. Thucydides remains committed to the intellectual framework developed in the Archaeology and in the analysis of post-Periclean decline throughout. Before turning to consider again the question of Thucydides' evaluation of democratic greatness and the relevance of his thinking for modern political thought, it is useful to point out several ways in which the close analysis of Thucydides' early books undertaken here promises to bring later episodes more clearly into focus.

First, the interpretation of Thucydidean democratic theory developed in this dissertation makes greater sense of Cleon's contribution to the Mytilenean Debate and his larger career as a leader of the Athenian democracy. In the Mytilenean Debate, Diodotus accuses Cleon of confusing the deliberative assembly with the law courts by foregrounding the question of whether punishing the Mytileneans is just or not.<sup>1</sup> As Edward Harris has demonstrated, Cleon's confusion between these two distinct spheres of the Athenian *politeia* extends far beyond his preoccupation with retributive justice.<sup>2</sup> While accusing other orators and the Athenian audience of mistakenly allowing epideictic oratory to predominate in the assembly, Cleon himself eschews the conventions of deliberative rhetoric in order to employ the characteristic language, argumentation, and rhetorical tactics of the law court. Harris exhaustively demonstrates the judicial character of Cleon's oratory by comparing his Mytilene speech with Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, the *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum*, and the speeches of the Attic orators. Harris stops short of demonstrating how Cleon's confusion relates to Thucydides' larger explanation of Athenian decline, however, and it is here that the analysis of this dissertation serves to make a further contribution. Cleon's substitution of judicial for deliberative rhetoric fits neatly with the interpretation of Thucydides' analysis of post-Periclean politics developed in Chapters 4 and 5. Cleon dramatically illustrates the process whereby the deliberative and the judicial become blurred in Athenian politics, allowing private differences, personal invective, and competition for the leadership to distract the deliberative assembly from considerations of the public good. This study therefore suggests that Thucydides' depiction of Cleon as juridically minded in the assembly does not merely stem from a concern for historical accuracy or a desire to paint the orator as either confused or hypocritical. It also stems from his larger explanatory framework for the decline of Athenian politics.

The pattern of *hybris*-driven reversal identified in Chapter 5 also gives us a useful framework for enriching our understanding of Cleon as a political counselor. Cornford, for his part, argued that Thucydides' selective presentation of Cleon's career depicts in miniature the explanatory pattern of *hybris*-driven reversal that would later account for Athenian decline. While refusing the most violent citizen of Athens heroic status on account of his lack of grandeur, Cornford suggested that Thucydides' Cleon "is quasi-hero of his own little tragic-comedy" at the same time he was "a minor character in the tragedy of Athens."<sup>3</sup> By focusing on the latter of these two characterizations, we are able to make greater progress than by simply accounting for Cleon's career as a distinct narrative. The tragic framework developed in Chapter 5 helps us to recognize in Cleon a well-established figure in the pattern of *hybris*-driven reversal: that of the unscrupulous counselor encouraging heroic *hybris* and excess, often in pursuit of his (or her) own interests. In looking for precedents to Cleon, we stand to learn much by considering him in light of figures such as Herodotus' Mardonius or the nurse to Euripides' Phaedra. It would be fruitful to pursue such parallels, recognizing not only where Thucydides' Cleon

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<sup>1</sup> 3.44.4.

<sup>2</sup> Harris 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Cornford 1907: 128.

resembles the conventional counselor of transgression, but also where he appears to depart from the conventional pattern, such as in his reliance on judicial rhetoric.

A second, important Athenian leader that can be better understood within the framework of this dissertation is Alcibiades. Like Cleon's Mytilenean speech, Alcibiades' Sicilian speech evinces numerous Periclean parallels. Unlike Cleon, however, Alcibiades in many ways exemplifies the grandeur appropriate to a hero and does not shy away from speaking in a heroic register. This dissertation forms a baseline for drawing out and diagnosing the ways in which Alcibiades' democratic heroism differs from that of Pericles and is presented as a perversion of it. In particular, it positions the reader to recognize that Alcibiades has a rather different subject in mind when thinking about democratic heroism. In the Periclean vision, it was the democracy itself, the community of Athenians, that collectively took on the role of the hero. Without denying a critical position for himself in this community, Thucydides' Pericles always subordinated himself to the good of the whole, and it is this whole that produced the unprecedented greatness of which he speaks. Alcibiades, on the other hand, viewed himself as a hero within the democracy, demanding authority from his fellow citizens on this account. The greatness of Athens, in his vision, stemmed not from the community itself, but rather from the glory that it gained by having him as its leader. In this way, Alcibiades introduces a source of heroic competition within the deliberative body; one that is perhaps more dignified than Cleon's introduction of judicial invective, but equally corrosive of the vision of preferment upheld by Pericles and of the health of the community. Alcibiades' appropriation and subversion of the Periclean ideal helps the reader see in high relief that version of heroism which Thucydides believed to be not only possible but necessary in a democracy, and that which was incompatible with and destructive of it.

This dissertation also functions credibly to assist us in better understanding the relationship between Athenian suspicions of Alcibiades' character, the cryptic digression about the tyrannicides in Book 6, and the relationship between Alcibiades' exile and Athenian defeat. The opposition that we find to Alcibiades' ascent to a position of Periclean dominance by his political rivals fits neatly into Thucydides' analysis of post-Periclean decline, but it also raises important questions about Alcibiades' inability to secure such a position for himself and, ultimately, the relationship between the Athenians and tyranny. Thucydides' earlier account of the Athenian disposition suggests a strong affinity for autocratic rule. The exile of Alcibiades on the grounds of his tyrannical ambitions and the digression on the tyrannicides, however, stand in apparent tension with this characterization. For all of the autocratic tendencies of the Athenian people and their ability to abide the quasi-autocratic leadership of Pericles, Thucydides reveals a deep-seated (if ultimately misinformed) fear of autocratic rule. Herein lies a puzzle that, if it can be adequately solved, promises to deepen and to complicate Thucydides' portrait of Athenian character and political culture.

Beyond the analysis of specific leaders, the Melian Dialogue offers an interesting avenue for further exploration in light of this dissertation's findings. For those who have read Thucydides' text in a tragic vein, the Melian Dialogue features as a crucial moment in the

narrative arc of Athenian reversal. Melos appears to dramatize the moment when Athenian *hybris* becomes bald-faced and overtly transgressive. Coming as it does immediately before the misadventure in Sicily, Melos would seem to demonstrate that the Athenians were ripe for reversal. Viewing the Melian episode in light of this dissertation's analysis and according to its interpretive approach, however, suggests that this reading is overly simplistic, especially once the Melian Dialogue is situated within the heroic tradition and the intertextual resonances of the Athenians' claim that justice does not pertain between the strong and the weak are recognized. The death scene of Hector in the *Iliad* and the fable of the hawk and the nightingale in Hesiod's *Works and Days* offer a particularly rich and provocative background against which to view this claim. Both of these passages feature arguments that sound surprisingly similar to those voiced by the Athenians, and both defy simple moralization. The death scene of Hector in particular establishes a heroic pedigree for Athenian argumentation that exists outside of the standard narrative arc of *hybris*-driven reversal, further associating the democratic hero with the story of Achilles while complicating the reader's ability to see it simply as an instance of pride before the fall.

The conventional tragic reading of the Melian Dialogue can be further problematized by viewing it in light of Thucydides' account of Athenian failure in Sicily and, ultimately, in the war. Thucydides' analysis of the post-Periclean turn in Athenian politics explicitly locates the cause of failure in Sicily, like the cause of Athenian defeat, in the deleterious competition among potential leaders in the assembly. The Melian episode, however, is notably untethered from the internal deliberative politics of Athens. The reader hears nothing about the debate leading to the invasion of Melos, nor of the decision to kill all Melian men and enslave the women and children. There is no indication of who it was that championed these policies in the assembly, nor whether this effort faced opposition. In this way, Melos is strikingly different from the Mytilenean episode and the later decision to annihilate the Scionians. In both of these cases, we find Thucydides explicitly point the finger at Cleon, and in the first of these we find a dramatic illustration of the pathologies of the post-Periclean assembly.<sup>4</sup> Thucydides' decision not to offer any comparable thread leading from deliberative dysfunction to Melian massacre encourages us to question what Thucydides may be doing in presenting the episode as he does. We must at least consider that, while noting the brutality of Athenian treatment of the innocent Melians, Thucydides may be correcting a prevalent assumption among his contemporaries—one encouraged by the same sort of tragic logic adopted by modern scholars—that this action was causally related to Athenian defeat, either in Sicily or in the war. In this corrective, the Melians become collateral damage, so to speak, and are perhaps highly symbolic or symptomatic of the change that occurred in Athenian politics after the death of Pericles. But the destruction of this city, as unbecoming and unfortunate as it is, plays no causal role in either this change or the catastrophic effects that it ultimately brought to the heroic democracy.

Finally, this project offers a contextual analysis important in addressing Thucydides' evaluation of the Periclean pursuit of greatness. In accounting for Thucydides' explanation of

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<sup>4</sup> 3.36.6; 4.122.6; cf. 5.32.1.

democratic greatness, the dissertation sets aside the question of whether or not Thucydides endorsed this objective. It has argued that Thucydides believed greatness to be most worth accounting for, and it has challenged those who assume a critical stance towards greatness because of the suffering it entailed. It has not, however, directly argued for Thucydides' sponsorship of Pericles' quasi-autocratic leadership or prioritization of greatness over peace. Given the lack of any explicit comment to this effect by Thucydides, it may seem that one must remain agnostic on this subject. Before resigning ourselves to this position, however, there is at least one further aspect of Thucydidean political thought worth considering for its ability to shed light on Thucydides' political commitments. This is Thucydides' approach to the construction of his own authority as a writer.

In addition to justifying the greatness of his subject and introducing his theoretical vision, Thucydides' *Archaeology* seeks to establish the authority of its author's speech by convincing the reader not only that his war was greater than those of Homer or Herodotus, but also that he was a more trustworthy documentarian of facts and analyst of power than they were. Thucydides impresses upon the reader through his analysis of the past his authority as an analyst of the present, and thereby also as a guide to the future. It does not suffice to simply note that Thucydides constructs himself as an authority for his reader, however. There were multiple, conflicting approaches to the establishment of discursive authority in fifth-century Greece, and each bore distinct epistemological and political commitments. The reader thus stands to learn much about Thucydidean political thought by considering the type of authority that Thucydides sought to win for his speech and the implications of this choice.

Thucydides cultivates a monological authority that bore a strong resemblance to the authority of archaic kings, poets, and prophets.<sup>5</sup> Thucydides habitually suppressed from his speech the dialogical considerations that led him to his conclusions, especially after the *Archaeology*, offering his reader only his final determination of the truth, which readers are expected to accept as *the* truth. In this way, Thucydides differs fundamentally from the approach of someone like Herodotus, whose text seeks constantly to establish authority by presenting competing accounts and helping the reader to navigate between their claims. Herodotus acted as a sort of guide for his readers, but these readers were expected to arrive at the truth themselves. His authority thus stems from his transparency, his encyclopedic knowledge of alternative possibilities, and his dialogical deftness. Thucydides' authority, on the other hand, stems from the readers' trust in his superior ability to discern and articulate what is true based on his analysis of the Greek past. After the *Archaeology*, the readers are not given the ability to check his work, so to speak; they must simply accept that such work has been expertly done.

This adherence to a monological vision of discursive authority establishes Thucydides as heir to a tradition of authoritative speech exemplified by epic poets, oracular prophets, and scepter-bearing kings. Thucydides did not merely accept this tradition as it was handed down to him, however, but sought to reinvent it in line with his own, distinctly fifth-century commitments

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<sup>5</sup> For the classic work on this tradition of speech and its challengers in the fifth-century, see Detienne 1996 [1990]. Cf. Marincola 1997.

(as we should now expect). The authority of the archaic “masters of truth” stemmed from their ability to channel supernatural forces, thus making them privy to an understanding of what was, what had been, and what would be that was inaccessible to most mortals. By giving voice to the mind of the god, they brought the divine truth into being in the human realm. In a manner of speaking, they were creators of truth in the human realm. Thucydides aims at the same scope of understanding, seeking to say what could be said about his past, present, and future, but he grounds this vision of the truth in the rational analysis of fully-human facts that could be ascertained through the rigorous application of a sufficiently talented mind. Thucydides’ authority stemmed from his own intelligence and his own diligence, not his ritualistic context or formal status, and the truth that he spoke of was located within the world that he lived in, not a world inaccessible to human perception. His was a distinctly new kind of monological authority pared of its traditional claim to supernatural inspiration.

Thucydides’ construction of himself as a speaker of truth aids our understanding of his attitude towards Pericles’ pursuit of democratic greatness once the politics of competing fifth-century approaches to discursive authority are brought into the picture. At risk of oversimplification, it can be said that the polarity between monological and dialogical modes of verbal authority aligns with the heroic/political and autocratic/egalitarian polarities that have thus far guided this work. As suggested above, monological verbal authority was characteristic of kings such as Agamemnon, while dialogical verbal authority was characteristic of egalitarian deliberation. The authority of the former was tied to the status and divine sponsorship of the king, the latter to the rigors and openness of deliberative debate. In adopting for himself a monological approach to verbal authority, Thucydides therefore aligns himself with a heroic and autocratic political project, just as Herodotus’ approach aligned him with an egalitarian one.

Thucydides’ adoption of an autocratic mode of verbal authority suggests a sponsorship of the Periclean project in two ways. First, it gives further evidence of Thucydides’ endorsement of the concerns and values of the heroic tradition by adopting its characteristic mode of speech. This encourages the belief that Thucydides’ commitment to this tradition extended beyond its approach to Athenian greatness. It also provided Thucydides with an axiology for his own aspirations. Thucydides’ determination to be a heroic actor of sorts encourages us to believe that he also accepted greatness as a worthwhile pursuit. Second, we can see that there is a congruence between the mode of verbal authority that Thucydides adopts and that which he identified as crucial for the greatness of the democratic hero. Thucydides’ Pericles exemplifies the type of monological authority that Thucydides practices, establishing a sort of kinship between these two figures. This kinship does not prove that Thucydides endorsed everything that Pericles said and did, but it strongly suggests that he approved of the quasi-autocratic authority with which Pericles ruled the Athenian deliberative sphere. And if this approval is granted, it becomes harder to believe that he did not broadly endorse the policies that Pericles used his rule to propagate.

Thucydides’ genius is such that he deserves our careful consideration, but his authority is not so absolute as to demand that we share in his evaluation of democratic greatness. Rather, when it comes to determining the desirability of greatness as a democratic end, we must embrace



Quentin Skinner's challenge to "do our own thinking for ourselves."<sup>6</sup> But this does not mean that Thucydides' text will be of no help. His unorthodox interpretation of Athenian democracy as a type of collective hero is not something that we can or should try to simply appropriate for ourselves. Nevertheless, it draws our attention to certain uncomfortable possibilities concerning the relationship between democracy, equality, and greatness that deserve our careful attention.

For most of western history, there would have been little question that a democracy, or any other political community, ought to strive for greatness if positioned to do so. The uneasiness with which many, though certainly not all, now view greatness as a political objective is a recent phenomenon that is intimately tied to a similar rejection of relationships of empire, domination, and inequality more generally. Thucydides' explanation of democratic greatness in terms of cumulative levels of quasi-autocratic rule is unlikely to allay this discomfort, and for many it may even seem to betray the very idea of democracy. This idea, of course, is an exceptionally difficult one to define, but it is uncontroversial to suggest that it sits in opposition to autocratic rule. Indeed, it is perhaps by foregrounding this opposition, rather than any positive attribute, that we are able to characterize democracy in a way that would garner general agreement. Thucydides' reinterpretation of democracy to allow for autocratic elements may therefore appear to hollow out the very core of the concept, making it unrecognizable.

And yet, Periclean Athens is recognizable as a democracy, and it is difficult to identify exactly what about it is disqualifying. It is consistent with the widespread distribution of offices, with equality before the law, and with a deliberative sphere characterized by citizens who possess an equal vote and an equal opportunity to have their voice heard. According to Thucydides, Pericles did not obtain his rule by excluding public participation or maintain it by institutionalizing his dominance; rather his rule arose organically out of the public recognition and preferment of his excellence. The means by which he secures this rule are public esteem and persuasion, both of which are perfectly consistent with democratic deliberation, and might even be considered essential for it. Wherein lies the subversion of democracy?

It might be thought that the further layers of autocratic rule inherent in Athenian greatness, namely the dominance of urban center over rural environs and of Athens over its empire, are easier to reject as undemocratic. In the case of the city's supremacy within Attica, however, this is a tough case to make. Though the city of Athens became the political center of Attica, those who lived outside of the city bore the same formal powers as those who dwelled within as citizens of Athens after the *sunoikismos*. Each had the ability to speak in the assembly, for instance, or to utilize the law courts. The rule of Athens within Attica was a matter of the centralization of power, not a matter of disenfranchisement or overt domination. This centralization naturally created an informal inequality of access to the centralized institutions, and even a prioritization of those interests that were proximate to this seat of power. In doing so, however, it was not dissimilar to a modern Paris, London, or Athens itself. We are perhaps unaccustomed to thinking of these cities as ruling over the countries for which they serve as capital, but it is not an entirely inapposite characterization. Representative democracy, in a

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<sup>6</sup> Skinner 1969: 52.

manner somewhat similar to that of the Athenian council (*boulê*), draws individuals from throughout the citizen body to a single location and concentrates power in their hands. Inevitably, those who are located in this center have greater access to the levers of power and a better chance of having their voices heard. If we pursue the important difference between Athenian centralization and modern systems of representative democracy, we are even likely to judge the former more democratic. Members of the Athenian council, for instance, were chosen annually by lot, an arguably more democratic means of distributing office than the representative system of elections, which favors the elite both through the selection of candidates and through campaign donations. Moreover, whereas the representatives chosen through election are responsible for the actual creation of policy, the primary legislative responsibility of the council was to set the agenda for assembly meetings in which the assembled citizens were able to vote directly on policy and to offer a preliminary opinion. It was, of course, easier for those who lived within the city to attend these assemblies, and their influence was thereby likely to have been disproportionate. At a formal level, however, any citizen from throughout Attica could come and vote, and even speak, when policy was being made. This is undeniably more democratic than the elitist legislative sessions of a representative congress or parliament.

The relationship between Athens and its imperial dependents certainly fails to live up to the standards of democratic practice, but neither Thucydides nor Pericles claim that the Athenians rule their empire democratically. Pericles' claim is quite the opposite. He boldly asserts that the democracy rules over its empire as a collective autocrat, even like a tyrant, and yet understandably believes that this in no way hinders his characterization of the Athenian regime as itself democratic. Merely as a historical point, we can note that the most celebrated democracies of the western world have all been implicated in relations of external domination: post-revolutionary France; nineteenth-century Britain; twentieth-century America. Does this disqualify these governments from being democracies? If so, how are we to characterize their domestic governments, and how are we to differentiate what is owed to citizens and non-citizens by a democracy? If not, what makes Athens so different?

Regardless of the democratic status of Thucydides' Athens, we might still have very good reason to oppose the pursuit of greatness as a political end. Defined along Thucydidean lines, it is hard to see how this road will not lead to domination, violence, and suffering. To oppose the pursuit of greatness on these grounds, however, is to oppose it as inhumane, not as undemocratic, and it is worth asking whether there is a way that we might save greatness from its associations with imperial domination, and whether there is reason to believe that it is worth saving. Thucydides' text helps us to answer both questions in the affirmative. Pericles' Funeral Oration, in particular, offers a conception of democratic greatness that focuses most of its attention on the manner in which democratic citizens relate to another and to the city, not to their dependents. To combine freedom with restraint, community with tolerance, intellectualism with action, and, above all, individual advancement and enterprise with a concern for the collective good and an absence of envy would be truly great achievements. In Periclean Athens, and within Pericles'

oration, these were achievements that were undoubtedly embedded within a system of imperial domination, but they need not be in order to be upheld as democratic ideals.

It may be unclear what exactly we gain by framing the achievement of these ideals as the achievement of greatness. On account of this word's tendency to invoke thoughts of military conquest and imperial domination, one may think that it is better to avoid its use altogether. Something critical seems to be lost, however, when we drop this word from our political lexicon and conceive of the ideals of democratic citizenship merely in terms of moral or political obligation. There is an aspirational and emotive force to the term and to the sense of achievement that it carries with it that cannot be replicated in the language of legitimacy and duty. Many have yearned to be part of something great; far fewer have yearned to do what they should. Pericles, of course, masterfully combines both appeals in his exhortations to the Athenian people, and we might learn from his rhetorical strategy. If obligation suffices to promote democratic virtue in certain contexts, at other times there will be a need for citizens to aspire to something higher. This need will not simply vanish if greatness is omitted from political discourse by those who oppose relationships of domination and oppression. The language will continue to be used by others, and the psychological needs that encourage its use will find other means of satisfaction. Rather than try to deny that this will be so, it should be accepted and harnessed towards ends that promote democratic virtue and inspire citizenship in line with a truly worthy ideal.

Not everyone feels this reticence to use the language of greatness, or even to think about it in terms of empire and violence. Likewise, not everyone will balk at the idea that democracy might benefit from leadership that approaches Periclean autocracy. Such individuals may be more eager than others to look towards Thucydides' Athens as a model for squaring the autocratic-democratic circle. But Thucydides' text gives its readers reason to doubt the practicability of such a project, especially in the modern world. At the same time that it offers a vision of democracy that is compatible with autocratic deliberative leadership, it also suggests that the realization of this vision will be unlikely in most circumstances, and perhaps even impossible in others. Pericles was a unique figure: most capable in speech and action, his excellence was acknowledged not just by any particular party within Athens, but by the community at large. His quasi-autocratic leadership did not stem from the institutionalization of such leadership, nor simply from his desire to be such a leader. Cleon and Alcibiades existed within the same institutional framework and clearly wished to achieve Periclean supremacy, but their virtues were insufficient to achieve the Olympian position that Pericles commanded. To be a Pericles, and thus to foster the type of democratic greatness that Thucydides attributed to his rule, required an individual who possessed not only intelligence and status, but also an unimpeachable integrity and preference for the good of the city over any individual or party advantage. Though a skilled political speaker, he was—according to Thucydides—one who stayed above the political fray and kept an eye on the common good while forgoing the agonism of deliberative debate. He was a teacher of excellence, not just a skilled rhetorician, and his actions reinforced his words. The democratic community accordingly united organically around

his leadership. To produce such a leader, it is not sufficient to recognize that one is necessary. One must first have an individual who is worthy of such authority—a truly rare phenomenon.

Even if a figure as uniquely excellent as this were to exist within the modern world, it is hard to see how he or she might achieve the quasi-autocratic influence of a Pericles over the democratic community. In the United States, at least, a complex system of checks and balances exists to curb any individual from exerting absolute control over the deliberative and legislative process. At an institutional level, it may be easier for such leaders to arise within a parliamentary system, but there are further factors militating against their rise even within this institutional context. Periclean virtue was something that the Athenians would have had a chance to see and judge for themselves. Many Athenians would have had the chance to campaign with Pericles while he served as a general and to rub shoulders with him in the agora. Any citizen who liked could see him speak in the assembly. This was, we must expect, a critical aspect of their ability to correctly assess his value. In the modern world, however, the ability of the populace to judge the character and qualification of potential leaders occurs primarily through partisan channels and increasingly polarized sources of information. Our vision is always mediated, and often distorted, for better or for worse. Under such circumstances, it is hard to imagine that any figure, however meritorious, might get a fair assessment of his or her capacity, let alone organically unite the population. The need for aspiring politicians to identify with a party apparatus, the tribalistic impulse of most voters to support or oppose a candidate based on this affiliation, and the tendency to seek out information that confirms one's intuitions would seem to create an impossible set of obstacles for the rule of a Periclean leader. No individual exudes such excellence that he or she will be impervious to the partisan lens through which politics must now be viewed. Even in the presence of a Pericles, it seems that we would still be trapped in a dynamic of post-Periclean competition.

This being the case, it may seem obvious that we should forgo the temptations of greatness, give up on Periclean leaders, and work instead to encourage greater inclusion and equality within the deliberative process. But Thucydides problematizes the adequacy of this answer as well. His analysis of post-Periclean political decline gives us a point of reference from which to doubt whether the agonism of egalitarian deliberative procedures will prove conducive to the democratic good. For Thucydides' Athens, equality among deliberative voices proved not only detrimental to Athenian greatness; it destabilized the democracy, detracted from the pursuit of the public interest, encouraged corruption among the leadership, and ultimately led to civil war. Egoistic individuals shed the robes of citizens, and collective cooperation was sacrificed to competitive desire. We might again consider Pericles' critique of equality within the Spartan alliance:

...Some want as much vengeance as possible against some enemy, while others want as little damage done to their possessions as possible. Coming together only rarely, a fraction of their time together is spent considering what is of common concern, while the greater part is spent attending to personal matters; each thinks that their own negligence will not suffice to do any harm, and someone else will take care to look after [the common good] on their behalf; as a result, because

everyone individually entertains the same delusion, the collective destruction of the common goes unnoticed.<sup>7</sup>

It does not take an enormous imaginative ability to see in Pericles' pathologizing of deliberative equality a diagnosis of the ills faced by many modern democratic communities. After reading Thucydides, we should perhaps not be surprised that democratic equality has coincided with the prioritization of individual and group interests over those of the collective, and that this has in turn led to extreme polarization, an inability to compromise, and a willingness to sacrifice the well-being of one's opponents for the sake of partisan and personal gain.

It might be thought that such a state is unavoidable, as no such thing as the "common good" exists, only the aggregation of individual interests. However, we do not need to accept an inflated or metaphysical conception of the common good to recognize that the preservation of a political community where disagreement can be resolved through non-violent means is in the common interest. Some will perhaps deny this, preferring the violence of anarchy to the injustices of present institutions and norms. After reading Thucydides' description of Corcyrean *stasis*, however, or witnessing the civil wars of our own time, we have reason to doubt the responsibility of this position.

Thucydides' text, it may seem, helpfully problematizes the ability of either extensive deliberative equality or a quasi-autocratic deliberative leader to secure long-term democratic stability, but at the same time refuses to aid its reader in navigating between this Scylla and Charybdis. The reader is confronted not only with the tragic end of the Athenian democratic hero, but also the contingency and instability of his or her own political projects. In trying to find a footing from which to move forward, there may nevertheless be helpful lessons to be gleaned from Thucydidean political thought. Through both his own radical reconceptualization of Athenian democracy and the speeches that he attributes to Pericles, Thucydides teaches us that successful democratic thought demands not ideological purity, but the dexterity to navigate between apparent opposites. In being democratic, it need not dismiss all forms of inequality. In being progressive, it need not set itself in complete opposition to tradition. While it is impracticable and perhaps even counterproductive to aspire to Periclean dominance, it is possible and salutary to endeavor to emulate his creation of harmony from what others perceived as antitheses.

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<sup>7</sup> 1.141.7.

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