THUCYDIDES' SPARTA: LAW, PIETY, AND THE REGIME

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My dissertation investigates Thucydides' presentation of Sparta. By viewing the war through Sparta, one is confronted with debates on the moral dimensions of war. Sparta decries the imperialism of Athens as unjust and while the Athenians imply that such claims are merely Spartan 'hypocrisy' and therefore that Sparta does not truly take justice seriously, my study contends that the Spartan concern with justice and piety is genuine. While the Athenians present a sophisticated and enlightened view of what they believe guides all political actions (a view most scholars treat as Thucydides' own) my study argues that Sparta raises problems for key arguments of the 'Athenian thesis.' Through a closer study of Thucydides' Sparta, including his neglected Book 5, I locate details of both Sparta's prosecution of the war and their regime that must be considered before agreeing with the apparent sobriety and clear-sightedness of the Athenians, thus leading the reader into the heart of Thucydides' view of morality in both foreign affairs and domestic politics. A portion of this research is currently being prepared as an article-length study on the broad and important issue of hypocrisy in foreign affairs among states.

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PREFACE

This study of Thucydides arose out of an interest in the place that justice has in the foreign affairs between states during war. The issue of justice arises in response to questions and problems that Athenian imperialism in particular and imperialism in general ignite in a reader of Thucydides' account of the Peloponnesian War. Most readers of Thucydides today approach his text already sympathetic to Athens' point of view and the general tenor of their arguments: the strong rule the weak by necessity, everywhere and always; to expect states not to rule when they can is to expect human nature to be other than it is; even the gods would excuse human beings for acting as necessity dictates and therefore one may dispense with considerations of justice. Readers of Thucydides today come to his account having already been influenced, albeit indirectly, by his thought. Many today will encounter Thucydides while already holding assumptions about his "realism." And this realism disposes them to Athens rather than Sparta. Acceptance of the Athenian view, however, as the truth about war and politics does not dispense with our other reaction to it. Passionate objections to war, revolution, and civil war as unjust, repugnant, anger provoking, and thus worthy of our indignation because an offense to the human desire for freedom reminds us to be wary of temptations to accept the Athenian view of human affairs. Once we confront this reaction, a reaction that reveals our abiding concern with justice, we will notice that Thucydides' account presents Sparta more favorably than is often assumed. For with Sparta we first encounter passionate objections to the injustice of Athenian imperialism as an encroachment on the autonomy of Sparta and Greece as a whole. And when we begin to question the basis and justification for Athenian imperialism, we must confront Sparta's objections as well as the basis for their departure from the Athenian view.

Our interest in Thucydides' account of the Peloponnesian War can only be with a view to our attempt to discern the causes of war simply. Why participants engage in the sacrifice of their citizens, rather than discovering other means to resolve their grievances, is a permanent problem of politics and thus a permanent problem for political science. This is not to deny that both political actors and political science seek solutions to the origins and duration of war and thereby to eliminate its causes and conditions. Thucydides' account of what he regarded as the greatest war among the Greeks has therefore remained of interest for scholars investigating the history of Greece but also for scholars of political science. Thucydides' account is the depiction of the precise moment when an isolationist regime was compelled to confront an imperial one. Therefore international relations theory in particular looks to Thucydides as the first writer to lay bare some of the fundamental aspects of war between states. Something about Thucydides' account endures. Scholars today perhaps recognize what Thucydides himself argues regarding his own account – that it would be a possession for all times and that his pursuit of the truth would reveal political lessons of use not just for his own time, but for the future as well (1.22.4).[1]

The character of these political lessons is still debated. Numerous schools have interpreted Thucydides through different lenses and drawn competing conclusions as to his views on empire and freedom, justice and necessity, piety and its absence, democracy and tyranny, and of course Sparta and Athens.[2] Much of the scholarship on Thucydides within political science has focused on what is now called power politics or "realism" – Thucydides' account of the Peloponnesian War reveals in particular the compelling interests that political communities

[1] Citations of Thucydides refer to book, chapter, and sentence. However, in instances when the same book is cited in succession, I have dropped the book number and referred only to the paragraph and sentence. Quoted passages are based on the Crawley translation in Strassler's (1996) edition, but translations have been frequently modified to render them into English closer to the original Greek.

[2] In his Chapter One, Marinatos (1981) shows the manner in which fashionable theories of the day in the scholarship throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries were responsible for a number of shifts in the interpretation of Thucydides' intention and views.

attempt to secure through an exercise of their power or strength.[3] Justice or morality is not a consideration in sober calculations of how one should act when confronted with securing themselves against the encroachment of others. More recent scholarship though (within political theory in particular) has noted that Thucydides pays careful attention and is sympathetic to those cities that eventually take a stand against the continued expansion and encroachment of Athens.[4] Despite the prominence of Athenian imperialism (and the Athenians' arguments for it), he does not neglect those cities who protest the injustice of Athens. For far from being a realist in the contemporary sense, it is argued, Thucydides does not dismiss those claims as a mere pretext or naivety but places before his readers the challenge of discerning the proper weight to be given to these claims. Just as in political life itself, so in Thucydides' account, the reader is compelled to face the competing claims of the war's participants.

This inclination is largely lost for contemporary readers, influenced as they are both by a certain interpretation of Thucydides and also by Thucydides' students, Machiavelli and Hobbes. The view of Thucydides as a realist thus obscures to these readers the manner and degree to which Thucydides presents Sparta, and not Athens, as the city to be admired and emulated. Taking the weakness of justice for granted without locating the source of that weakness is to obscure Thucydides' most fundamental insights. Sparta therefore appears to exist in a deeper stratum of Thucydides' thought precisely because we are tempted to side with Athens and believe that Thucydides' view is their own. But acceptance of the Athenian point of view is not clearly identical with Thucydides' own view of the war. Thucydides presents the growth of

[3] Notably influential was Romilly's (1963) study of Athenian imperialism, pp. 98-104, 291-93, 306-07.
[4] The shift in the scholarship on Thucydides in this regard is indicated in one instance by the titles of two relatively recent, but competing, compilations of essays on his teaching: Morgenthau's (1978) *Politics Among Nations* has received scholarly response from Pangle and Ahrensdorf's (1999) *Justice Among Nations*. For a review of relevant scholarship that views Thucydides as a "realist," consult Ahrensdorf (1999) p. 212 n2. The scholarship that has established Thucydides' attention to the issue of justice includes: Ahrensdorf (1999), Bartlett (2001), Bolotin (1987), Bruell (1974), Burns (2010), Forde (1986, 1992), Orwin (1986, 1994), Palmer (1992), and Strauss (1964).

Greece as one of peoples beginning to settle, acquiring laws, and founding stable political communities less susceptible to the flux of former times, ruled as they were by piracy, tyranny, conquest and re-conquest (1.2-5). Only with a reprieve from this flux could cities begin to settle (12.1) and it is Sparta that receives the first mention by Thucydides of a people who founded a city with good laws while repelling tyrannical rule. Part of Sparta's founding also included a more communal equality among its citizens, shunning the disparities of wealth that arise everywhere between the few and the many (1.6.4). Apart from these considerations and with a view to the war itself, Thucydides states that it was Sparta's fear of Athens' continually expanding empire that led ultimately to the outbreak of the war. Yet it is the injustice of Athens' continually encroaching empire that leads Sparta's allies and the Spartans themselves to urge action against this encroachment (71.1, 86.1-4). And when Thucydides details the growth of Athens from a voluntary hegemony after the Persian War to an involuntary subjugation of these and other cities, we notice that the portrait of Athens is not clearly favorable. Is there nothing to support the claims of Sparta and their allies other than a lack of strength to stop Athens? Should the other cities not expect to enjoy autonomy from an empire that, while itself beginning as a bulwark against Persian encroachment, is now an encroachment which can no longer justify itself as simply defending against that threat?

To throw aside Sparta's claims as simply arguments of the weak is to deny without consideration the possibility of peaceful relations existing between political communities, and further, to deny without consideration the grounds of those claims for the peoples that make them (and thus to impose a denial of justice onto the divergent views of others). We need only consider the charges of illegitimate preemptive attacks, war crimes, and human rights abuses as violations of human dignity or nobility, as well as the excessive use of force (including disregard

for the manner in which war is conducted) to notice that a serious and abiding concern with justice animates *our* view of contemporary international affairs. And even a denial of justice as having any place in sober conduct of foreign politics requires a penetrating portrait of what justice is and why it has no such place. Such a portrait must therefore confront, in Thucydides' terms, the relation between justice and necessity, i.e. whether states are compelled to pursue their interests or whether they can be reasonably expected to refrain from these interests in cases when such pursuit will encroach on others. As we will come to see, Sparta and its view of the war is *the* challenge to Athens and its view, not merely as the main city that Athens is at war with, but as the city most exemplifying the opposing understanding of politics itself.

The purpose of this study is to investigate Thucydides' Sparta as the challenge to the Athenian view of politics. Of particular interest is the Athenian accusation that the Spartans simply call "justice" what is advantageous for Sparta (5.105.4). This remark (and its tone) implies both that this is an inadequate view of justice and also one that the Athenians themselves do not share. This claim is what we may call (and has been called by scholars) Sparta's "hypocrisy."[5] The Spartans claim that they are acting justly, but the Athenians accuse them of merely acting as all cities act – pursuing the interests of their city while masking these interests behind the claim of being just. Thus according to the Athenians, the Spartan demand that justice bear on politics is not genuine; the Spartans do not take justice seriously. The question of Spartan hypocrisy is therefore directly relevant to the question of whether any political community (or individuals) who make claims to justice are doing so from a genuine belief in justice or merely making such claims to excuse or mask the pursuit of their interests. To conclude without due consideration of Sparta and its view of the war, as well as possible reasons for initiating the war, that Sparta s professed concern with justice is mere hypocrisy is to reduce the seriousness with

[5] Details on this scholarship are discussed in Chapter II.

which we approach the issue of justice. As I argue, Thucydides does not take the Spartan view for granted and portrays it with more sympathy and complexity than most scholars appreciate.

That Thucydides is not a realist in the sense he is often taken to be nevertheless is not to deny that he presents a strong case for the motives of interest in the relation between states. But the compelling character of necessity is most clearly a problem when considering the view of the Spartans, particularly in explaining strategies and policies they adopt throughout the war that appear to hinder securing their victory over Athens or even reducing the present threat of Athens' unchecked growth. To reduce these actions to their interest, hypocritically pursued, is to minimize the strength justice may have in affecting the beliefs of the Spartans themselves. Throughout the war the Spartans reveal their concern with oaths (both amongst themselves and with others), the proper customary sacrifices before engaging on foreign campaigns, and obligations imposed by treaties, all of which are guided by an abiding concern with piety. Educated as we have been in realist interpretations of Thucydides, it perhaps appears foolish to admit to such a possibility. Yet even today the language of statesmen continually appeals to such claims even while admitting the needs of a state to secure its interests against foreign influence. And is not the open admission that a state is in fact pursuing its interests viewed as legitimate only when its interests are not morally inferior to the interests of other states, states that lack the moral superiority that would sanction the legitimacy of the very same interests? Nuclear states (especially liberal democracies) today would not admit any hypocrisy in continuing to possess nuclear weapons while denying this very right to other states. That those states denied such a right charge liberal democracies with hypocrisy does not lead to an admission by liberal democracies that their principles are less just; it receives as a response a justification of such a right, over and against that of others. During the Peloponnesian War the Athenian claim about

the Spartans implies (besides what we have mentioned) that one should not mask one's intentions behind such pretexts, but rather frankly state one's aims, even though there would seem to be manifest benefit in masking what could be perceived by others as injustice. Only Athens is notable for precisely this frankness, arguing that the relations between cities is dictated only by necessity – all cities will pursue their interests and to expect otherwise is naïve and foolish. This view however is neither that stated nor supported by those opposed to Athens, as evidenced by the accusations before the outbreak of the war – Athens is a tyrant city holding an empire unjustly. Sparta's declaration to be liberating Athens' subject cities gains the support of both their own allies and those cities seeking to live autonomous of the Athenian empire (2.8.4-5). Thus Sparta receives more support than the Athenian claim to be worthy of their empire and their claim that all cities are justified in securing their interests and would do so given the chance and the requisite strength (1.76.2-3).

What Sparta and Athens claim in speech may however be opposed by what they do in deed and thus the Athenian view of the true motivations behind political actions would still be sound. But that the Spartans were able to gain support does not explain *why* cities appeal to justice and autonomy in legitimating their actions, especially in declaring war; they could, on the Athenian view, simply declare war in the name of their interests, with no justification or pretext being necessary. Indeed, why Sparta sought any justification at all complicates the Athenian view. And this view also includes an appeal to justice by the Athenians themselves. For if all cities rule when and where they can, the Athenian claim of being *worthy* of their empire (deserving more due to a moral superiority of the principles *they* adhere to as a city) raises the question of what hold justice has over the expectations of all cities.

Given this difference, part of a consideration of the charge of hypocrisy against Sparta is what might be its cause and source – why Sparta does not state or agree this view, or as it has come to be called, the "Athenian thesis." Surprisingly, Thucydides' portrait is notable for the detail it offers of Sparta's domestic politics and the character of Spartans' leading statesmen, largely ignored by scholars due in part to the neglect of Book 5.[6] Although Thucydides is traditionally viewed as focusing on the relation between cities and therefore foreign relations, observations on domestic politics and the characteristics of differing cities are not absent from his account. From the Archaeology to the decay of Athens, Thucydides offers indications of how the domestic politics of Sparta and Athens are intimately related to each city's conduct of the war. Indeed, the details of each city prove to be of fundamental importance for understanding the overall war and Thucydides allows us to notice in what manner Sparta was a different city from Athens. Sparta was the city dedicated to the rule of law, to the strong adherence of each citizen to the regime, and as even the Athenians admit, the most virtuous city, where the individual acts most with a view to the (common) good of Sparta (5.105.4). Thucydides praises Sparta for the measured relations among their citizens and a moderation even in prosperity (1.6.4, 8.24.4).[7] Sparta is the only city during the war which does not experience profound domestic strife or civil war; and Sparta was not the imperialistic city that Athens was, but concerned with domestic stability and security rather than with expansion. Thucydides distinguishing Sparta from Athens raises questions as to the inevitability of imperialism that the Athenians and their thesis present. Further, Sparta is noticeable in lacking the daring that led Athens into ruin; Sparta seems to win the war not so much on its own as by Athens' failures, but these failures are due to civil strife at

[6] Details on this scholarship will be discussed in Chapter III.
[7] It is perhaps no accident (and quite striking) that Thucydides presents the Athenians' praise of the Spartans in the same part of their speech to the Melians where they boldly state their view of the divine, contradicting as it does the view of the pious Spartans.

home, where none existed in Sparta. Sparta therefore is of interest to us as a regime that appeals most emphatically to issues of justice and right, in contrast to the Athenians' appeals to necessity and compulsion.

When we begin to consider Thucydides' account of the war more closely, the view that his account is a vindication of Athens begins to appear problematic.[8] Thucydides praises Sparta and the Spartan virtues (in Spartans and in others) – an interpretation of Thucydides concentrating on Sparta reveals a subtlety in his account of the war that deepens our understanding of these virtues and Sparta's peculiar regime. But this subtlety only begins to come to light by considering what is most conspicuous – Thucydides' departure (especially in Book 1) from the chronology we would expect. As we will later observe, Thucydides will state his own view on the cause of the war in Book 1, but then follow this statement by a long discussion of the outbreak of the war, including its lead-up, accusations cast on either side, and a digression on the growth of Athenian imperialism. Thucydides' judgment on the cause of the war, Sparta's fear of Athenian imperialism (1.23.5-6), thus appears more as a puzzle than as a solution to our questions about the war, particularly in light of Sparta's professed cause of liberating Greece from Athenian imperialism (a claim we are only allowed to hear at the beginning of Book 2). Perhaps Thucydides intends his readers to begin from the Spartan point of view, i.e. that Athens is rightly to blame for starting the war and Sparta, due to their lack of imperial ambitions, is more just in their principles and conduct.

Thucydides' judgment on Sparta is also supported by his oft-noted concern with civil war as displayed in his famous accounts of the revolutions and civil wars in Corcyra and Athens, the latter ultimately leading to the defeat of Athens. Thucydides signals the importance of moderation and piety as civic virtues in his account of the Corcyraean revolution, noting in

[8] Cf. Romilly (1963) pp. 252-55, 257, 292.

particular their decay (3.84.3-8). Moderation and piety are presented as the political virtues that hold the community together; the best regimes in Thucydides' account have this feature, even the tyranny of the Pisistratids (6.54.5-6, 8.97.2). We must recall that according to Thucydides' own judgments Athens lost the war principally due to the factions in the city at a period in the war when their enemies began to advance with more vigor than at any other time (2.65.8-12, 6.15.2-4). If Thucydides unites his praise of Spartan piety and moderation with the effects of its loss at Corcyra, including especially how these virtues held the city and its citizens together, his case for Sparta is perhaps based not on their victory in the war (which he does not depict) but on the causes of Athens' defeat, compelling us to consider why Sparta refrained from the imperialism characteristic of Athens. As Machiavelli, who considered both the advantages and disadvantages of Sparta argues, their regime was unsuitable for empire and the virtues that maintained its stability were also those that did not allow for imperial expansion.[9]

Admiration of Sparta is a notable feature of modern political theory, particularly in the thought of Machiavelli and Rousseau. For both, Sparta stands as the exemplar of the ancient community and offered itself as a possible model for the new and modern world that each of these thinkers had a hand in shaping. While Machiavelli's judgment decides against Sparta (because it could not expand beyond a modest size and scale)[10] Rousseau offers the strongest praise of Sparta among modern political philosophers. Contrasting the ascendency of liberalism and its emphasis on the individual as the basis of modern natural right (particularly the thought of Hobbes and Locke), Rousseau looks to Sparta as *the* regime where the individual is wholly dedicated to the common good of the political community and possessed the civic virtues

[9] *Discourses on Livy* I.5.3. All primary sources are referenced by their standard pagination (e.g. Stephanus pages in Plato) or author's divisions (as used here for Machiavelli) when available. See the Bibliography for primary and secondary sources.
[10] Proietti (1981) pp. xi-xii.

required for sound political life. For the Spartans, the notion of the individual seems all but incomprehensible. So striking were the laws and institutions of Sparta for Rousseau because they appeared to be against human nature.[11] While the Athenians in Thucydides' account argue for self-interest openly pursued (thus sharing this characteristic with modern politics and the thought that formed it) the Spartans offer an example of the strength of ancient morality and possibilities for civic virtue at odds with the movement of modern political philosophy.[12] Fearing the weaknesses of modern citizens (raised on excessive liberty) and the consequences for civic virtue, Rousseau finds in Sparta the example of a morality rooted in law-abidingness and uncorrupted by the influence (as he viewed it) of philosophy and science, dedicated rather to cultivating the robust virtues required for citizens most beneficial to their regime.[13] Rousseau's praise also appears connected to an awareness of Thucydides' view that the domestic strife at Athens was in particular the cause of actions taken during the war that weakened their ability to succeed in Sicily and thus the larger war; it was "secret causes" that Thucydides does not allow us to notice easily that led to Athens' defeat. These causes are all the more notable for directing our attention away from the most noticeable causes of these events (the relations occurring within the cities).[14] It is here that Thucydides praises Sparta over Athens and therefore compels us to consider what distinguishes the two cities.

The foregoing remarks imply that Thucydides' account of the Peloponnesian War raises questions and confronts problems we may not have expected and not in the straightforward manner we may expect from an historical account. Any beginning point for a study of Thucydides must therefore contend with the continued debates over the status of his work as

[11] *Emile* Book I (p. 40 of Bloom translation). Cf. Plato *Republic* 419a1-420c4.
[12] *Letter to M. D'Alembert on the Theatre* (p. 32 of Bloom translation).
[13] Rousseau *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences* para. 24-25 (following Gourevitch's numbering of original paragraphs).
[14] Rousseau *Discourse on the Arts and Sciences: Replies* para. 41-46 (with Rousseau's footnote).

belonging to the genre or discipline we call "history." While it departs from our present purpose to discuss this issue at length (and since it has been aptly treated by others) the manner in which I approach Thucydides' text must be briefly considered to elucidate how this study of Sparta will proceed; for a neglect of the strange character of Thucydides' account of the war will otherwise interfere with understanding the subtlety in which he presents his Sparta and the Spartan view of the war.

Thucydides claims that his account is a possession for all times and this is not a claim one would expect from a modern historical account, except in so far as future readers might take some antiquarian interest in the historical event itself. But Thucydides' claim of permanence is tied to his claim that he is presenting the truth not merely of the Peloponnesian War, but of war as such (including the events leading up to its outbreak; the character of the cities involved; and the individuals leading each city or most involved in the movement of the war). However history today is animated by the importance of accuracy and precision – no one would consider an historical document accurate in which the author admitted to modifying or inventing the speeches of the most important envoys and statesmen (1.22.1). Even Thucydides' sacrifice of chronology is at odds with a properly written history of a particular state or war. One should begin at the beginning and include only those details which can be checked, corroborated, and verified. Yet even if there were other accounts of the Peloponnesian War, it is not obvious that Thucydides would have framed his account with any reference to them. Thucydides' account then is enigmatic as it continually disappoints or confounds the expectations of the modern reader.[15]

[15] Wallace (1964) raises all of these objections. R.G. Collingwood's influential *The Idea of History* (1946) served to further the view that history must proceed according to scientific laws and that Thucydides' account certainly did not qualify based on this criterion (p. 29).

In a recent account of Sparta from a classicist or historian perspective "Sparta and the Spartans in Thucydides," Cartledge and Debnar argue they are presenting evidence of Sparta and the Spartans in light of the shift in scholarship on Thucydides from the "compositionalist" view (that Thucydides wrote different parts of his account at different times and therefore inconsistencies, contradictions, and changes in his view abound throughout) to the view that Thucydides' account must be considered from a literary perspective.[16] This shift in how Thucydides is approached includes W. Robert Connor's influential book *Thucydides*, arguing persuasively that Thucydides' intention is guided by educating his readers and thus written in a manner that presented puzzles and questions to the reader. Following Hobbes' famous (yet for a time, long forgotten) statement on Thucydides' writing[17] Connor's study could not be denied by classicists and historians, further supporting Reilly's view that it was an error to approach Thucydides with the guiding assumption that his account of the war suffered from problems of composition and incompleteness.[18] But despite announcing their departure from the compositionalist thesis, Cartledge and Debnar's essay still focuses on some of the central compositionalist questions such as Thucydides' objectivity, terminology, sources and reports, before then turning to narrative and speeches, and to an account of individuals. And in each of these themes (contrary to a literary approach), their emphasis is placed on *what* Thucydides presents regarding Sparta rather than the *manner* in which he presents it (and thus how his

[16] Cartledge and Debnar (2006) pp. 559-587. For an overview of the scholarship that presents the compositionalist view, see Romilly (1963) pp. 1-9.

[17] Hobbes *The Peloponnesian War* 'Of the Life and History of Thucydides': "Digressions for instruction's cause, and other such open conveyances of precepts, (which is the philosopher's part), he never useth; as having so clearly set before men's eyes the ways and events of good and evil counsels, that the narration itself doth secretly instruct the reader, and more effectually than can possibly be done by precept."

[18] In discussing Book 5 in Chapter III, we will notice that Romilly (1963) does not entirely depart from the compositionalist view – she argues that Book 5 is indeed incomplete and thereby disregards many of the problems that it raises, since that book does (as she notes) introduce a number of problems when contrasted with Thucydides' presentation of the war during the first ten years. Similarly, Connor (1984) p. 231 does not deny that the work is incomplete, but does deny that this fundamentally detracts from the text.

presentation might guide our understanding of his Sparta). Their approach and interpretation is therefore informative to show how compositionalist questions find their way into interpretations of Thucydides. It will also allow us to present evidence that such an approach fails to give due weight to or even to consider.

The authors begin by noting the significant shift in Thucydides scholarship after the "literary turn" which they define as the thesis that "*how* a historian says what he says can now seem to matter quite as much as *what* he says" (560 – emphasis in original). They are correct to note this renewed focus on Thucydides' presentation of his account of the war. But their own study turns largely to discussing questions of Thucydides' "objectivity" and his possible sources for information on Sparta. Only in the section of their study dealing with the narrative of Sparta and Thucydides' imputation of motives (along with possible sources) do they imply a response to the literary turn thesis. While not mentioning this change in scholarly understanding, they suggest that Thucydides did not invent narrative events and that he would refrain from drawing conclusions (about Sparta or the Spartans) when he lacked reliable source information (568). If this view is correct, we may be forced to conclude that the amount of space Thucydides dedicated to an event or character reflects the information at his disposal. There are two issues here: first, Thucydides could also have had other information that he chose not to include in his account because it did not serve his purpose. The existence of information or sources for his claims cannot therefore be a measure of what he chose to discuss. Second, Thucydides could have written his account in such a manner that he made clear precisely his sources or lack thereof when they were completely absent; he could have stated that an important matter is said to have taken place but that he could not ascertain the truth of the matter. In the very example that Cartledge and Debnar use in this context (that of Sparta's secrecy regarding its battle formation,

discussed by Thucydides in Book 5) Thucydides admits that it was difficult to know precisely the number of men who died in the battle (5.74.3). But he does offer a calculation of the number of troops *engaged* in the battle because of the precise order the Spartans employed (5.68.1-3). In other words, Spartan secrecy was not always successful. And more important for our present argument, Thucydides states what he did not know with enough certainty to ultimately determine. As for the possible imputation of motives and any connection this may have to Thucydides' "source information," could Thucydides have known the motives from firsthand information regarding any of his characters? Did he not have to interpret their motives from their speeches (when they gave them) and from their actions? No one would claim (and Thucydides does not) that he interviewed every individual in the war, particularly those whom he presents as having distinctly private motives, yet he makes claims about the private motives and desires and ambitions of his characters throughout.[19]

Cartledge and Debnar also argue that Thucydides' reticence may be due to editorial choice or lack of sources or lack of interest in modern questions (568). These are obviously competing claims, but in enumerating some of the questions that *they* are concerned with, perhaps an answer emerges to our approach to Thucydides. Cartledge and Debnar express disappointment that we do not have information about numerous aspects of Sparta: their connections abroad, certain individuals such as Meleas at Mytilene, and how the Spartans financed the war. Further, they also note some of the details of Thucydides' account of Pylos (where a Spartan contingent became surrounded by the Athenians on the island of Sphacteria, just off the coast from the city of Pylos), but then argue that Thucydides does not "explain fully" why the Spartan authorities decided that the situation at Pylos was hopeless (569). Thus they

[19] In Chapter IV especially, we will discuss the motives, desires, and views of the Melians, Nicias, and Brasidas.

conclude not only that we lack information from Thucydides about the Spartan regime, but also about political and military aspects of Sparta as well.

In considering how one may treat these objections, we begin with their statement on Pylos that Thucydides did not "explain fully." In this instance, Thucydides appears to present the matter at Pylos from the Spartan point of view, since he does not openly pass judgment on their decision. Perhaps he leaves it to the reader to decide why the Spartan authorities believed that the situation was hopeless and why the return of their men took on such importance for Sparta that it dominates Sparta's prosecution of this period of the war. Certainly their decision stands out by contrast to their heroic reputation, forged as it was due to their actions at Thermopylae. But Thucydides alludes to Thermopylae precisely in this very context (4.36.3), while also repeating that the Spartans' abiding concern was the return of their men trapped on the island, shocking as their capture was for them (4.40.1, 5.14.3). Thus the reader is compelled to ask why this was their abiding concern, as Thucydides' repetitions urge us to do (4.41.3, 108.7, 117.1, 5.15.1). This concern stands out by the importance that the Spartans place on it; we cannot imagine the Athenians suing for peace after losing such a relatively small number of men, even of their first or best men. And while Cartledge and Debnar are correct to note that we do not garner an abundance of information on Sparta's domestic situation from Thucydides' account, perhaps there is more there than first appears.[20] For such an understanding of Sparta (and thus a

[20] One could also make this claim about Athens. We have to figure out precisely why Pericles is trusted by the demos, for Thucydides' explanation that he could quiet them and even use contradictions, is not an obvious explanation (2.65.8). And besides Pericles, it is in the preparations for the Sicilian expedition, including the motives for its undertaking, that the domestic situation in Athens receives more attention. But the attention there and throughout Book 8 is explained by the fact that Thucydides states in his own name that domestic discord in Athens was the cause of their losing the war. This too requires understanding and bringing together numerous considerations including: the significance of the loss in Sicily, the occupation of Decelea by the Spartans, the charges against Alcibiades, and the shifting regimes within Athens near the end of the war. The Athenians would not have failed in Sicily had Alcibiades been in charge and the Spartans would not have sent Gylippus to Sicily nor Agis to Decelea had it not been for Alcibiades. On the importance of Alcibiades to Athens and the events late in the war, see Forde (1989).

resolution to the incident at Pylos and other complexities of the Spartans' prosecution of the war), one would have to consider Pausanias, Archidamus, Alcidas, Brasidas, the revealing but neglected Book 5 as a whole, as well as Agis and Gylippus late in the war. Once we become alert to what Thucydides *does* present regarding Sparta, we notice that he leaves clues for us to explain fully what kind of city Sparta was and what kind of men they cultivated. We are allowed to hear the traditional Archidamus appeal to the Spartan education and the virtues it inculcates; we are allowed to see the appreciation for Brasidas by the Spartans followed not long after by the envy that his successes aroused as well as Spartan indifference to his objectives when they wanted peace (i.e. alleviation from necessities of war and return of men); we are allowed to further notice the problems for Sparta in Book 5 including the restrictions that piety placed on their foreign policy, the failures of Agis in prosecuting the war, and the tension that existed between the king's hereditary position and the Ephors' authority over him; we are allowed to see that the laws that formed the Spartan character and that were the source of the education Archidamus praised were the same laws that governed their conduct in battles, governance that Thucydides quietly notes Brasidas did not employ. While this is not to argue that Thucydides replaces the clarity we gain from a treatise such as Xenophon's, it is to suggest that for Thucydides' purposes and the education of his readers we learn much about Sparta and the Spartans from his presentation and the contrast that it offers to Athens and the Athenians.

For we also cannot neglect that the praise of other characters such as Demosthenes or Alcibiades is striking when we compare their qualities with those of Archidamus or Alcidas, Agis or Gylippus; or when we consider the shortcomings of Sparta's prosecution of the war when compared even with their own Brasidas. Thus while Cartledge and Debnar argue that Brasidas is one of the most enigmatic characters in Thucydides, we must hesitate at their

conclusion that we do not know what Brasidas' political goals might have been and that his apparent desire for personal glory "does not preclude more ambitious aims" (aims which they do not attempt to elucidate – 573). Further, while according to Cartledge and Debnar Agis "remains remote" as to his place in the war and in Sparta, they do not treat those actions that Thucydides does relate, including his policies before and during the battle of Mantinea, his hesitation to enter battle due to the customary sacrifices holding Sparta back, his post at Decelea late in the war, and how his hatred for Alcibiades might have figured into his strategic and policy decisions as one of Sparta's kings. Without investigating what Thucydides does offer, they are led to the assumption that Lysander would have been included in Thucydides' account of the Spartans if he had completed his account (584).

We may begin by wondering what we do learn from Thucydides' depiction of Spartan individuals. Brasidas is praised for his virtue and intelligence, as well as his gentleness and daring (4.81.2). It is his daring that Thucydides presents as most surprising to the Athenians in his advances, as this quality was not expected from a Spartan. And perhaps this exceptional quality is in keeping with the remarks of the Corinthians and Thucydides' explicit judgment late in his account that the two cities' characters were most different and it is the daring and inventiveness of the Syracusans that allowed them to defeat the Athenians (1.70.1, 8.96.5). If necessary, one could consider Xenophon's presentation of Lysander, a commander at odds with Sparta but also more successful in carrying out the conclusion of the war. Yet such a portrait is not required to raise the question of the relation between outstanding Spartans and the city – Brasidas provides this portrait.[21] One side of Thucydides' presentation of Brasidas therefore bids

[21] Similarly, Wasserman (1964) p. 294 looks to Xenophon's Lysander in an attempt to explain Thucydides' Brasidas, thereby not fully considering Thucydides' account.

the reader to raise questions about how and why the most effective Spartan commander is also at odds with Sparta both regarding policy initiatives and aims, as well as the desire for war.

In focusing on issues external to Thucydides' text, Cartledge and Debnar lose sight of the significance of Sparta for us and, in my view, the reasons why Thucydides presents Sparta and their view of the war in the manner he does. Rather than reading the text from what is contained within it, they approach it with questions of their own (as they admit) instead of allowing the themes, problems, and judgments of Thucydides to present themselves and direct our reading, however laconic he may first appear in his presentation. Only by understanding Thucydides' account of the war, including the different cities involved and the character of those cities, may we begin to consider his possible answers to how a "history" such as his can be informative and provide guidance for us today.

Since Thucydides states that his account was to reveal the truth, could we not rather raise the simple question whether he did not believe that the first twenty-one years of the war served *that* purpose and therefore that we know what he wants us to know about Sparta and Athens, the causes for the beginning and end of the war, and when carefully considered, something about the nature of war and politics itself? For it is due to the apparent incompleteness of Thucydides' account, ending where it does, that leads scholars such as Cartledge and Debnar to find other themes, questions, and problems as left untreated. However, it seems an error to assume without evidence that Thucydides' account of the war is incomplete (both in ending where it does and in lacking details that scholars continue to expect) simply because he ends it before the final defeat of Athens. For besides the fact that he leaves out other details that some scholars might expect (for example, the Megarian Decree) he also claims that his account is a possession for all times. Since it is intended to be a possession for all times, meaning that it will aid us in understanding

war and politics in the future, Thucydides could not simply be concerned with detailing every event that occurred during the Peloponnesian War. In failing to cover the final seven years of the war he may be doing no more than refraining from accounting for those years that had no fundamental effect, in his view, on what the war could reveal about war as such, as well as politics and human nature.[22] And for a consideration of Sparta we must begin by investigating what Thucydides *does* present, to discern his view on how the Spartan understanding of the war may reveal important details both about the war and about politics generally that we overlook by only focusing on Athenian imperialism and the Athenian view.

This of course is not to deny the importance of that view and of the nature of imperialism. To this end Chapter I treats Book 1, especially the growth of the Athenian empire, the cause of the war as Thucydides states it, the speeches arguing both for and against the war, as well as Pericles' response to the Spartan decision to declare war. Here we also notice firsthand how Thucydides' account proceeds, including his subtle but discernible praise of Sparta. Indeed, the question of the differing characters of each city itself arises, both through the so-called Archaeology and through the claims of the Corinthians as they are attempting to spur the Spartans to war.

With Chapter II, the incident between Plataea and Thebes is investigated including Sparta's involvement. This incident is the source of many scholarly accusations of hypocrisy on the part of the Spartans. However the details of the incident, including especially the arguments of all three cities in their speeches, are more nuanced than is often noticed. Further, a consideration both of the Athenians' treatment of the Mytilenians, as well as how each city prosecutes the war during this period, proves vital to understanding the differences in each city's

[22] Hobbes *The Peloponnesian War* 'To the Readers': "…the principle and proper work of history being to instruct and enable men, by knowledge of actions past, to bear themselves prudently in the present and providently towards the future."

view and actions. For understanding Sparta, this is especially brought out by their loss at Sphacteria and what it teaches us about their foreign policy and success in combating Athens.

Chapter III discusses Thucydides' neglected Book 5. Due to the abrupt shift in style of this book, most scholars fail to pay proper attention to what may be Thucydides' purpose, focusing only on the so-called Melian Dialogue. For our purposes, this book considered anew reveals a focus on Sparta and offers details of their domestic politics as it affects their prosecution of the war during this nominal time of peace. The debates over obligations of a new treaty and alliance with Athens, conflicts with their allies, the battle of Mantinea, and policy disagreements within Sparta itself (leading to a new law regulating how their king conducts affairs away from home) all bear careful consideration for our concern with understanding Sparta.

Chapter IV studies Thucydides' "characters" as those that most manifest the Spartan view: the Melians, Nicias, and Brasidas are all investigated as differing instances of this view, yet ones that all reveal something about Sparta and the character of individuals who share and act on their understanding of the war. Here we are confronted with the Athenian most exemplifying the Spartan view of the war, Nicias, as well as a Spartan rare for his departure from Sparta and sharing something of the Athenian character, Brasidas. The Spartan concern with piety, moderation, and justice, or virtue generally, is revealed by Thucydides through these statesmen. And with the Melians, Thucydides presents a city that most noticeably argues for the injustice of Athens' imperial ambitions. This argument includes the invocation of the gods who protect the just against the encroachments of the unjust. And besides the claims of the Melians themselves, we also are able to hear the Athenians directly confront the Spartan view of both war and human nature. In addition, it is during this dialogue that the Athenians both praise the Spartans as

virtuous citizens yet also make clear their view that Spartan appeals to justice are merely a pretext to disguising interests that all cities, including Sparta, seek. It is the intention of this study, in both considering the most lauded aspects of Thucydides' account and those that have received only criticism and neglect, to show that a detailed concentration on Sparta will further illuminate that city, the course of the war, and further clarify Thucydides' teaching on politics.

CHAPTER I

SPARTA AND ATHENIAN IMPERIALISM

The investigation of Thucydides' portrait of Sparta and the Spartans is necessary to our understanding of justice in his account of the Peloponnesian War in particular and of political life in general. Sparta is the city more clearly concerned with justice than Athens and this concern will affect every aspect of the war itself. The outbreak of the war and its movement are directly affected by the Spartan understanding of justice, both from the point of view of the Spartans themselves and also of Thucydides. The Spartans charge the Athenians with breach of the treaty that was intended to ensure thirty years of peace between the two major powers in Greece, a charge that they themselves will reconsider later in the war, and have clear effects on the course of the war. Regardless of what we believe or decide Thucydides' own view to be on the place of justice in war and political life in general, the investigation of the Spartans' own beliefs regarding justice is the starting point in which Thucydides places the reader in the early stages of his account. And despite the injustices they have been charged with by Sparta and its allies, the Athenian envoys at Sparta largely deflect the issue of injustice, instead offering a justification of Athenian imperialism that is shocking in its boldness and frankness and that argues that no city has ever refrained from acting against their own interests out of a concern with justice.

Spartan fear of the growing Athenian empire is the truest cause according to Thucydides, but the Spartans and their allies will charge Athens with breach of the treaty, with injustice against them, and generally, with the subjugation of all of Greece – Athens has become the tyrant city of Greece. Those who began as Athens' allies during the Persian War to fight off the Persian attempts to expand their empire, have become the subjects of the Athenian empire. Thucydides'

account of Sparta beginning from the so-called Archaeology ("account of the beginnings") and through Book 1 portrays not only the actions leading up to the war with Athens, but also the beginnings of each city, their differing characters and regimes, as well as the manner in which each city responded to the hostilities leading up to the war.

In this chapter we will investigate the arguments and actions leading to the eventual outbreak of the war. Sparta will charge Athens with breaching the treaty and hence injustice by expanding their empire, while the Athenian response includes their justifications for imperialism that most contrast with the Spartan view. One is naturally inclined to the Spartan view, even as one is also somehow aware of the weakness of that view. If justice is in fact weak or ineffectual in politics, the Spartan claims still must be understood to locate both why justice is weak and why Sparta holds so strongly to their view despite this apparent weakness.

Sparta's Beginnings

Thucydides' first mention of Sparta, as well as his observation near the end of the war, connects Sparta with moderation. In the Archaeology, the Spartans are the first to adopt a "measured" (*metrios*) way of life, in their dress and in the relation between the rich and poor within the city (1.6.4). Sparta lacks the adornments of Athens, and Thucydides argues that little to no relics of Sparta would be left behind to suggest their power as a city (10.2). Indeed, Sparta is closer to ancient times than Athens, their city being comprised of villages. Sparta is characterized more by an approximation to these times than Athens; they did not lack the wealth that Athens first enjoyed, but the wealthy began to assimilate themselves to the way of life of the many. They moderated themselves to reduce or eliminate the distinction between rich and poor. And they were also "moderate" (*sophrosyne*) in prosperity as a city (8.24.4). Thucydides is cautioning the reader against being enamored with the magnificence of Athens. While Athens

became a naval people, the Spartans dealt with factions owing to the virtue of the soil in the Peloponnesus and the resulting fights over the land. Sparta was the first city to have good "laws" (*nomos*) and maintained the same regime (*politeia*) for four hundred years leading up to the Persian invasion of Greece.

While many coastal cities battled the piracy that Thucydides argues characterized this time, the Spartans were able to avoid this threat and found a stable regime. Thucydides notes that piracy was not considered "shameful" (*aischros*) in these times, but understood simply as a means of survival (5.1-2). It is only after the colonization of islands by Minos that Thucydides speaks of those involved with piracy as "evildoers" (*kakoyrgoi*) that threatened these coastal populations (1.8.3); piratical activity is referred to as morally reprehensible once walled cities were founded and peoples began to live a settled way of life. The first glimpse of notions of justice only arises once the cities begin to form and both the basic necessities or interests are supplied and luxury is also possible (8.2-3). And it is in seeking to protect the interests of a founded and settled way of life that these new cities label piracy as "unjust." As for the cities themselves, both Sparta and Athens ceased the practices of the barbarians which included the carrying of arms as a means of protection. And each city adopted a particular way of life differing from the other, including especially their regimes. Thucydides notes that it was Sparta's regime which will become the source of their strength (18.1); they avoided the tyrannies that characterized much of the rest of Greece; they were the supreme power at the outbreak of the Persian War due to their regime, while the Athenians relied on their wealth and naval abilities to subject other cities throughout Greece.

The Athenians were compelled to leave Athens and become a naval people during the Persian invasion possibly due to the presence of piracy in early times. Piracy brought instability

to those cities easily accessible by sea. The Spartans' position on land would have allowed them to avoid what Thucydides argues was this most problematic feature of antiquity – this instability leading to lack of growth or allowing cities to acquire greatness (2.2, 5.1, 12.1). Sparta was one of the first cities to civilize and find peace from the smaller wars that characterized ancient times.

The war was initiated by the Persians yet Sparta's power on land allowed them to take the lead in defeating the Persians. But the alliance that Sparta had with Athens during this period was short lived, as each city had allies that went over to the competing sides once a united Greece began to quarrel amongst themselves following the Persian defeat (18.2-3). Sparta set up regimes friendly to their interests, namely, oligarchies; Athens on the other hand exacted tribute from their allies in the form of money, while also reducing their navies. And Thucydides notes that this policy, specifically their dissolution of alliance with each other, increased the strength of each to such a degree that each city (with its allies) was alone greater than the alliance they had established together for the sake of defeating the Persians (19).

Pretexts and Causes

It is here that Thucydides' account shifts contrary to the reader's expectations. The outbreak of the Peloponnesian War occurs due to the growth of the Athenian empire after the Persian War. And yet Thucydides does not describe this growth following the Archaeology – chapters 20-88 instead detail the fifty year period (480-430) following the Persian War of the growth of the Athenian empire. Here, Thucydides turns to considerations one would have expected as a sort of prologue to his account; the next few chapters are a discussion of his manner of writing and then, before describing Athens' imperial growth, he states his own opinion on the cause of the war. Upon closer consideration this is not a relic of the order in which he wrote his account, but rather presents the war to the reader with a particular purpose.

After concluding the Archaeology, he notes the policy of Sparta and Athens with regard to their allies and thus the regime of each city. He then turns to a story regarding an Athenian tyrant as proof of his contention that most traditions passed down are simply believed by those who hear them, rather than being considered carefully and that most do not attempt to consider the truth of such traditions. Following this claim, he considers the accuracy of the poets (the source of the traditional stories that he has alluded to) and adds to this a description of his own procedure in writing the speeches in his account of the war. From here he moves to considering the differences of the Persian War and the Peloponnesian War, including not only the vastly greater sufferings of the Peloponnesian War itself, but the sufferings that befell both sides as the result of earthquakes, famines, the plague, and the like. And we then discover his own opinion on the cause of the war after the dissolution of the Thirty Years' Peace treaty, a treaty which he mentions here for the first time. This treaty between Athens and Sparta was broken by Sparta due to the growth of Athenian power which, instilling "fear" in the Spartans, made war inevitable (23.6). How are we to account for this sequence of events, which not only lacks the chronology one would expect from an account of a growing empire and the war resulting from it, but also the seemingly irrelevant details regarding catastrophes that he places in this very context?

Returning to where the chronology of his account breaks off and considering Thucydides' order of presentation, we notice the following sequence: tyranny, poetic accounts of the past, speeches, greatness of Peloponnesian War, catastrophes and other phenomenon. This particular ordering is telling. Immediately after discussing inaccurate knowledge of the past and claiming that his work will be a possession for all time, i.e. not simply a chronological account of this war, but somehow revealing the truth about human affairs everywhere and always, Thucydides argues for the greatness of the Peloponnesian War and includes in this earthquakes, eclipses, droughts,

famines, and especially the plague. And these catastrophes are then followed by Thucydides' statement regarding what he understands regarding the cause of the Peloponnesian War. He argues that the "truest pretext" (*alethestaten prophasis*), Spartan fear of the growth of the Athenian empire, was not openly avowed (1.23.5-6). Further, there were also "causes" (*aitia*) alleged by either side. These causes that were openly avowed are the accusations or blame that each city directs against the other, *aitia* translating either "blame" or "cause." This passage is difficult as it is not clear why Thucydides employs both pretext and cause in this way – one's expectation would be that pretexts are those causes which are openly avowed on either side as a justification for waging war and that there is only one cause of the war, avowed or not. To suggest that there is a hidden pretext that is in fact the cause of the war would seem to imply that pretexts, whatever they may be, could be true, i.e. motivating, for those who claim them, although this may not always be the case.[23]

The distinction between a true and professed cause is a key consideration in understanding the outbreak of the war since the eventual decision of the Spartans to wage war against Athens is apparently decided based on the arguments of the Spartan ephor Sthenelaidas, who does not mention fear or advantage, but accuses the Athenians of doing "injustice" (*adikeo*).[24] The professed causes become as true as the true causes, since without these professed causes or "pretexts" the actions of cities may not be possible. The professed causes of war by any city or state, their public statements, always appeal to the (perceived) justice of their cause.[25] There is no doubt that the Spartans blame the Athenians for starting the war by accusing them of a breach of the treaty, of an injustice. For Thucydides the professed cause, that which is made

[23] Consider 5.53 where Thucydides uses *prophasis* in the sense of an openly avowed reason for going to war. Cf. Orwin (1994) pp. 213-14; Burns (2010) p. 50 n21.
[24] This is not to deny that his speech also appeals, though not as loudly, to the interests of Sparta, particularly their allies. Cf. Orwin (1994) p. 58 with n55.
[25] "For without a pretext, no war follows." Hobbes (1989) p. 582.

public, appeals to justice and seems to be required for a city to initiate open war against another. And when one considers that Sparta's accusation against Athens occurs within the context of Thucydides directing our attention to sufferings throughout the war that were possibly not of human origin, the suggestion seems to be that we do not know for certain whether these catastrophes are natural, i.e. follow natural, knowable necessity, or whether they are not sufferings caused by the gods as punishments for acts of injustice.[26] The question of the cause of the war for Thucydides is bound up with the question of whether necessity or just gods intervene in human affairs and thus will punish either Athens or Sparta for starting the war. This suggestion is strengthened if we consider Thucydides' account of civil war. There, he indicates that civil war undermines piety and divine law and that human nature rebels against all laws (3.82.5-84.3). In the Archaeology, it was Sparta that was said to have good laws and later that they were a prosperous and moderate regime. But if Sparta was compelled by Athens to start the war, then Athens would be the one responsible and thus incur blame and possibly punishment by the gods that support the oaths of solemnly sworn treaties and punish their breach.[27] Yet if Athens was somehow compelled to engage in their imperialism, then they would perhaps be exculpated from Sparta's charges against them.

In further considering Thucydides' order of presentation, we had also observed his claim regarding the inaccuracy of the past and his use of the example of an Athenian tyrant to illustrate this misunderstanding – what is the significance of this tyranny as an example of a misunderstanding of the past? Later, in correcting the inaccuracy of this story, Thucydides

[26] Furley (2006) p. 422-23 argues that Thucydides "emphasizes the great disasters that happened with unprecedented frequency and intensity during the war, but their relevance in context is more to the increased suffering they caused to the affected populations than their significance as tokens of 'cosmic' disorder." This interpretation does not address the fact that Thucydides notes these occurrences immediately before stating in his own name the cause of the war. Cf. Strauss (1964) p. 151 who argues that eclipses are not disasters but may seem to signal a disaster.
[27] Orwin (1994) p. 58 notes: "Like all treaties, this one rested on the most solemn oaths: the very word for treaty (*spondai*) refers to these oaths."

argues that that tyranny was in fact not harsh, but moderate and gentle (6.54.5-7). In other words, the question of the possibility of an Athenian empire that rules Greece moderately is implicitly raised, for Pericles himself later admits that the Athenian empire is so to speak a tyranny (2.63.2). While the juxtaposition is not precise since the moderate tyranny of Hippias was "domestic" and that of Athens "foreign," we may wonder whether the Athenians could rule their empire moderately.

Athenian Imperialism

Before investigating the Athenians' claims regarding their empire as well as the accusations openly stated against that empire by Sparta (and others) in more detail, we will turn to the fifty year period of the growth of the Athenian empire to observe its character and in particular Sparta's response, as the actions by each city will be integral to the arguments that the allies on each side advance.

While Sparta began this period as the supreme power in Greece, their leading commander Pausanias drove away their allies due to his "violent" (*biazetai*) actions (95.1). This led to Athens becoming supreme; those who grew to hate Pausanias voluntarily allied themselves instead with Athens (96.1). From this time until the Peloponnesian War, the alliance of Athens with various cities across Greece developed. Athens engaged in attacks against the barbarians, against their own allies who revolted, as well against enemies from the Peloponnesus. We note the shift in Thucydides' account here – the supremacy of Athens began as voluntary but here in Thucydides' list of the three actions of Athens, the central one points to allies now in revolt from Athens. Thucydides calls his discussion here a "digression," required it seems by the inaccuracy of previous accounts of the past that have not made this growth clear. This digression is a preface to a shift, since whereas Thucydides had spoken of Athenian "supremacy" (*hegemonia*), i.e.

Athenian hegemony (97.1), he now speaks of the origins of the Athenian "empire" (*arche* – 97.2). The shift from hegemony, or the head of an alliance, to empire is due to the subjugation of allied cities, rather than the previous freedom that their allies enjoyed (97.1, 98.4). Allied cities revolted due to a desire not to pay tribute to Athens, but since wealth was the source of Athenian power, they did not easily let their subjects go but rather subjected them to "necessity" (*ananke*). Athenian imperialism compelled many cities to submit to its demands. It was the Athenian *empire* rather than simply its being the supreme city in Greece that was the cause of the war because it was the cause of the Spartan fear of them.[28] And the Spartans, after Pausanias had been recalled by Sparta for his actions abroad, were not willing to send out another commander, fearing that another would be corrupted and resort to the actions of Pausanias (95.7). Athens expanded its empire largely unimpeded.

At this time the Spartans were involved in a war with rebels from Ithome in the Peloponnesus, but unable to subdue them, they requested aid from the Athenians. While Athens had taken over as the supreme city in Greece, hostilities had not yet developed between the two cities. Therefore Athens agreed to aid the Spartans, but the "daring and innovating" (*to tolmepov kai ten neoteropoiian*) character of the Athenians was of concern to them,[29] for they feared the Athenians might attempt something within the Peloponnesus. However Sparta did not advance this as the reason for dismissing the Athenians, but claimed rather that they were no longer in need of aid to deal with the rebels. The Athenians though, being aware of this, left offended and broke off the alliance that they had with Sparta, the alliance that still existed at this time when the two cities fought together against Persia. And as Thucydides notes, this was the first open quarrel between Athens and Sparta (102.3) and led to the Athenians developing a "hatred"

[28] Strauss (1964) p. 181; Bruell (1974) p. 14.
[29] For a discussion of the significance of *tolma* in Thucydides' account, see Forde (1986) and (1989) pp. 17-19.

(*echthos*) for the Spartans (103.3). While the offense the Athenians felt at the Spartans' actions is not surprising generally, it does raise questions about the Athenians' adherence to their own stated arguments later at Sparta. For the Athenians claim to act according to what is most advantageous to Athens. Yet their reaction as Thucydides presents it implies that they felt slighted by Sparta – they offered their services to Sparta in suppressing the revolt at Ithome and were summarily dismissed. The Spartans seems to lack consideration for the Athenians' willingness to offer assistance; they did not recognize that Athens was acting not in their own interests, but for the sake of Sparta. For the Athenians, this departure from their interests is a sacrifice of these interests, but the Spartans do not reward the Athenians with the proper honor for doing so. The Athenian hatred that results is due to their honor being offended – they expected a reward for their selfless actions. And the Athenian envoys will admit that the Athenians were not without concern for honor; it was one of the motivations for maintaining and expanding their empire (75.3). As a result, the Athenians occupied Megara due to the Megarians being displeased with the Corinthians, Sparta's allies. And thus the Corinthians now grew to hate the Athenians for this action, a hatred that will manifest itself in the main actions before the outbreak of the war.

The rebels at Ithome would surrender to the Spartans, but the Spartans were gentle and allowed them to leave the Peloponnesus due to an old oracle from Delphi with which they compiled (103.1-2). And while the Athenians continued their expansion after this incident, the Spartans were characterized by inaction or failure (108.1-3, 109.2-3, 112.5, 114.2).

Actions and Speeches: At Athens

The growth of the Athenian empire culminates in the actions at Epidamnus and Potidaea, placing Athens in direct conflict with Corinth, and eventually Sparta.

Epidamnus was a colony of Corcyra, but Corinth was its mother country. When factions arose within Epidamnus and barbarians took advantage of these factions by siding with the people and expelling the rulers, the rulers sent for aid from Corcyra. With Corcyra refusing to intervene, they appealed to the god at Delphi about whether they should involve the Corinthians, the god advising them to do so. The Corinthians agree to offer assistance out of duty and a hatred for Corcyra, as they believed the Corcyraeans had not honored them as a colony should. However in the repetition of Corinth's reasons for assistance, Thucydides drops any mention of a sense of duty on the part of the Corinthians (26.1; cf. 25.3). The Corcyraeans, following an attempt to place Epidamnus' rulers back at the head of the city, offers the Corinthians the chance to leave or to send the dispute to arbitration, including referring the matter to the god at Delphi. As neither side is willing to withdraw, arbitration is not accepted, and Thucydides seems to place the aggression on the side of Corinth.

After the skirmishes between Corcyra and Corinth, each city sends envoys to Athens to plead for their assistance. The Corcyraeans realize that the Corinthians have increased their navy and added allies to their side, while the Corinthians fear that the Athenians will ally themselves with the Corcyraeans, bringing together the two largest navies in Greece against them.

Both Corcyra and Corinth send envoys to Athens to argue before the Athenians, the Corcyraeans seeking an alliance and the Corinthians trying to prevent this alliance. These speeches are particularly significant, as they are the first speeches in Thucydides; therefore we begin to observe the need to consider the contrast between the speeches and actions or narrative. Indeed, the two speeches allow us further insight into Thucydides' manner of writing, examples of which we noticed also in his order of presentation. Here, the speeches require consideration

not only as to their content but also noticing what Thucydides himself may be intimating through the manner in which they are crafted.

The Corcyraean speech begins with the word "justice" (*dike*). Our expectation would be that this opening term is Thucydides' signal regarding the theme of the speech, yet this is only true in a qualified sense. The Corcyraeans appeal to justice in addressing the Athenians because they have not been involved in any of the Hellenic alliances, Spartan or Athenian, and thus they must now present (as they admit) a case for Athens' support when they have offered no previous service to the Athenians which could expect to be reciprocated. But as their speech unfolds, they speak less of justice and the theme of advantage or interest becomes more prevalent (33.2-3, 35.5-36.2). This is particularly noteworthy in light of their accurate assessment of the Spartans and the relation between Sparta and Athens – they state the judgment of Thucydides himself, that the war between Athens and Sparta is inevitable and that this is due to the Spartan fear of the Athenians (23.6, 33.3). Further, they assure the Athenians that granting them an alliance is not in breach of the treaty. The Athenians are not committing an injustice and Corcyra is also conveniently located on the passageway to Sicily and Italy. But although they began their speech appealing to Athens' potential concern with their past actions (or inactions) involving any alliance with them, and thus to a possible Athenian concern with justice, their concluding summary fails to mention justice at all (36.3). And when we consider their remarks in relation to Thucydides' own comments on the Athenians' decision, the Corcyraeans seem to understand the concerns of the Athenians – the Athenians did not want to risk breaching the terms of their treaty in allying themselves with other cities, although they were aware of the inevitability of the war

with Sparta and apparently even at this early stage, and thoughts of Sicily and Italy were a consideration in making strategic decisions (44.3).[30]

The Corinthian speech by contrast begins with the word "necessity" (*ananke*) but the speech itself will argue in terms of justice – their speech abounds with references to justice and injustice, honor and nobility, implying these considerations should guide the Athenians' decision. They argue that the Corcyraeans are unjustly involved at Epidamnus; that Corinth has served Athens in the past as an ally during the Persian invasion; and therefore that they deserve Athenian repayment now for aiding Athens in the past. Most importantly though seems to be their claim that will be counter to their own understanding of Athenian character later in Book 1 – near the conclusion of their speech they argue that the Athenians will be sacrificing "permanent tranquility" only for an uncertain and temporary advantage if they should ally themselves with Corcyra (42.1). They here imply that the Athenians are both currently inactive and that they seek permanent tranquility or peace. They also imply that the war is not inevitable, with the exception of course that they bid Athens to ally with them and, failing this, that Athens will become an enemy of Corinth (40.3). And once the conference of Spartan allies comes together at Sparta to urge them into action, of all the accusers of Athens, the Corinthians are the ones that Thucydides allows us to hear – they become the main accusers of the Athenians, not surprisingly in part due to these early skirmishes over Epidamnus and the Athenian defensive alliance with Corcyra.

The Athenians ultimately side with the Corcyraeans, but only after two assemblies were held. They initially were disposed to side with Corinth, but changed their decision upon

[30] Bruell (1974) p. 12 implies that given the expansion of the Athenian empire over the previous fifty years, those who were enemies of Athens may have had their opinions on why this fact was important for Athens, i.e. that they had designs on Sicily even before the war broke out. Cf. Pericles' warning to the Athens not to expand further during the war, as reported by Thucydides (2.65.7).

reconsideration. Their initial disposition was on the side of justice, as this was the thrust of the Corinthians' argument but after the second assembly their decision shifted to one based on interest or advantage. They were concerned with a breach of the treaty (45.3), but they decide this alliance would not be a breach, so long, it seems, as they acted within certain conditions. It was to be a defensive alliance only, to which Athens was not bound. Besides, Corinth and Corcyra were two powerful navies in Greece, and with Athens being supreme in this, they were not unaware of the advantage of allowing these two cities to fight amongst one another, if a war that involved all of them was possible (44.2).

From these actions and the speeches of each city, Thucydides raises for the first time the themes that will animate his account of the war – each city appeals to justice or necessity in their speeches to the Athenians, and while the Athenians considered siding with Corinth, Thucydides in his own voice indicates the reason for their decision, including reference to Sicily and Italy.[31] This reference is obvious when one considers the later Sicilian expedition, but even upon an initial reading one notes Athens' plans for further growth of their empire, Thucydides' narrative confirming Sparta's fears. Corcyra with Athenian assistance will stave off the Corinthians' attack and Thucydides concludes these actions noting that this would be the "first cause" (*aitia*) that Corinth had against Athens, i.e. that during the time of the treaty the Athenians fought against them. However, Corinth is the city that Thucydides most clearly presents acting for their own private interests, despite stating grievances against other cities. Thus the Corinthian complaint that the Athenians may side with Corcyra (in disregard for Corinth's support of Athens during the Persian War) implies that Corinth's complaint is based on ingratitude, i.e. an accusation of

[31] It is nevertheless not clear that Athens sided with Corcyra strictly or even primarily for reasons of interest. They were concerned *both* with avoiding a breach of the treaty and with Sicily. And the Sicilian expedition will be an Athenian action in the war that is particularly questionable as serving the purpose of preserving their empire and winning the war. However, it may be in keeping with their desire for honor and nobility (Cf. 6.24.3, 31.6).

injustice. This ingratitude, rather than the legal breach of the treaty, seems to be the true but hidden cause behind Corinth's supposed concern with the treaty. Thucydides never allows us to believe Corinth is genuinely concerned with justice. [32]

Actions and Speeches: At Sparta

This episode is significant to our investigation of Sparta, as the Athenians were aware of the hatred that they had incurred from Corinth as the result of aiding the Corcyraeans, and the actions in Potidaea would renew Sparta's involvement in the Athenian movements. Potidaea being a Corinthian colony but paying tribute to, and thus being allies of Athens, the Athenians now make demands on Potidaea out of concern that the Corinthians would attempt a revolt there as revenge for the skirmishes at Corcyra (56). Potidaean and Corinthian envoys arrive in Sparta to seek their assistance and Sparta promises to invade Attica if Athens attacks Potidaea (58.1). Thucydides does not indicate why Sparta agrees to this action in aiding Corinth and while they are allied with the Potidaeans, Corinthians, as well as Perdiccas of Macedonia, Thucydides alludes to the possibility that they did not directly involve themselves in any actions (65.1). It is this episode that leads directly to the conference at Sparta and to "causes" or "accusations" (*aitai*) by both sides – each believed they had a right to Potidaea, Corinth due to it being their colony, and Athens since the Corinthians had initiated a revolt of a tribute paying ally.

Despite these actions, Thucydides refrains from calling this the outbreak of the war. This was a "private" (*idia*) action of Corinth (66). This claim immediately precedes the four speeches that take place at Sparta and we must consider the relation between this claim, based on the preceding hostilities and the speeches themselves, which will result in a vote for war on the part of Sparta and its allies. These hostilities return us to a consideration of Thucydides' statement regarding the cause of the war and the distinction between pretexts and the cause or causes. For

[32] Consider 1.66, 103.4, 119, 5.25.1, 27.2, 30.1-4, 115.3.

while the involvement of Corinth and Athens in the actions of Corcyra and Potidaea will be openly avowed, these are not the same as the Spartan fear that Thucydides had indicated as the truest pretext. The most obvious consideration is whether the Corinthians were correct in claiming that Athens breached the treaty with their action in Corcyra, and later, in Potidaea. The truth of that claim has not yet been determined before we are allowed to hear the speeches of each side, i.e. the arguments of each side as to whether the treaty had been breached or not. For even if the treaty had not been breached by Athens, as their envoys at Sparta will contend, this does not stop Corinth from claiming they did and the Spartan ephor Sthenelaidas from securing the vote of Sparta that they in fact did.[33] And Thucydides does indicate, before we hear any defense of their empire by the Athenians, that the Athenians were anxious not to breach the treaty and this seems to explain their willingness only to enter a defensive alliance with the Corcyraeans (44.1).

But as alluded to, the most important consideration besides the actions themselves are the speeches crafted by Thucydides. For the speeches of Corcyra and Corinth, while allowing us to see the claims and concerns of each city, also allow us to see something of Thucydides' own presentation of the issues that are being debated – Corinth appeals to justice and Corcyra to necessity, despite the opening word of each speech. Justice and necessity are presented by Thucydides as at odds with one another,[34] as competing claims of motivations for action, the truest pretext of the war as Spartan fear of the growth of the Athenian empire, which necessitated (*ananke*) the war.[35] The war was the result of a necessity; it was inevitable. Since the Athenian

[33] Thus Romilly (1963) p. 21 is incorrect in downplaying the incident at Potidaea as "little more than a pretext for action" since even if Corinth does not truly believe Athens breached the treaty, there is no vote for war without this or a similar incident. Sparta refused to go to war without a pretext.
[34] This is not to deny that those cities that appeal to interest, particularly Athens, may still display a concern with justice, whether they are aware of it or not.
[35] Bolotin (1987) p. 10; Bruell (1974) p. 15.

empire grew, the Spartans at some point had to engage them. And yet the speeches at Sparta will hide this from our view – Corinth and its allies, including Sparta, will argue that Athens has committed an injustice by holding an empire, while the Athenians at Sparta will counter these claims by arguing that they were compelled to found an empire and hold it. It is through the speeches at Sparta that we must begin to consider these competing explanations of the war. And as the speeches at Athens implicitly indicated, the theme of justice and necessity is fundamental for Thucydides, as it will continue to animate these and other cities' claims and explanations for the war.

These speeches arise as the result of the Corinthians summoning the allies to Sparta to put forward two accusations against Athens: Athens was in breach of the treaty and was committing "injustice against the Peloponnesus" (*adikoiev ten Peloponneson* – 67.1). Before we even hear the Corinthians speak, Thucydides has already indicated that the truest pretext of the war as he understands it will differ from the claims of those who seek to stop the actions of Athens.

The speech of the Corinthians is directed against the Spartans for their lack of action to upend the Athenian empire. It is Sparta that is to "blame" (*aitia*) for the growth of their empire; they argue that this is due to the characteristics of the Spartans – they keep what they have, lack innovation, do not use their power, are unwilling to leave home due to fear, distrust their own judgment, believe they are always in danger, and are slow to act, while the Athenians are very much the opposite of these (70.1-9). The Athenian empire has grown due to the differing characteristics of these two cities. Thucydides' earlier account of the Spartans seems to confirm this, as it was Sparta that allowed Athens to carry on the Persian War while they themselves withdrew (95.7). This withdrawal was due to the Spartans' disinterest in continuing the war

against the Persians, but also due to the actions of Pausanias as well as the relations they had with Athens. Yet the Corinthians will attempt to convince the Spartans to act contrary to what they themselves identify as their character.

The Corinthian speech alludes to a particular attribute of the Spartan character – the first word of their speech is "trust" (*pistis*). The Spartans trust in their regime, yet are distrustful of others. The Corinthians contend that this trust in their regime was the source of their "moderation" (*sophrosune*). The character of the Spartans from the Archaeology confirms this – Sparta was moderate due to its good laws and gained its supremacy from its regime. But the Corinthians argue that this moderation, presented by Thucydides as a quality of their city which contributed to stability, is also Sparta's source of ignorance in dealing with others. The Athenians by contrast have minds that are their own, but are used on behalf of the city (68.1, 70.6). It is necessary for Sparta to improve and innovate, but their ways or manner are determined by the laws of their city. The Corinthians argue for innovation, but the Spartan regime which cultivates moderation is unable to innovate and this is due to their adherence to custom (71.3), an adherence the Athenians lack.[36] The Corinthians blame not simply the actions of the Spartans, but the Spartan character as it pertains to their being good allies to aid against Athens' encroachments (71.5-6). Owing to the Spartan character, the Corinthians implicitly

[36] Consider 5.105.4: "They hold" is a verb related to *nomos*, i.e. what they hold or believe is according to law or custom, while in the very next sentence the Athenians accuse the Melians of being "unreasonable" (*alogon*) in their "thought" (*dianoia*) – the Athenian understanding of what is honorable and just is somehow connected not with their laws, but with their free thought. This agrees with the claim of the Corinthians that their bodies belong to the city, but their minds are most their own (1.70.6). The Corinthians' claim regarding the Athenians is borne out in the speech by the Athenian envoys that immediately follow this claim – these Athenians come forward on their own accord and offer an account of the Athenian empire. That Thucydides leaves these speakers anonymous only reinforces the impressiveness of their defense of Athens.

argue that the Spartans must become more like the Athenians for the sake of being good allies and becoming the liberators of Greece from the Athenian empire.[37]

The Athenian envoys though will respond by urging the Spartans to remain as they are in every way. Thucydides' introductory remark to their speech indicates that they wanted to show the Spartans that the question of waging war should not be decided quickly and that the Spartans should prefer peace to war, this latter objective being achieved, they hope, through an account of the power of their city (72.1). And although their intention was to keep Sparta at rest and not answer the charges against them, the envoys do in fact offer a justification of empire on the basis of the motivations of cities and human beings, motivations which necessity does not allow to be cast aside.

In addressing their empire directly however, the envoys[38] offer an account of Athens' past, culminating in their claim that Sparta did not finish the war against Persia and thus that Athens' current allies voluntarily joined the Athenians. And as we have seen, Thucydides' account in the fifty years leading up to the Peloponnesian War agrees with these claims. The Athenians therefore attempt to indicate that "not unfairly" do they hold their empire; they placed themselves in danger to defeat the Persians. And Athens' willingness to engage in such risks indicates the character of the city that Sparta and its allies will face should they vote for war (73.3). The Athenians were both daring and vigorous, despite acting alone, in their war with the Persians. Owning to such risks, along with Sparta's withdrawal and the voluntary alliance of Greek cities, the Athenians ask how it is that they deserve the hatred that their empire has now brought upon them. For it was in this episode of the Persian War and under these circumstances

[37] It should also be noted that the Corinthians were perhaps secretly hoping for the defeat of Athens and the hegemony of Greece being overtaken by their allies, the Spartans. The Corinthians could not openly claim that this is what they hoped for, but liberation of Greece is a publicly defensible claim for siding with Sparta.
[38] See the concluding remarks of note 14.

that the Athenian empire was formed. Therefore the Athenian envoys argue that they were *compelled* to acquire their empire "first by fear, and then by honor and interest" (75.3). What began as fear of the Persians initiated the Athenian empire and then, the envoys argue, further compelled them by fear once they began to realize the suspicion and hatred that resulted from this empire. Now regarding this fear, to act out of such a motive, including securing one's interest, is unobjectionable according to the Athenians. And the compelling motive of fear did not end with their ascent to holding an empire as opposed to mere supremacy among the cities – in Thucydides' account of the fifty years leading up to the Peloponnesian War, the Athenians are still engaged with the Persians *after* Thucydides allows us to observe the shift from supremacy to empire (1.100).[39]

Yet it is apparent that the motivations for the Athenian empire do not end here and despite the Persian threat, their compulsion to pursue it is not apparent. While fear was their *initial* motive in acquiring empire, they admit that honor and interest were not absent (75.3). This admission hints at the Athenians' dueling motives. It was the shift from supremacy and the founding of an empire which led their allies (as allies) to begin to fear and hate them. Their allies became their subjects. And therefore we must consider the manner in which the other motives they mention contribute to this shift from alliance to subjugation. When the envoys repeat the three motivations for empire, they (which is to say Thucydides) do not present them in the same order – "fear, honor, and interest" is replaced by "honor, fear, and interest" (75.3, 76.2). While fear led Athens to ascend to the position of hegemon of an alliance of Greek cities, honor and interest led them to ascend to holding an empire over these cities and continue to hold it. That fear became less compelling or less their true motivation is further revealed when the Athenians also claim that their empire is in fact more just than it has to be, that their empire could be more

[39] Bruell (1981) p. 26; Orwin (1986) p. 76.

cruel and harsh on its subject cities than it is. The Athenian empire does not simply serve Athenian interests because it practices a gentleness that refrains from exercising its true strength. All cities are compelled to expand, but the Athenian empire is more honorable due to its relatively just character. Further, they argue that only one "superior to human nature" could refuse an empire (76.3), or more generally, that no cities act out of a concern for justice but rather according to the motivations of human nature, including honor and interest. The Athenian empire, far from deserving of blame, is "worthy" of praise – while clearly holding an empire, Athens is more "just" (*dike*) than they have to be and "measured" (*metrios*) in their conduct (76.3-4).

The Athenian envoys claim both that the empire does not simply serve their interests, since to act justly or honorably is a restraint on these interests, and that it is impossible for any city *not* to serve its interests. The Athenian envoys are attempting to preserve the possibility that they deserve honor for their empire due to its noble or just character, while also openly stating that Athens cannot be accused of injustice since they simply act as all cities act. For if their admission that all cities are compelled to act in accordance with what is beneficial to them, rather than the Spartan compulsion of fear, is correct "what under certain circumstances might be allowed to fear, could not without the gravest consequences be granted to the desire for honor and profit."[40] If honor and interest are regarded as exculpatory, then all actions that cities take against one other would be as equally justifiable as fear.[41] Yet the Athenians also imply that honor is not a compulsion; they admit that they *could* have been harsher than they have been (as were the Persians, for example – 77.5). In fact, their subjects should be "grateful" (*charis*)

[40] Bruell (1974) p. 13.
[41] Despite the claim of the Athenians, Romilly (1963) p. 251 n1 argues that honor is a more exculpatory motive than fear.

toward them for this mild treatment (77.3).[42] The Athenians were compelled by fear initially, but it was the honor especially that attends empire that they sought; they *chose* to pursue honor, where a city merely acting to secure its safety would not. They recognized the risks involved, subjected themselves to these risks, and thus are worthy of the empire they have attained (75.5, 76.2). For the Athenians could not expect to receive this praise if they were simply compelled to act as all cities do; all cities merely set aside justice to pursue their interests when their strength allows them to do so. The Athenians however strive beyond this. To strive for honor is to act beyond the compulsions that force cities to preserve themselves. The Athenian envoys, without being aware of it, hold *both* that cities are compelled by interests that can never be set aside for the sake of justice, and that they themselves freely chose to pursue empire for the honor that attends it.[43]

Yet in light of the Athenians' claims, the hatred and blame that they themselves recognize being directed against them is not sufficiently accounted for in their justification for empire. The envoys' tone is one of frustration or almost disbelief at this hatred. The Athenians therefore betray a concern with their worthiness to rule and the honor they should receive from ruling. And this claim of one's worth could only be determined by past actions and the rewards or punishments that attend such actions. The Athenians thereby betray motivations that exist due to a concern with justice, despite their claim that no city restrains pursuing their interests from justice. And as they themselves cannot help but (partially) admit, the pursuit of honor is freely chosen – they do not exercise their full powers, but restrain themselves, respecting justice more than they have to (76.3). The honor and nobility they seek from foregoing simple considerations

[42] Romilly (1963) p. 249 argues that the Athenians are worthy of hegemony due to a consensus that they should rule (after the Persian War); but Romilly does not note that this consensus was short-lived and most cities found the empire harsh, once the Athenians forced them to comply with their conditions.
[43] As Orwin (1986) p. 86 argues: "They practice as much justice as possible, or injustice as justly as possible."

of fear or profit is precisely why fear or profit are not honorable. Fear is not blamed since it is a compulsion; advantage is blamed, because it is a harm to others (even though all cities seek their advantage, however understood). But seeking honor or nobility, or more clearly, the glory of empire (2.64.6), is not this kind of compulsion. When considered from the point of view of Athens' subjects, we are thus no longer surprised at the hatred directed towards Athens. For since the Athenians admit to freely choosing to pursue empire out of their desire for honor, encroachment on the autonomy of the other cities will undoubtedly be viewed as unjust. Could the Athenians not have been even gentler? Do their subject cities view their conduct as just or measured at all? The argument for injustice by Corinth and the other Spartan allies rests on the assumption that Athens could have acted otherwise. The argument for justice, considered broadly, presupposes that the motivations put forward by the envoys are not compelling simply or not in all cases. To act according to justice, according to specific laws or conditions (in this case the treaty) that limit or restrict one's self-interest presumes that one is not compelled to act in a particular manner – compulsion or necessity is in tension with justice. The tension between the Corinthians' claim and the Athenians' justification rests on the dispute Thucydides allows us to see regarding in what manner the desire for honor or nobility is compelling for human beings, if in fact these are compulsions at all. And in the case of justice in particular, the envoys have claimed that it never limits those who have the strength from pursuing their own interest, and in particular, pursuing their own interest at the expense or harming of the weak. For the envoys do not argue that the Athenian empire benefits those who are its subjects; they do not argue that their empire serves a common good for all of Greece; they adhere to justice in the qualified sense that they do not harm their subjects to the degree to which their strength would allow them. Yet this justification does not fully answer the charges of injustice – the Corinthians and their allies

can still claim that the Athenians do not have to hold an empire now; for even if they conceded that the fear of the Persian threat is a compulsion, that self-defense is a compulsion, that threat has been put down and the desire for honor and interest is not such a compulsion.[44]

The Athenian response is that it is human nature itself that restricts them from giving up their empire; that to do so would only leave them exposed to another city, possibly Sparta, who would simply replace them as the strong and compel them as the one who is weak, as Athens does now. But recalling that the stated purpose of their speech is to keep the Spartans from declaring war, and thus presumably to allow the Athenians to continue their imperial expansion, we wonder whether their defense does not have the opposite effect, instead striking fear into the Spartans. While the Athenians state what they believe to be the motivations of all cities, due to an apparent desire to be open about these motivations, it is notable that this view is not recognized by others. The Athenians fail to state a justification for their empire *recognizable* to the other cities actually hinders their ability to secure their empire against the charge of injustice. The Athenians underestimate the attachment that other cities have to just causes, i.e. justifications to action. They believe that other cities will recognize the same principles that they (and all cities) apparently adhere to. And Thucydides' account of the Fifty Years of Athens' expansion confirms that their subjects did not want to contribute to Athens' warlike practices; they wanted to remain peacefully at home (99.3). It is shortly after this remark that Thucydides notes the manner in which the Spartans viewed the Athenian character (102.3); the Athenians are different than other cities.

Before we hear the Spartan king Archidamus speak to the allies, the Spartans discuss privately what has been argued by the Corinthians and Athenians and they vote that "injustice"

[44] Consider note 6 above.

has been committed by the Athenians and that war should be declared (79.2).[45] And initially surprising is the fact that Archidamus defends the Spartans against both the blame the Corinthians directed toward them and despite the admission of the envoys that Athens will not relinquish its empire. The Corinthians had not claimed that Athens should cease from its ambitions; they know better than to expect this. They had blamed the Spartans for not commencing with actions to counter these ambitions. Archidamus, the Spartan king reputed to be "intelligent" (*xynestos*) and "moderate" (*sophron*), comes forward then despite this vote, but here Thucydides does not explicitly indicate in advance the purpose of his speech. Our expectation though is that he will present a case contrary to the decision for war and, given the Corinthians' complaints regarding the Spartan character, Archidamus' arguments regarding the war and Sparta generally are therefore of particular interest.

Archidamus' initial appeal to his fellow Spartans is to his age, experience, and thus knowledge of matters pertaining to war. It is mistaken, he has learned, to expect that war is good or safe. Therefore Archidamus quickly turns to enumerating all the disadvantages from which Sparta suffers that Athens does not. He cautions against haste and questions the Spartans' source of assuredness when confronting such a formidable enemy – Athens, not Sparta, has the advantage in almost every consideration regarding resources and the arts of war. Even in those arts of war where Sparta has the advantage, such as their hoplites and abilities to fight on land, he questions what advantages these hold against an enemy such as Athens, as well as suggesting that the war could continue into the next generation (81.6). Despite these surprising admissions of a king regarding the weakness of his city, Archidamus concedes that if war is going to come to pass the Spartans must delay it such that they can prepare themselves to face an enemy such as

[45] While the Athenians have been unjust according to the Spartans, it does not clearly follow that war against Athens should be declared, especially if Sparta is not prepared to do so, as Archidamus will argue. Yet it is in keeping with the Spartan understanding of the war that this charge against Athens and the declaration of war belong together.

the Athenians. Sparta must acquire money, allies, and in general undertake the preparations to defeat a city different from their own given the Athenians' abilities at sea. Archidamus urges Sparta to proceed cautiously, both in deciding to go to war and in prosecuting the war should they decide in favor of it.

One must consider how these arguments respond to the charges of the allies, for Corinth had already admitted that Sparta must prepare for war and such preparation requires innovation now, as the Athenian empire further expands. Despite the Spartans voting that Athens had been unjust, Archidamus only mentions "injustice" once at the end of his speech and there it is injustices that Sparta's allies spoke of. Archidamus seems reluctant to admit the same. Rather, he mentions or refers in numerous instances throughout his speech to the potential "blame" that could be incurred by Sparta for starting the war. In the last instance he even states that "it is not lawful" to proceed against those who offer arbitration (81.5, 82.1, .6, 83.3, 85.2).[46] So far from agreeing with his fellow Spartans' decision to go to war, he implies that Sparta may be guilty of injustice if they are to declare war against Athens. His arguments that caution and slowness are not hindrances appears then to be due to a genuine concern with justice – he is not sure which side the blame may fall on should war occur and thus advises against it. And perhaps most telling is what he does not say – Archidamus' speech is the only one of the four at Sparta that refrains from any reference to oaths and the gods.[47]

In the context of arguing for slowness and delay for the sake of preparation for war, he suggests further talks with Athens to make demands with regard to the present situation. This is an echo of the end of his speech which warns against proceeding with war without arbitration – the Athenian envoys openly referred to sending the matter to arbitration (78.4). Archidamus is

[46] Blame (*aitia*) and its cognates are specifically mentioned at 82.1 and 83.3.
[47] Cf. 71.5, 78.4, 86.5. See also Bartlett (2001) p. 79.

also correct to question the motivation of the allies themselves by suggesting that their appeal to Sparta as an ally is for "private" interests (82.6). And if we consult Thucydides' remarks immediately preceding the speech of the Corinthians, in all cases the grievances of the allies were based upon to their own interests (67.1-4).[48] That Corinth was angry over the siege of Potidaea due to having men there (67.1) casts light on Thucydides' previous remark that war did not begin with the Potidaea incident, since this was a "private" action of the Corinthians (66).

The second half of Archidamus' speech furthers our understanding of his concern with justice. Here he defends the Spartan manner and directly addresses the blame of Sparta by the Corinthians. The slowness characteristic of Sparta is not a matter of "shame" (*aischros*), but rather evidence of their "sensible moderation" (*emphron sophronsyne*). This allows the Spartan to be measured both in their successes and failures. The chief part of their moderation is a sense of shame and they are of good council because they do not question the wisdom of the laws. In a word, it is their education in the laws passed down from their ancestors that is the source of their strength.

Archidamus' praise of Sparta is a praise of antiquity and thus at odds with the Corinthians' demands that Sparta innovate and change their character. The adherence to law that instills this moderation is also the source of their slowness and delay, in contrast to the rashness and daring of the Athenians. And the wisdom of their laws is in contrast to the freedom of mind that the Corinthians had praised the Athenians for and which Thucydides allows us to observe in the speech of the envoys. To breach Sparta's laws is to be immoderate because it is to act above the city. To innovate with regard to their regime, as one who innovates in the arts of war, would be an act of immoderation. Sparta's obedience to the laws is therefore due to their fear of acting

[48] The Aeginetans lacked the independence the treaty presumably guaranteed them, while the Megarians were excluded from the ports of the empire and market of Athens as established by the Megarian Decree.

shamefully, of being dishonored by the city. Being moderate means not questioning the laws. We cannot fail to note though that Archidamus was *reputed* to be intelligent and moderate. Archidamus' praise of the laws and exhortation to their wisdom is in keeping with his reputation as moderate; however the Spartans' moderation, including their slowness, has not been unquestionably good – it is this caution and slowness that has allowed the Athenians to ascend to their current position. Despite Archidamus' arguments that the Spartans are not strongly positioned against Athens to carry on a large scale war, Archidamus only appeals to the "necessity" of the Spartan education (84.4) and not the necessities of war; it is the Spartan education that has hindered their ability and willingness to anticipate and avoid or prosecute such a war to their advantage.

Regardless of Archidamus' appeal to antiquity and Spartan education, including his appeal to the potential unlawfulness should a declaration of war be a breach of the treaty, the Spartan ephor Sthenelaidas succeeds in procuring the vote for war. While Archidamus' speech attempted to avoid the grave question of the justice in going to war, Sthenelaidas' speech seems to succeed almost solely due to an appeal to injustice – "injustice" is mentioned five times in his laconic speech. He is not convinced that the Athenians answered the charge of committing injustice against Sparta and its allies. Perhaps most important in his speech though is the ambiguity that Thucydides himself pointed to in his introduction to the Corinthians' speech – the accusation against the Athenians was breach of the treaty *and* injustice against the Peloponnesus (67.1). For while the oaths sworn on each side are to be ensured by the gods, the question of the justice of the Athenian empire has not been answered by the arguments that the envoys advanced. While according to their claim the Athenian empire is more just than it need be owning to their overwhelming strength, the question of imperialism remains open as we have yet

to determine whether they may not be unjust for encroaching on the other cities – were they compelled as they claim or does justice demand restrictions on a city's pursuits beyond the measured conduct the Athenians claim?

The problem of the outbreak of the war is further complicated because the Spartans inquire to the god at Delphi regarding going to war – he indicates to them that they will be victorious in the war if they put forward all of their strength and himself will be with them, called or uncalled. It does not seem that the Spartans asked whether the war was a breach of the treaty or whether the Athenians had in fact been unjust in their actions (118.3). Does the god even demand that the Spartans need to be just in prosecuting the war? However this may be, in this context Thucydides indicates that the Spartans were attempting to attain a "pretext" (*prophasis*) for war; the Spartans are concerned with at least appearing just in declaring war. Thucydides never states in Book 1 that the treaty was clearly breached by the Athenians.[49] And when we consider Thucydides' own remark after the conference at Sparta, we are struck by his reiteration that the cause of the war was not the accusations against Athens by Sparta's allies, but the Spartans' *fear* of the growth of Athenian power (88). Necessity, rather than justice, is the cause of Sparta declaring war against Athens. However when Thucydides returns from his digression of the fifty years depicting the growth of the Athenian empire to the present war, he claims *both* that Sparta was typically slow to go to war unless due to necessity *and* that they themselves were *convinced* of a breach of the treaty and injustice by the Athenians (118.1-3). Yet regardless of Athens' growth, if the argument of their envoys is correct then Sparta was compelled to go to war due to fear – and as we have seen fear is the compulsion least questionable, since no one would argue against allowing one, city or man, to defend itself. Rather, the complication arises when we consider that the Athenians at Sparta had argued not

[49] Strauss (1964) pp. 175-76.

only that fear compelled them to empire, but that their desire for honor and interest did as well. And this motivation for empire is a compulsion that is open to serious doubts as being truly compulsory, and thus exculpating them from blame.[50] For while the Spartans were compelled out of fear to protect their city from the growth of the Athenian empire, this does not allow us to draw the conclusion that the Spartans did not believe that the Athenians were unjust. Sparta here seeks a pretext for war and this will not be the last time that they look to considerations of justice before undertaking an action in the war.

The last Spartan actions we observe in Book 1 then are their attempts to secure such a pretext. With the Cylon incident, the Spartans demand that the Athenians cleanse themselves of an ancient curse that occurred due men being slain who had taken refuge at the Acropolis as suppliants, sheltering themselves at the altar of the goddess (127.1-3). To kill men who had done so was to commit a crime against the goddess, an impious act. But this Spartan demand is odd since it is both an old curse and because the Athenians are able to respond with two more recent curses committed by the Spartans. Thucydides had introduced this Spartan attempt as a "pretext" and claims that the Spartans did not expect the Athenians to comply, but only wanted to create slander against Pericles (who was their most vehement opponent and connected to this incident). While this appears as a calculated attempt on the part of the Spartans, we wonder why the Spartans sought a pretext at all. According to their own claims, the Athenians were guilty of injustice and their allies had agreed, voting for war (87.4-88). Was the pretext for the sake of the Spartans themselves? Thucydides does not comment on whether the Spartans in fact believed in this accusation, i.e. that a curse may have been involved. In other words, Athens compelling Sparta to go to war out of fear does not solve the issue of the Spartan belief that they were in fact on the side of justice in the war – one can defend oneself out of fear and believe that one's cause

[50] See note 5 above.

is in fact just. And if the Spartans understood the Athenian thesis, why did they not appeal, after hearing these arguments, to the compulsory nature of fear?[51] Perhaps the Spartans' sense of shame will not allow them to admit their fear of Athens. For it was the Athenians who made that argument and it is Athens, based on the actions and speeches of Book 1, that appear to have no regard for justice thereby strengthening Sthenelaidas' appeal to Athenian injustice. The Athenians did not advance pretexts during the growth of their empire in the fifty years leading up to the war and only appeal to justice at Sparta, we might wonder if this is properly called "justice" at all.[52] Yet the Athenians nevertheless offer what *they* believe to be justifications for their empire – their measured conduct in ruling means they relinquished their own interests or good for the sake of something higher, honor. Thus they want to be viewed as deserving or worthy of their empire *because* their empire is not as harsh as it could be. Thus even though according to Sparta Athens' conduct is unjust, we cannot neglect to notice that Thucydides' Athenians do in fact betray a concern with something beyond their mere interests, while proclaiming those interests to be their (and all cities') only truly compelling motive.

Pericles' Response to Sparta

While the Athenian envoys offer something of an unofficial response to the charges of Spartans and its allies, Pericles offers the first official response to the impeding war, as well as a justification of imperialism from Athens' "first man" (139.4).

In Pericles' first speech the question of how Athens is to proceed with the war is raised. He warns the Athenians that should the Spartans be victorious, Athens will be enslaved to them as well as losing their allies through revolution. Since Sparta has rejected the possibility of arbitration as stipulated by the treaty between the two cities, Athens must not acquiesce to any

[51] Orwin (1994) p. 36.
[52] *Ibid*. pp. 54-55.

demands or threats from Sparta lest they set a precedent of appearing weak. Further, since Athens' superiority is its resources and navy, in contrast to the numerical superiority of Sparta and their allies, Athens must rely on their sea power against the Spartan skill on land. Pericles therefore recommends that Athens treat themselves as islanders, rather than attempting to defend both the city and their ports, as well as the countryside comprising Attica. His argument is that the homes and land of the Athenians are not fundamental, but rather the "bodies" of men (143.5).

Broadly speaking, Pericles has hope for the outcome of the war to fall in Athens' favor provided they refrain from any new conquests or enterprises. His fear is less of the enemy than of errors that the Athenians commit themselves. And the prize for victory in war is the greatest "honor" (*timai*) and, although war is a "necessity," willingness to engage in it will show the Spartans and their allies Athens' strength, particularly the "daring" (*tolma*) and "intelligence" (*gnome*) which characterizes the Athenians (144.3). However Pericles refrains from speaking about how Athens acquired its "empire" (*arche*); he only alludes to the Athenians defending themselves (2.36.2-4). Thucydides himself did not refrain from speaking about this acquisition. The digression we have observed earlier in Book 1 details the growth of the Athenian empire during the fifty year period leading up to the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War, noting the shift from Athens' alliance with other Greek cities to subjugation of those cities and their severe treatment of them (1.97.1, 98.3, 99.1). While Pericles fails to discuss this growth and therefore avoids the question of the justification for Athenian empire, Thucydides implicitly raised this question. Pericles had only "blamed" (*aitia*) the Spartans for breaching the treaty by not submitting to arbitration – while the Spartans may be legally responsible for the war, we must recall that Thucydides compels us to raise the question of blame, since the Spartans acted out of fear and fear for one's own safety is exculpatory (1.75.3, 6.83.2). Therefore Pericles' legal blame

of the Spartans does not clearly establish the justice of the Athenian empire that led to what he claims is a breach of the treaty by the Spartans.[53] If there was a peace party in Athens and if Pericles lacked his prominence, perhaps the Athenians would have been amenable to such concessions.

While Pericles leaves the question of justice unanswered, in his funeral speech he does offer a moral justification of Athenian imperialism. He speaks at length about the character of Athens and especially of the Athenian citizen, culminating in his claims that Athens is the "school of Greece," that the Athenians "love the noble with thrift and philosophize without softness," and "combine in the same persons both daring and calculation" (2.41.1, 40.1, 40.3). The virtue of the individual for Pericles is this combination of daring or courage (*tolma* or *andreia*) and calculation (*logismos*). The reward for empire is honor or nobility, both for the city and for the individual (43.1-2, 44.4, 46.1) and this requires daring or courage to sacrifice one's body for the sake of the city.[54] Further, the Athenian citizen's courage is "not so much instilled by laws as arising from our ways" (39.4). Previously, Pericles had spoken about the difficulty in giving his speech in part due to the envy that might affect some "should he hear anything surpassing his own nature" (*phusis* – 35.2). We begin to understand Pericles' understanding of Athens and the Athenian character – Athenians are *by nature* superior to others because they are able to act on behalf of the city, not due to strict obedience to law as the Spartans do, but through adherence to unwritten law and a strong sense of "shame" (37.3, 43.1). However, Pericles also speaks of "daring" together with "everlasting memorials of deeds bad and good" (41.4). Despite Pericles' praise of daring, it is not clear that daring results in just deeds or actions. And

[53] Bruell (1981) p. 25: "According to Thucydides, then, the Spartans cannot be blamed for starting the war because the Athenians compelled them to start it. Perikles' treatment of the issue was too narrow, too legalistic: the Spartans acted out of legitimate self-defense."
[54] Pericles mentions "body" (*soma*) three times in the funeral speech (41.1, 42.4, 43.2). Cf. 1.143.6.

this admission that Athens has left memorials of their bad deeds further suggests that the Athenians' imperial expansion is of questionable justice. He even claims that "our city alone…gives no grounds…for her subjects to complain that they are being ruled by those who are unworthy" (41.3) and later admits that Athens' empire is "so to speak a tyranny" that "to take it *perhaps* was wrong, but to let it go is unsafe" (63.2 – emphasis added). In the funeral speech dedicated to praising the men of Athens who died on behalf of the city (a speech which he began by questioning the very law that demands this speech, in striking contrast to Archidamus' praise of Sparta's laws) Pericles in fact praises the city of Athens or its power (despite the fact that he claims it needs no such praise – 41.4, 42.2). Pericles is asking citizens to sacrifice their own good for the sake of the city's good because it is noble to do so; Pericles himself had offered to relinquish his private property to the city (13.1). Nobility implies a relinquishing of one's own good; to act merely out of one's own interest or good is not noble. Only self-sacrificial action can be deemed noble.[55]

For Periclean Athens, the reward for empire is the nobility that it bestows on the city and the individual. Pericles does not answer the Spartan (and allies') charge of the injustice of the Athenian empire. His justification of Athenian imperialism is only legal, not trans-legal – Sparta has breached the treaty. And while the Athenian envoys at Sparta appealed to justice as a restraint only within the bounds of necessity, Pericles' view of justice does not answer the question of blame for the war outside of the treaty. Rather the reader is now compelled to confront two conflicting views: Thucydides argues that fear of Athenian imperialism led to war, while the Athenian envoys, Archidamus, and Pericles focus on the breach of the treaty.

The relation between necessity and justice is still unclear, for the Athenians introduce other apparent compulsions that Thucydides has yet to pass judgment on. The Spartans admit to

[55] Bolotin (1987) p. 20.

none of these compulsions as exculpating; they openly state only the strict necessity of obeying their laws.

CHAPTER II

SPARTAN "HYPOCRISY" AND THE ATHENIAN THESIS

This chapter will investigate the Spartans as they press forward with the war. We will examine in particular the infamous Spartan actions at Plataea, the disaster at Pylos that left Spartan men surrounded by the Athenians, and their prosecution of the war as they establish a treaty and were officially allied with Athens. Sparta's prosecution of the war raises questions about the justice of their cause, the manner in which they conduct the war, and their understanding of the relation between the claims of justice and the dictates of necessity.

Sparta at War – Plataea

Sparta's departure from the Athenian view in their prosecution of the war is notably illumined by the incident at Plataea. We are allowed to witness the invasion and defeat of Plataea, hear Spartan speeches, and most telling, witness Sparta as judges of the fate of a vanquished city. This incident has led to blame of Sparta by many scholars of Thucydides, but the details of this episode of his account is more nuanced than is often noticed.

Leading up to the debate between Sparta and Plataea is the incident with Thebes. Plataea and Thebes have been enemies "always" and thus the Thebans, seeing the Peloponnesian War on the horizon, attacked Plataea before the war had openly begun. This attack leads both Athens and Sparta, along with the allies of each, to begin preparations and launch their first assaults. What Thebes seemed to view as a necessary preemptive attack against a city they were sure to fight in the larger war was in fact an attack that led to war. This action was a cause in the immediate and legal sense – Thebes' attack on Plataea breached the treaty. Curiously, Thucydides does not say that Thebes breached the treaty; rather, only that the *affair* at Plataea was a breach, leaving open the possibility that the breach was not the action of Thebes simply (2.7.1).

The invasion of Plataea by Thebes is further complicated by the manner in which it began. The Thebans were invited into the city by a faction within Plataea itself. Certain Plataeans wished to shift the regime away from the democracy to an oligarchy, the regime in place being a democracy due to Plataea's alliance with Athens. Thus while the Thebans hoped to gain the city to themselves through the invasion, it is questionable whether such an opportunity would have arisen if not for faction within Plataea. This interpretation is further strengthened by the manner in which the Thebans carry out their assault. The Plataean faction demanded that the Thebans immediately kill their own enemies after entering the city, an act the Thebans refused to carry out. Instead, the Thebans hoped to arrive at a "friendly" agreement with the Plataeans, appealing to the previously existing Boeotian alliance (2.4). Further, the Thebans, as the Plataeans themselves observed, had not engaged in any violence upon entering the city. They of course agree to the alliance immediately, due to it being dark and therefore unaware of the number of Thebans within their gates. This misperception on the part of the Plataeans once realized, they attacked the Thebans and were able to subdue or kill many of them. The "greater number" (*plethos*) of the Plataeans were not in favor of revolting from Athens, confirming that the faction inviting the Thebans into the city was oligarchic.

Since the Plataeans were correctly worried about Theban reinforcements arriving at their city to support the initial assault, they send word to the Thebans that they have prisoners and that if the Thebans do not leave the countryside without further harming Plataea, the prisoners will be killed. However, the Plataeans indicate that they will hand the prisoners over should the Thebans leave without further harm. The Thebans leave the Plataean countryside and the Plataeans kill the Theban prisoners; there was also an oath given between the two regarding this arrangement of the prisoners (5.5-7).

Now this account of the affair is the Theban one. The Plataeans argue that no oath was given and that the return of the prisoners would only occur upon further negotiations (5.6). But as Thucydides relates, the Thebans complied by not harming Plataean land, yet the Plataeans still killed the Theban prisoners. While the Plataean account of the arrangement between the two cities may be correct in that an oath was not exchanged, they still did not allow for further negotiations with the Thebans. Therefore even according to the Plataeans' own account, they reneged on the conditions of their promise. They killed the Theban prisoners "immediately" (*euthus*), i.e. without any further negotiations (5.7).

This affair is relevant not only to understanding the causes of the war, but the Spartan invasion of Plataea on their way to Attica, an attack that seems to follow from both Athens and Sparta hearing of the events at Plataea (7.1). On seeing the Spartans' intention to attack the countryside, the Plataeans urge them to refrain. They appeal to the promise that Plataea live "independent" (*autonomous*) after they helped the Greeks defeat the Persians in the Persian War; this was guaranteed both by the Greek allies and the fathers of Sparta, and in particular through Pausanias' promise to them. Therefore the Plataeans also appeal here to the oaths and gods of each city, as well as the gods of Sparta's forefathers. The Plataean appeal is to the traditional claims of justice. They acted with "virtue" (*arete*) and thus ask the Spartans to recognize past service rendered as well as past oaths sworn (71.3). The Plataeans' expectation is that their virtue be rewarded; they apparently do not pursue virtue as its own reward, but rather virtue serves their interests, precisely when it is a sacrifice of their immediate interests. Virtue then, at least for the Plataeans appears to be a long-term calculation of interests and thus in keeping with what the Athenians claim about the compelling nature of our interests.

Not surprisingly, Archidamus' reply to this demand begins with the word "justice"; he does not deny the claims of the Plataeans simply. Rather, the Plataeans must abide by what they themselves appealed to and remain independent, if they cannot join the Spartans in the war. They cannot however remain subject to Athens and be friends of Sparta; they must remain neutral. The Plataeans confer, but cannot agree to Archidamus' terms. They fear for the city, especially that the Athenians may take their city from them or that the Thebans would attempt a second invasion. Even if Thebes were also to take oaths with Sparta to leave Plataea neutral, the Plataeans fear for the city. This mention of oaths in regard only to the Thebans may hint that the Plataeans had in fact made an oath with the Thebans previously, but breached it when they killed the prisoners and expect the Thebans to repay them in kind. Or they may surmise that their long-standing enmity with Thebes will continue regardless of any oaths. The appeal to oaths with regard to the Spartans and the past cooperation between Sparta and Plataea indicates that the Plataeans expect this appeal to be convincing to the Spartans – they do not appeal here to Sparta's interest or advantage (71.4). And they seem to assume that the Athenians will retake Plataea after Sparta leaves, a strategy or action that recurs repeatedly throughout the war when Sparta fails to fully conquer Athens' subject cities.

Archidamus though assures them that they will be restored to their city after the war, but must leave now. Archidamus grants a truce for the Plataeans to consult with the Athenians on the Spartan proposal; he refrains from taking an action against the city. But the Athenians promise that they will not abandon Plataea to the Spartans and will protect the city. Thus the Plataeans are told to maintain their alliance with Athens and to stand by the solemnly sworn oaths made by the Plataeans' fathers. They do so and refrain from abandoning their alliance with Athens (73.3).

On receiving this response, Archidamus delivers a speech addressed directly to the gods (74.2). He contends that the Spartans have not been aggressors nor will they be now with an invasion of Plataea; it was the Plataeans who departed from their oaths. He appeals to the gods to see to it that "vengeance" (*timorias*) be received by the Plataeans for their breach of their oaths. For Archidamus, the Plataeans have failed to keep their oaths by not remaining neutral, i.e. by being an ally of Athens. Their "alliance" with Athens makes them an enemy of Sparta in the war. After offering them a chance to leave the Athenian empire and their failure to do so, the Plataeans are acting against their oaths. Archidamus does not appeal to any other considerations, including that the Plataeans are compelled to be not allies, but subjects of Athens. This compulsion borne out of fear would be in keeping with the Spartan claim to be liberating those cities held under the Athenian empire (8.4). Instead, Archidamus assumes that Plataea can act freely, if not to be allies of Sparta, at least not be subjects of Athens and therefore believes his proposals to be "reasonable" (*eikota*). By his silence he implicitly disregards the Plataeans' appeal to their past alliance with Sparta and their service in the Persian War where they fought alongside other Greek cities.

In this Archidamus agrees with the appeals made by the Plataeans themselves. They argued that past oaths protected them as an independent city, but as Archidamus understands it, they have not maintained their independence. The Plataeans do not claim here the "fears" that Thucydides indicates as their basis for not being willing to leave Athens (72.2). And the Athenians also appeal to the oaths that the Plataeans made in joining Athens. Yet even if Plataea did not join in alliance with Athens, this does not negate their claim that it would be dangerous to leave this alliance. To switch sides with the war underway would be considered a breach of their oath to Athens as well as result in the risk that Athens would reestablish a democracy friendly to

their alliance. And while their appeal to justice may be due to a genuine concern with justice, they cannot appeal to Spartan interests, since the Thebans stand by the Spartans as their allies. The Plataeans realize that Spartan interests lie with Thebes, their old enemy. Sparta thus invades Plataea after their reply and subdues the city, eventually leading them to surrender. Upon their surrender the Spartans send to Sparta for "judges" (*dikastais*) to discern who the guilty party is in this dispute (52.2).

The Spartan judges do not charge the Plataeans with a specific crime, but only ask them what "good service" they have done for Sparta in the war. Here the Plataeans ask to speak at length and this is granted by the Spartans. Sparta does not simply follow through with their apparent pre-arrangement with the Thebans, which Thucydides only allows us to notice after the Plataeans' speech. In fact, the Thebans themselves only come forward to speak in response to the Plataean speech – they were afraid that it may have been persuasive to the Spartans (52.4, 60, 61.1). The Spartans, against the Thebans' insistence, allow the Plataeans to speak at length instead of simply replying to the question presented to them. That the Spartans allowed this indicates that they were not simply puppets of the Thebans.[56]

Since the Plataeans, as Athenian allies, have not benefited Sparta in the war they appeal to past service as a means to receiving preferential treatment now. They ask Sparta not to act on behalf of their enemies the Thebans. However, they do little to appeal to Sparta's current needs in the war or to recent just actions. They even admit that they had become "enemies" of the Spartans currently; they excuse this by arguing that they were "compelled" to become Sparta's

[56] According to Romilly (1963) p. 40 the Theban speech had no effect. Crane (1998) p. 193 argues that the Plataeans and Thebans "might as well have said nothing." These arguments disregard both the fact that the Thebans did not want the Plataeans to speak, as well as Thucydides' narrative remark that the Spartans' reconsidered their own question (3.68.1). Cf. Cogan (1981) pp. 66-73 who notes this in passing, but focuses on the term "Atticism" and argues that this was an "ideological" shift in the war, Athenian imperialism being viewed in a new light. However the name Athens' subject cities gave to their empire does not appear to affect their view of the conditions of subjection nor its injustice. The Plataeans even note the benefits of alliance with Athens, which presumably would have been partially responsible for Athens' subjects not revolting in the past.

enemies (58.2). Compulsion has acted upon them, excusing their alliance with Athens and implying that this is not an alliance at all – they could not have acted otherwise because the Spartans refused an alliance with them. And Athens was able to compel its allies in a manner that rendered them subjects (1.99.1).[57] They were not in a voluntary alliance with Athens but were forced to contribute to the Athenian empire; they were forced to submit to what was in the interest of Athens, to sacrifice their interests for the interests of Athens. This compulsion to submit instead of fighting was brought on by the strength of Athens and also by their small size. This is not stated directly, however Thucydides later allows us to see the fate of Mytilene in their attempt to rebel, as well as the fate of Melos, even in their neutrality. The small Plataea would have no choice but to submit to the Athenians' terms of alliance or potentially accept the fate of Melos. Although the Plataeans appeal to justice, as the Melians will later in the war, they had hoped for a just judgment from Sparta because the Spartans were held to be just (3.53.1). The Plataeans do not mention that the Athenians were held to be just. They do not argue this point at length because their speech is concerned with demonstrating their justice, not that they submitted to Athens out of necessity. Therefore they only mentioned (briefly in one sentence) their being "enemies" of Sparta and "compelled" to fight with Athens (58.2). Since they were compelled, they are "friends" of Sparta. Compulsion is never mentioned again. Instead, they appeal to their past service to Sparta in the Persian War and refer to themselves as "benefactors" of Sparta. They must appeal to the past because they are not benefactors of Sparta now. And they have already admitted that Sparta should consider its own interests (56.7).

The Spartan question implies however that the Plataeans had free choice to act contrary to the manner in which they did. All blame for actions taken or not taken presupposes the ability

[57] Forde (1989) p. 5: "The new and openly immoral doctrine of power and justice proclaimed and acted upon by the Athenians exerts a similar compulsion on those who are forced to confront the Athenians at war."

to have acted otherwise; to deem actions just or unjust presupposes that they are possible. When the Plataeans appeal to their alliance again, the terms are those of justice. They had a duty not to leave their alliance with Athens. While they were compelled to serve Athens' interest, they were also just men in acting as Athens wanted. Yet oddly, they also admit to having their own interest served – they "receive[ed] benefits at their hands" (55.4). Further, they requested to obtain Athenian citizenship for themselves. They are able to state these claims, which would hardly seem to aid their case, due to the fact that Sparta had sent Plataea to Athens for alliance. While we do not know from Thucydides if this detail is true, we have seen that the Spartans allowed the Athenians to take over the alliance of Greek cities that fought off the Persians. However the difficulty exists that the Spartans, though glad that they did not have to further lead the war against Persia, were also constrained by Pausanias and his corruption – his conduct was "like that of a tyrant" and "[t]he Athenians…succeeded to the supremacy by the voluntary act of the allies through their hatred of Pausanias" (1.95.2, 96.1).[58] The Spartan commander could no longer lead the Spartans in the war; the Spartans were handicapped by their own man. Yet whatever Sparta's reasons for leaving Athens in sole control of the allies fighting against Persia, the Plataeans' arguments are problematic. Appealing first to compulsion, then to duty, and then to their own interests, they attempt to find a justification for being allies of Athens and not remaining neutral. Or are the Plataeans trying to offer the Spartans all possible explanations for this alliance?

The Plataeans further argue that the Thebans initially invaded their territory and indicate that they had a right to kill the Theban prisoners – the punishment for invasion is "vengeance." In killing the Thebans, the Plataeans were acting according to the "law" of resisting an invader

[58] Cf. Machiavelli's *Prince* Ch. 19 "Of Avoiding Contempt and Hatred" with *Discourses on Livy* III.6 "Of Conspiracies." In Thucydides' account of Pausanias, the hatred towards him is the result of his violent disposition. The Spartans ultimately conspire against him since he was conspiring both with the Helots and with the Persians, neither of whom the Spartans were particularly friendly with.

(3.56.2). However, from the Spartan point of view as allies of Thebes, this argument is problematic. The Plataeans had promised the Thebans a negotiation for the return of the prisoners contingent on the Thebans leaving Plataean land without further harm. And the Thebans complied with this demand; the Plataeans reneged on their own conditions. But in appealing to the Spartans not to act vengefully towards them now, they appeal to a sentiment that they themselves, in a similar situation, did not act on. They plead for Sparta not to kill them for the Thebans, despite the fact that they killed Theban prisoners themselves. The Thebans left the country and their fellows were immediately killed. The Plataeans urge the Spartans to grant gentle treatment of an enemy that they themselves did not grant. It seems that they believe that these more recent actions (alliance with Athens and the killing of the Thebans) are ultimately more of a concern for the Spartans than their past good service; for otherwise raising these considerations would only seem to harm their attempt to be granted clemency by the Spartans (56.1-2).

The Plataeans continue by arguing that the Spartans' "reputation" (*doches*) will suffer if they kill the Plataeans, an action which will breach the "common law of the Greeks." It is not clear precisely what law the Plataeans are appealing to, other than reciprocity for past service to Greece.[59] The granting of independence by Pausanias is not without difficulties as well however, given his cooperation with the Persians. And Pausanias was eventually killed by the Spartan Ephors due to his corruption while fighting during that war. Thus even if such a law or custom exists between Greek cities, the Plataeans themselves have breached it with the killing of the Theban prisoners.

[59] See Fustel de Coulanges (1980) p. 199; Burckhardt (2002) pp. 107, 109-110. Both authors argue that the general action taken among Greek cities was to execute prisoners that were captured in times of war. This is perhaps rendered problematic by the fact that both use Thucydides as one source of confirmation of this. However, even among the Athenians, who claim to act out of considerations of interest, killing prisoners is the rule (3.36.1, 5.32.1, 116.3-4. Cf. 3.49.1).

The Theban speech is a response to Plataeans' lengthy appeal to Spartan justice. They argue that they were not guilty of allying with the Persians because they were under a tyrannical regime (*dunasteia*). Further, the Plataeans chose an alliance with Athens when they could have sided with Sparta. While the Plataean speech can only focus in the past, the Thebans focus on the present.

In keeping with their focus on the present, the Thebans detail the matters surrounding their unannounced invasion of Plataea. They were invited in by Plataeans, a faction of the leading men of "wealth" and "birth." However they are wrong to assert that they were brought in as friends serving all of Plataea; the Thebans had to reject the request of the Plataean faction to kill all of their enemies immediately.[60] Besides, the openly avowed cause of the war is the liberation of Greece from Athens and the Thebans have no claim to hold Plataea for themselves. They claim that the men who called them in intended to moderate the regime. They present their decision to invade Plataea based on the claims of the faction to be instituting a better regime (65.1-2). But Thucydides presents the reason as being due to the old enmity between the two cities – since the war between Athens and Sparta would draw, so to speak, all of the cities of Greece into it, the Thebans expected war to break out between themselves and Plataea as well. Therefore they preemptively struck the Plataeans, without any open declaration of war. Thucydides is silent on their justification that they were aiding in bring a better regime to Plataea. And even on the Thebans' own terms, the problem now arises that they exculpate themselves (and blame Plataea) because they were invited in, but also had just argued that they were not to blame for supporting the Persians in the past; that support was due to the power of a few in the city at that time.

[60] Cf. 5.17.2 where the Athenians seem to accept this claim since Plataea is not returned to them in their treaty with Sparta.

Despite the difficulties with these arguments, they deflect attention away from these issues by returning to the present considerations at hand. The Plataeans, they argue, have committed three injustices: the violation of an agreement of neutrality with Sparta, the killing of Theban prisoners, and deceiving the Thebans by promising the return of their men should they leave the Plataean countryside unharmed (66.3).

After hearing both speeches the Spartans decide that the question was a "correct" one (*orthos*) because they had offered the Plataeans the opportunity to remain neutral, as their agreement with Pausanias had stipulated, or to leave Athens now and remain neutral in the war. Both the treaty with Pausanias and the offer of Archidamus afforded the Plataeans the opportunity to remain neutral. This ancient treaty and the current offer now being rejected, the Spartan believe "by their just intentions" (*te heauton dikaia boulesei*) to be released from the prior conditions connected with the promises of Pausanias. And further, the Plataeans have done "evil" (*kakos*) to the Spartans now (68.1). The Plataeans' arguments regarding their past service to Sparta are not recognized by the Spartans as exculpatory for their alliance with Athens, an alliance that the Thebans focused on in their speech. The view that the Athenians are unjust and have harmed Greece, and thus led Sparta to wage a war of liberation, is in keeping with the Spartan decision. The Plataeans' claim to be "friends" of Greece is problematic considering the war now underway. They speak as though the war were still one of a united Greece fighting a foreign invader. The Thebans' claim that it was not themselves, but a quasi-tyrannical regime that led their city to ally with the Persians may persuade the Spartans considering their own difficulties with Pausanias himself – the "Medism" of Pausanias and the Thebans is less of a consideration than the "Atticism" of the Plataeans (62.1).

The error of the Spartan decision lies in their blame of Plataea for its lack of good service to Sparta. The Spartans could not expect that the Plataeans, as Athenian allies or subjects, to have served Sparta's interests. The only point upon which the Plataeans may be blamed is for their execution, without the promised negotiations, of 180 Theban prisoners. Sparta focuses in their decision on neutrality and this is the only point on which the Plataeans can be blamed by the Spartans themselves. Plataea has not harmed Sparta directly except through their alliance with Athens. Yet what is most striking to note about this incident as a whole and the speeches of all three cities is that they argue almost exclusively in terms of justice. Even with their lives on the line, the Plataeans argue that they were justified in killing the Thebans that had invaded their city. And the Plataeans affirm that vengeance is the proper response to injustice. No city argues in terms that approach the arguments of the Athenian envoys at Sparta. The Plataeans, in failing to argue in such terms, may be aware that an appeal to the necessity of pursuing their own interests would have no effect on the Spartans. Yet their appeal to punishment establishes a precedent for Sparta – they unwittingly appear to help Sparta view the issue as the Plataeans themselves fear, i.e. that Sparta will mask a decision serving their own interests behind an apparent concern with justice (56.3-4). Most commentators thus interpret Thucydides' remarks at 3.68 as a clear indication of Sparta's so-called hypocrisy, although these remarks are not as clear as they appear.[61] The Spartans are viewed as hypocritical because they argue here (and

[61] Finley (1967) p. 19: the Spartans are "supremely guided by self-interest"; Cogan (1981) p. 66: the Spartans killed the Plataeans because the Thebans wanted them to; Romilly (1963) p. 40: the Spartans acted only out of self-interest; Pouncey (1980) p. 19: "…self-interest as the only legitimate concern"; Connor (1984) p. 93: "Advantage decides." Cf. Crane (1998) p. 193 who parenthetically alludes to one of the complications of the case, i.e. the Plataeans killing of the Theban prisoners and the offer of neutrality by Archidamus, facts of the event that warrant much greater, if not decisive, consideration. Romilly pp. 279-81: "egoism and hypocrisy" of the Spartans is shown by Thucydides at 3.56.3. Romilly takes the Plataeans' assessment of the Spartans as decisive and apparently Thucydides' own view. However, cf. Strauss (1964) pp. 216-17; Burns (2010) pp. 40, 42 speaks of Spartan "hypocrisy *or* self-delusion" (emphasis added); Forde (1989) pp. 45-47, 151-55; especially p. 153 where he argues that Spartan hypocrisy is "all the more effective for being invisible to the Spartans themselves." Cf. Orwin (1994) p. 78 who argues: "Long habituated to act as their interests seem to require, they do so as *smugly* as if meting out

throughout Thucydides' account) in terms of justice, yet seemingly act in accordance with their own interests. They seem to knowingly use pretexts of justice to advance their own cause, while being fully aware that they are merely employing such arguments as a ruse. And Thucydides certainly lends evidence to this interpretation given his claim that the Spartans *did* consider their advantage when killing the Plataeans. However, the issue of the fate of the Theban prisoners, the restatement of the Spartan judges that their question was a correct one (implying a reconsideration of what had been argued by the Plataeans), and Thucydides' own remark that they acted "mainly" for the usefulness of the Thebans in the war all complicate this view. These considerations lead us to raise the question of how Sparta understands the relation of justice and expediency or advantage, for the statement of the Athenians at Melos implies that they do so knowingly.

Despite these complications, the claim of the Plataeans (along with the Athenian statement at Melos) are taken to be decisive, to be Thucydides' own understanding of the Spartan character (3.56.3, 5.105.4). Yet these are only a few of the complications of the Plataean case – the Thebans were also allies of Sparta; the Plataeans, despite being offered neutrality, had allied themselves with Athens; and the Plataeans now also fail to avail themselves of yet another offer to leave Athens and remain neutral in the war. This expectation of neutrality is perhaps unreasonable on the part of the Spartans. However, we cannot fail to note that the interest of the Thebans and Plataeans is never raised in the debate – both argue in terms of justice or right and not with a view to their interest. The Thebans especially could have argued to the Spartans that it

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impeccable justice" (emphasis added). Orwin's claim of smugness implies that the Spartans are *aware* of their own conflation of interest and justice and thus are only concerned with the *appearance* of being just. Apart from what follows in my argument (departing from this view), I would also note that their long habituation may be precisely the source of their failure to notice the conflation of their interests with justice. Therefore Thucydides' portrait of the Spartan regime will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

was in their interest to kill the Plataeans and threaten to revoke any alliance should Sparta not comply. The Thebans feared that Sparta would be swayed to clemency by the Plataeans' speech, a speech animated by appeals to justice and even to the gods. And the Plataeans as well argue that any Spartan decision would be unjust if it did not give serious, or all, consideration to the fact that they had been allies of Sparta during the Persian War.

The comparison between Thucydides' remarks at 3.68 and the Athenians' claim of Spartan hypocrisy at 5.105 is revealing in understanding the Spartan view. The Athenians accuse the Spartans of holding what is expedient as just. Here Thucydides merely says that the Spartans acted "mainly" to please the Thebans. In other words, we are left to wonder whether in the case of Plataea, the Spartans also held that their interests and justice coincided. Thucydides' use of "mainly" (*schedon*) cannot be ignored.[62] It suggests that the Spartans did not act toward the Plataeans *entirely* out of a concern with the usefulness of the Thebans in the war. This leaves us to consider whether they truly believed that they were acting justly in this instance. While the Plataeans' assessment of the motives of the Spartans agrees with Thucydides (apart from the qualification just mentioned), Thucydides also notes, without an additional remark and in his own name, that the Spartans thought their question to the Plataeans to be "right" (*orthos*). The Spartans do consider the question they posed *after* the speeches of the Plataeans and Thebans. And this consideration is presented by Thucydides as a private debate amongst the judges who then proceeded to ask their question again to the Plataeans, calling them in one by one to stand judgment. The Spartans may genuinely view their actions as judges as just. That they consider the usefulness of the Thebans to their cause does not sufficiently indicate that they believed their

[62] *Schedon* is an adverb that when used in the sense of degree means "nearly, all but, almost." *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Eds. H.G. Liddell and Robert Scott). Oxford University Press. 7th Edition. 1945. p. 786. See also 5.66 and 7.33 for Thucydides' only other uses of *schedon*.

actions to be unjust and inconsistent with the dictates of justice as they understand it.[63] While their suitability as "judges" is questionable, their uniting justice and expediency does not mean they did so *knowingly* – they believed they were justified in killing the Plataeans because the Plataeans were Athenian allies and failed to remain neutral. The Spartans identify the good of Sparta with justice. Sparta's concern with their own good and their concern with acting justly are the same because Sparta's cause in the war is the just cause. Athens is the tyrannical and imperialistic city.

Thucydides could have argued that the actions of Sparta were a mere pretext as he does elsewhere. At 5.53, Thucydides shows us a relation between "pretext" and "cause." There he allows us to observe the claim by one side and follows it with the actual reason for the claim being made. Alcibiades and the Argives wanted to gain Epidaurus. They initiated a war under the "pretext" (*prophasis*) that the Epidaurians had not sent an appropriate offering to Apollo. The invasion by the Argives was to enforce the demanded offering that the Epidaurians had not given. The reason for invasion however was to aid Athens strategically in the war. The openly stated reason for the invasion, which Thucydides first calls a pretext, is *known* to be false by those demanding it. Yet it becomes a "cause" (*aitia*) since the Argives will in fact invade Epidaurus, for the actual reason of offering Athens a strategic advantage in the war. In this case, Alcibiades and the Argives are acting in a manner that can be called hypocritical, for they are aware that their pious claims are utterly false; they in no way believe that the Epidaurians are guilty of an injustice or impiety.[64]

The use of pretexts serves a purpose when the one utilizing it is aware of its true intention. For they expect that the pretext will give less cause for the other side to claim that they

[63] This is a reminder of the Plataeans' own argument that they were compelled to be Athens' allies, were just by keeping this alliance, but also were merely acting as their interests dictated.
[64] Cf. the dispute between the Spartans and Eleans at 5.49-50.2.

are being attacked unjustly. And an unjust attack would possibly secure other allies to aid them, while if they were in the wrong, they may not win this support. Sparta acts in many, if not all, instances only when there is the belief that a just cause is being served (5.31.4).

Athens at War – Mytilene

We must briefly contrast the incident at Mytilene with what we have seen at Plataea. Mytilene and Plataea are interwoven in Thucydides' order of presentation in such a manner that these incidents require comparison – they allow us to see both Sparta and Athens in their treatment of other cities with which they find themselves at odds. Furthermore, the events at both Plataea and Mytilene are accompanied by speeches that deepen our understanding of the Athenians' justification for their imperialism and the contrasting views of justice (along with human nature) that Cleon and Diodotus each reveal during the Athenians' Mytilenian debate.

The city of Mytilene, believing that the Athenians were weak and would be weaker still if the Spartans would agree to an attack of their own on Attica, initiate a revolt they had long desired to undertake. But matters do not proceed as planned. The Athenians, realizing that the cause of these actions were due to their perceived weakness, not only resisted the revolt and the attack on Attica, but "displayed their power and made descents upon the Peloponnesus wherever they pleased" (3.16.1). With this the Spartans became very disheartened and delayed their support to Mytilene. Furthermore, the Spartan commander Salaethus, due to the delay of the bulk of the Spartan fleet, made the grave error of arming the Mytilenian people, in the hope of defending the island against Athens. But the people, once armed, immediately refused to support the few in the city who had initiated the revolt. Therefore the city is compelled to surrender to the Athenians, since the few could not meet the people's demands and hoped for a better

outcome from surrendering to the Athenians than from an alliance between the people and the Athenians.

Athens thus decided (on the day before Cleon and Diodotus speak) that all the men in the city should be put to death for their betrayal of Athens. The next day the people begin to doubt their decision because of its cruelty. Cleon recommends that the Athenians should not have retracted their original decision since this decision was based on "anger" (*orge*) and thus was the best response to ensure that justice would be done to the Mytilenians (38.1). Therefore he exhorts the Athenians to return to their former state of anger and put the whole city to death. Diodotus recommends that the decisions be based on "good counsel" (*euboulia*), i.e. based on what seems best for Athens in the given situation and what future use the city of Mytilene may have to Athens.

Diodotus opens his speech by denying that those who reopened the case should be blamed. He does not "blame" (*aitia*) the Athenian people for changing their opinion on the punishment suitable for the Mytilenians' revolt. Unlike Cleon who had wondered at the need to reconsider the matter, Diodotus accuses those who act in haste and anger and implies that the Athenians also did so in reaching their first decision; these two things are he says "most opposed to good counsel" (42.1). Thucydides earlier had himself made this judgment in describing the Athenians' initial response (36.1-2).

Although Diodotus argues in terms of the use of Mytilene to Athens, he acknowledges the attraction of justice to the people, particularly the desire for revenge at those one has perceived to have done one harm, as Cleon argued the Mytilenians had. But Diodotus does not believe this is the sensible way to proceed. He now turns in his speech to reasons why the Athenians must be concerned with what is best for them, rather than what seems to be owed for

the injury that the Mytilenians have done. He further adds here that he does not believe that the death penalty has any deterring effect upon those who are wont to revolt as Cleon had argued. Here Diodotus appeals to the people, admitting that even though the speech of Cleon may seems more just, the considerations being undertaken are not those of justice, but those of the possible usefulness to Athens of the Mytilenians. Diodotus argues that justice is not even a consideration for Athens and that they should act out of usefulness only, i.e. out of their own self-interest aside from *any* consideration of justice. However, we cannot ignore Diodotus' appeal to justice as well. Alluding to the possibility of leniency, Diodotus claims that he will only advise it if it is good for the city (44.1-4). Punishment of revolting subject cities appears to be good for the city in some circumstances. Thereby Diodotus is able to appeal both to the Athenians' sense of justice, while also directing them toward considering what is advantageous for the city in this and subsequent decisions.

On the surface of this exhortation, we would expect Diodotus to argue for the ways in which the Mytilenians will be useful to the Athenians in the future. Yet Diodotus fails to discuss the practical benefits of pardoning the Mytilenians; he does not indicate here or anywhere in the remainder of his speech for what the Mytilenians may be of use. He instead turns to a consideration of "human nature" (*anthropeias physeos*) and attempts to explain to the Athenians what animates cities and men in their pursuit of various ends. For now we may be able to say that Diodotus, in recognizing the concern for justice of the Athenian demos, does his best to defuse their blame and anger towards the Mytilenians. He will argue against execution on the grounds that all cities and men strive for that which they hope to achieve, and that it is in human nature to do so. Diodotus must confront Cleon's argument that justice as revenge is a deterrent and this requires directing us toward another understanding of human nature that denies the possibility of

controlling certain actions through the fear of punishment. This part of Diodotus' argument refers directly to the part of Cleon's argument which claimed that men have free choice (39.7). Cleon had argued that those who are compelled by an enemy should not be treated similarly to those who revolt of their own choosing. Thus Cleon argues for a different punishment for freely revolting cities compared to those compelled by an enemy to revolt. But this assertion rests on an error. He claims that the Mytilenians could have come over to the Athenians but decided against this and instead stayed with the few and revolted. But as we noted above, the Mytilenian people revolted from the few as soon as they had the means to do so. Oddly, Diodotus appears to argue that while cities are compelled in their actions, the Athenians now have the possibility to freely choose the fate of Mytilene.

Diodotus' discussion of human nature focuses on "hope" (*elpis*). Hope leads men to extend beyond their reach for that which they desire. Men and cities will act against what is more immediate for the sake of that which is not immediately before their view. No law and thus no punishment will hinder their action if the end set before them is strongly hoped for – hope and *eros* together direct human beings into actions that seem contrary to either their means or their good. *Eros* drives men toward various ends and reason becomes subservient to *eros* in conceiving of the hope and thus the possible means to this end. To complicate matters further, Diodotus also speaks of the influence of "fortune" (*tyche*). Fortune sometimes seems to favor the particular ends of certain peoples and this only "helps the delusion" (45.6). The apparent coincidence of fortune with one's ends often leads men to strive further, even with inferior means. Therefore Diodotus concludes that it is "impossible" to stop men from striving after what they have determined to be their end. Hope and *eros* will not be bound by any law or "by any other terror whatsoever" (45.7). If this account of human nature is correct, then we understand

why Diodotus stands in opposition to the punishment of death for the Mytilenian revolt. With a view to its usefulness, nothing is to be expected from such a policy for the Mytilenians or any future allies of Athens.

For Cleon the proper way to deal with any revolting city is to act quickly, proceeding with all the anger felt from the injury. He says that he wonders who will suggest that this revolt was good for Athens. Diodotus addresses this by reversing what Cleon claims – not that the Mytilenian revolt is of use to Athens, but rather how the Mytilenians can be made of use to Athens now. Since an act of revenge will not render the city of Mytilene of any use to Athens, as they can no longer supply it with anything it needs, it should be allowed to continue to exist. Diodotus' argument is concerned with the possibility of surrender for future revolting cities. If cities know they have no possibility for surrender because they will be put to death for the revolt regardless of when they surrender, then they will fight harder and to the death, since death already assuredly awaits them. However, if death is not the assured penalty, then those who revolted may surrender early on and become useful to Athens.

Here we encounter a difficulty. Human nature strives after things which it cannot attain, a striving that Diodotus had called an error. Since human beings err regarding what is good for them, it does not seem appropriate to punish them for these errors. These errors are ultimately an insufficient awareness of one's own good. Diodotus makes this apparent when he speaks of both hope and the ability for one, city or man, to change its mind once it becomes apparent that an action was initiated based on a false understanding, either of what is possible or what is good (46.6). Although Diodotus only argues in terms of usefulness, his speech contains within it an appeal to justice. If all actions of men proceed from what they believe is best for them, then any apparent injustice committed by them would be based on a lack of *knowledge*. No one does

anything that they *believe* is truly bad for them. To blame anyone for pursuing their own good is to blame human beings for striving after a mistaken understanding of what is in truth good for them. The distinctions that Cleon attempts to maintain between just and unjust, ally and enemy, compulsion and free choice, appears to break down. Cleon's reference to Athenian rule as a tyranny (37.2) indicates that Athens is as guilty as the Mytilenians based on Cleon's criticism; they "prefer might to right" (39.3). Cleon's only defense of Athenian rule is that it is not as oppressive as it could be, particularly in the case of the Mytilenians – not that it is just, a claim we have heard from the Athenians envoys at Sparta. Strangely however, Diodotus argues both that human beings are compelled by nature and that the Athenians may freely choose punishment or salvation for the Mytilenians. Further, he argues that they should choose to save those who had the least to do with the revolt, only punishing those few who initiated the revolt. And while Diodotus appears, as he claims, to only present a concern with how the issue of Mytilene relates to the interests of Athens, he does therefore argue in terms of justice. The Athenians will *betray* their benefactors if they punish the people of Mytilene – since the people surrendered the city to Athens, they have aided the Athenians in putting down the revolt and in now being able to punish the few that authored it. In his appeal to the people of Athens, Diodotus apparently is compelled to appeal to justice. And even when concluding his speech with an appeal to the interests of Athens in not killing the people, he argues that one must put up with injustices, those that may justly deserve punishment, for the sake of serving the interests of Athens' continued empire and rule (47.5). Conveniently, Diodotus allows his Athenian listeners to believe they are acting soberly and with a view toward Athens' interest; but he also appeals to that side of them that is tempted by the open appeal to vengeance that characterizes Cleon's speech as well as the feeling of doubt and guilt at their previous decisions (seeing as they had in fact passed a

judgment on Mytilene that they chose to reconsider precisely due to its harshness). In other words, Diodotus allows the people to have it both ways – they can act justly in reversing their decision *and* clear-sighted with a view toward the interests of their city. Diodotus' speech reveals that to appeal to the interests of most human beings, one cannot divorce such an appeal from their concern with justice. Apparently not noticing the tension between the two, they seek to be enlightened to their interests and not the dupes of those who would falsely advise them, while also not wanting to be mere petty calculators unconcerned with or unable to forgo interests for a noble concern with justice.

Despite Thucydides' contrast of the incidents at Plataea and Mytilene, the parallel is not without differences.[65] Plataea and Mytilene are both Athenian allies. In Sparta's actions against Plataea, they are supporting their Theban allies. In punishing a faction in Mytilene for their revolt, the Athenians are controlling their empire and attempting to prevent future revolts in other cities. However in the case of the Athenians' attack on Melos, the parallels are even closer. Melos pleads to remain neutral, as the Plataeans had done. They appeal to justice and the gods, as the Plataeans had done. And the Melians are eventually killed by the Athenians, despite the glaring question of how it is advantageous for Athens to kill the citizens of a small island that bears no strategic significance on the course of the war. The Athenians kill the Melians because they claim that others will perceive them as weak if Melos is allowed to remain neutral; Melos is particularly an indication of Athens' strength given its weakness (5.97). Yet Athens is already feared by every city in Greece, thus the question of how the killing of the Melians serves Athens' interests is unclear. But as we have observed, Athenian imperialism is driven by a concern with the nobility of the Athenian empire despite their claims of only acting according to what is in

[65] Thucydides' order of presentation of his narrative is particularly striking in this case. He moves between the two incidents to heighten the effect on the reader when the Spartans sentence the Plataeans to death and the Athenians spare the Mytilenians.

their city's interest.[66] That they kill the Melians and not the Mytilenians is telling – Diodotus had argued that the treatment of subject cities must serve the interests of Athens and with Mytilene they refrained from punishing any but the conspiratorial faction within the city. The slaughter of the Melians does not alleviate the problem of cities revolting from Athens. And while Thucydides explicitly judges the decision of the Athenians to kill the Mytilenians as "cruel," he does not make a judgment in his own name regarding Sparta's actions against the Plataeans (3.36.4).

The Spartans promised to judge the case of Plataea, but the terms of good service to Sparta are not the sound basis for judgment since the Plataeans are Athenian allies. And the Plataeans have not harmed the Spartans directly, unless alliance with Athens constitutes clear harm. The Spartans claim and seek to be just, but are unable to be just. Their understanding of justice shows a primary concern with their own regime, with Sparta, not with judging. That the Plataeans are allowed to speak indicates their attempt to be just. Yet the Spartans, long habituated to be distrustful of sophisticated speeches (1.84.3, 86.1, 4.17.2), must be suspicious even while allowing the Plataeans to speak. And as we have observed, it is through both the complications of the case and the problematic admissions and claims of the Plataeans themselves, that Sparta may have been able to notice precisely the justification for acting against the Plataeans in this case. That ultimately they act mainly to please the Thebans, their allies, reveals their error is connecting their own good or interest with their just intentions. Thucydides does not say that the Spartans were compelled to kill the Plataeans, just as the Athenians were never compelled to kill all the Mytilenians.

Athens is then the exception among cities. No other city so frankly states that they are compelled to rule. All other cities argue in terms of justice. The Plataeans, Thebans, and Spartans

[66] Bolotin (1987) pp. 19-20, 27.

all argue in terms of justice; they have a right to punish one another. Even when they act in their own interest, they always justify it to themselves in terms of justice. Now clearly some cities justify actions that are advantageous to themselves knowing that these justifications are a mere pretext; they know that they are masking their interest behind the pretensions to be just. The Corinthians are perhaps the clearest case of this in Thucydides (5.30). Yet even the Athenians are unable to act in accordance with their own frank claims. The Athenians kill out of anger in this very context, between the Spartan invasion of Plataea and the Mytilenian revolt. They kill the Spartan Salaethus, who was hiding in Mytilene, despite his offer of securing the withdrawal of Peloponnesians from Plataea. They do not even consider his proposal; he is killed "at once" (3.36.1).

The Spartans and others who expect justice to bind cities in their actions presuppose that these cities are able to do so. The Athenians treat their actions as due to compulsion, even if there are various kinds of compulsion. Justice and the good are connected since the claims made on behalf of justice are with a view to the good of another. It is not good for the Spartans' interests to be infringed upon by the Athenians. Those goods belong to Sparta and the Athenians are attempting to secure those goods for themselves. This includes the wealth that attends empire, but also includes the desires that the Athenians seek to satisfy – the desire for nobility and honor. If we are compelled to pursue the good, however one understands it, then justice requires one to relinquish one's own good to some extent for the good of another. Justice proves to be a hindrance to that pursuit. It is not in the interest or good of the Athenians to allow the Melians to remain neutral in the war, just as it is not in the good of Sparta to allow the Plataeans, being enemies to their allies the Thebans, to remain a part of the Athenian empire.

That free (moral) choice is possible is a key premise that begins as a theme in the Plataean incident with Archidamus' speech and continues through the speeches of the Plataeans and Thebans. This contrasts most notably with Mytilene and the argument put forward by Diodotus that nothing will hinder human nature from pursuing what it has set out for itself. Moral culpability presupposes free choice, but Diodotus presents human nature as compelled by both hope and *eros*.

The Spartan manner with regard to their enemies is perhaps clearest in an incident that Thucydides relates in the context of Mytilene, but that initially appears of minor importance. Alcidas, the Spartan general, fails to arrive in Mytilene in time to aid the city and therefore leaves to return to the Peloponnesus. However, before leaving the Ionia coast he stops to slaughter allies of Athens. On noticing this, Sparta's allies the Samians entreated him to stop, arguing that these "allies" of Athens were so only by "necessity" and that these men were not his "enemies" (*echthrai*). Further, the liberation of Greece from the Athenian empire would not be furthered by the killing of those very men one is supposedly freeing. Upon hearing the Samians' argument, Alcidas ceases at once from his actions since they serve no benefit and may even cause Sparta more enemies (3.32.1-3). He had failed to consider the benefits to Sparta of killing; revenge for perceived injustice was his reason. He did not consider the interests of Sparta because those interests are identical with their just cause – to free Greece from Athens' empire. But most notably, he had no conception of necessity; he viewed all allies of Athens as unjust and thus deserving of punishment.[67] This Spartan manner is in agreement with Cleon who had also

[67] See Orwin (1994) p. 76 for a similar observation.

argued that punishment and revenge were the proper response to injustice, since injustice is done voluntarily.[68]

Sparta's Disaster – Sphacteria

The events at Pylos, a coastal city on the Peloponnesus, will significantly shift the war. Sparta's best men will become trapped on the island of Sphacteria, just off of Pylos, bringing Sparta their first adversity in the war.

Demosthenes lands at Pylos while the Athenians are sailing to Sicily because he observed the "nature" (*phusis*) of Pylos to be strongly fortified and possessing a harbor. The Athenians fortify it in anticipation of the Spartans' return from plundering Attica. The Spartans delay due to their ongoing invasion of Attica and their belief that they could engage the Athenians when they chose and defeat them with relative ease. Perhaps the Spartans did not observe the distinct nature of Pylos as Demosthenes had done. But Agis and the Spartans become concerned given the proximity of Pylos to Sparta itself; they were also facing difficulties in their invasion of Attica from a lack of food which was due to their invasion being in the early spring before the crops were ripe.[69]

Accordingly, men are sent to the island of Sphacteria to protect against the Athenians landing there. When the Spartans attack, they land where Demosthenes had anticipated and the Athenians succeed in driving the Spartan ships out of the harbor, leaving 300 Spartans trapped on the island. The Athenians pursue further despite their already good fortune, defeating the Spartans and surrounding the island with their ships. The gravity of the situation for the Spartans

[68] Cf. 2.67.4 – the Spartans butcher all at sea, Athenian ally or neutrals; they killed "as a matter of course" (Strauss 1964 p. 215).

[69] In failing to observe the distinct nature of Pylos and invading Attica at a premature time of the season, the Spartans fail to correctly understand nature. And while they attribute numerous events in the war to chance, they believe chance can be governed by the gods should they choose to do so. Events which are due to misfortune (and failed policy or lack of experience) are understood by the Spartans to be punishment by the gods for injustices. The plague at Athens would have been understood by the Spartans as punishment for a transgression, as it was for some, if not most, Athenians (2.54.1-4).

is clear; once they saw that their men were trapped, they decide on negotiating an armistice with the Athenians and sending envoys to Athens to secure the return of their men from the island.

The speech of the Spartan envoys appears of particular relevance as it is the only speech Thucydides allows us to hear of Spartans at Athens; it therefore corresponds to the speech of the Athenian envoys at Sparta. There, the envoys come forward on their own and defend the Athenian empire as the Spartans debate going to war. The Spartan envoys at Athens are sent by Sparta, but must depart from their usual ways and here speak at length, since the situation was "believed" (*dokeo*) by them to be a serious one (4.15.1).[70]

The Spartans urge the Athenians to use their good fortune in this situation to their advantage and to their honor and reputation. They should not be overly trusting due to their present prosperity. The Spartans mention "fortune" (*tyche*) numerous times throughout their speech (4.17.4, 18.3-5). Yet they also admit that the disaster on the island is due to a failure in their judgment; it was not due to a loss in "power" (*dynamis*) or becoming "arrogant" (*hybrisantes*). The Spartans thereby imply that the disaster they have suffered was due to both a failure in their judgment and also due to ill fortune. They have not become weak nor have they acted in a manner that would lead to punishment, i.e. they have not ceased from acting virtuously. Spartan failure is framed by them in terms of shame and nobility. They do not mention their own interests apart from these judgments. And they are indeed judged by the other Greeks based on the outcome of this battle, in particular the eventual surrender of their men (5.75.3).

The Athenians should act as "moderate" (*sophron*) men in success since ill fortune may befall any city. The Spartans anticipate the arguments of the Melians who likewise attempt to

[70] Thucydides is silent on the severity of this defeat and the men being captured; he may not share the Spartan view that the return of their men should be of the utmost concern.

persuade the Athenians that fortune in war may favor either side and it is not knowable how matters will fall out (5.102, 112.2); thus they argue that one should not be led on by "hope" and "grasp continually at something more" (*pleonos oregontai*) due to their present fortune (4.17.4; Cf. 4.65.4). The Spartans have only erred – they are no weaker than before. Therefore the Spartans follow by arguing that the Athenians, as "moderate" men, should be content with their present goods and not risk the shifts in fortune which may befall anyone. Good fortune only lasts for a time; eventually the Athenians will find themselves facing a disaster which places them at a disadvantage. But since fortune has favored them now, the Athenians should act moderately and thereby obtain a reputation for strength and wisdom (4.18.4-5).

The Spartans further argue that the surest way to solve the enmity between the two cities is for the Athenians to act with gentleness in their current dealings. However, the Spartans now quietly admit that it may not have been fortune that favored the Athenians – they should accept Sparta's offer to make a treaty on measured conditions since they have conquered Sparta by means of "virtue" (*arete* – 19.2). They argue that this will ensure that each will refrain from revenge and that the debt of shame will be placed on the Spartans.

With these considerations in mind, the Spartans urge the Athenians that it would be noble for each city to agree to a peace now to avoid being "forced" (*ananke*) to hate one another. The advantages of peace now are reputation and friendship for Athens and an alleviation of the shame of defeat for the Spartans (20.1-2). The reason this is so, the Spartans argue, is due to their admission (almost in passing) introducing the possibility that Athens was not to blame for the war but that Sparta is engaged in an unjust war, or more cautiously, that Sparta broke the treaty by beginning the war without submitting to arbitration. The Spartans view their bad luck as the reverse side of the Athenians' good luck – they are now suffering due to beginning the war

unjustly. This admission is especially striking, as the Spartans also claim that the Athenians will be considered "responsible" (*aitia*) for the peace should they now agree to Sparta's terms for a new treaty.

The Spartan understanding of the good fortune of Athens is a problem for them. Their previous claims were that the Athenians were unjust in acquiring empire and encroaching on Spartan territory and thus the Athenians do not deserve success because they are unjust men; yet chance favored them. The Spartans note this begrudgingly for two reasons: first, they believed that the Athenians actually possessed an advantage in virtue and that their capture of the Spartans at Sphacteria was not a matter of chance. Second and more importantly, the Spartans in this context question who began the war, implicitly raising the question of who may be to blame for the war (20.3). These admissions are connected – if the Spartans had acted virtuously, i.e. justly, they would not have been "punished" with the misfortunes they now cannot help but recognize. Their belief in punishment implies a connection of virtue and outcome. They betray this without explicitly saying it because Thucydides imitates the speech of men who understand the relation between good fortune and just actions as fundamentally connected. Once the war turns very unfavorably for the Spartans (their view of this blockade of their men on the island), the question necessarily arises for them whether they may have acted in an unjust manner. And though the Athenians' success is due to their virtue, rather than simple chance occurrences that may befall anyone in war, the Spartans begin to believe that their fate at Pylos was deserved punishment for an unlawful breach of the treaty.

The Spartans also believed that the Athenians are as interested in peace as they were (21.1). But the Athenians read the situation for what it is; they have the men on the island trapped and the speech of the Spartans certainly lends the impression that they were anxious to

come to terms with Athens. Therefore the Athenians believed a treaty could be made at their convenience. They reject the treaty with Sparta and "grasped at something more" (21.2). Sparta had warned Athens against grasping at something more because those that do so risk their good fortune. Those who have experienced good and bad fortunes understand how matters can change. But the Spartans do not understand the Athenians. Just as they blame the Plataeans despite their appeal to the necessities of subjugation to Athens, here they fail to understand what even the Corinthians claimed at Sparta – they fail to understand the daring character of Athens (1.70.2). And given the conditions that Cleon now demands, the Spartans ask the Athenians to select counselors with whom they can discuss the different points that Cleon and the Athenians have demanded. Cleon responds by accusing the Spartans of having no just intentions and demands they speak in front of everyone instead of conferring in private. The Spartans realize that they cannot satisfy Cleon's demands without upsetting their relations with their allies, especially if the negotiations fail. And the Athenians are not willing to agree to "measured" (*metrios*) conditions (4.22.2). The Spartans view their own proposals as measured terms, while the Athenians (led by Cleon) realized the advantage of their position and make demands that the Spartans could not agree to. These demands included the return of cities near Attica, cities that the Spartans themselves gained in the Thirty Year peace treaty when Attica was being attacked by them and Euboea had revolted form Athens (1.114-115.1).

Given the failure of these negotiations, the armistice between Sparta and Athens ends and hostilities are renewed at Pylos. The Athenians accuse the Spartans of an attack which violates the armistice, as well as other violations "not worth mentioning" (23.1). Thucydides implies that the violations which the Athenians direct at the Spartans are perhaps of questionable validity, the Athenians being led here by the violent demagogue Cleon. And while the Spartans deny the

"violation" (*adikema*), both sides now return to war with all their strength. The Spartans seem to be inspired by their belief that the Athenian charge of a violation was false; they act with vigor at the perceived injustice.

Despite the advantageous position of the Athenians at the moment they deny Sparta's proposals of a treaty, the matter at Pylos begins to press upon them. They are unable to reduce the men on the island and their ability to carry in food and water is difficult. So poorly are matters proceeding that they begin to regret not having agreed to the treaty with Sparta (27.2). And it is Cleon who is held responsible for the rejection of the treaty since he had urged the demos to reject Sparta's proposals and even further private discussions. Despite the Athenians' desire for a treaty at this point, Cleon also notices that he may be able to convince them to send a new expedition in an effort to push back the Spartan forces. He attempts to persuade them to send Nicias on the expedition due to his "hatred" of him, but Nicias maneuvers the demos into placing Cleon at the head of the expedition. And Cleon promises a quick result.

This elicits a perhaps surprising remark by Thucydides – the "moderate" men at Athens doubted Cleon's abilities, yet were pleased with him leading the expedition; for "either they would be freed from Cleon, which they greatly hoped for, or if disappointed in this expectation, would reduce the Spartans" (28.5). Despite the Athenians' daring character and grasping for more (which we have observed throughout) Thucydides reminds us that there are moderate men at Athens, men of a more Spartan view.[71] And Thucydides' reminder arises in the context of his striking description of Cleon as "the most violent citizen at Athens, and at that time by far the most powerful with the people" (3.36.6). The moderate men at Athens desired the death of Cleon even *more* than the defeat of the Spartans; they preferred the death of a violent demagogue to a

[71] As Palmer (1992) p. 117 notes, this is the only mention of moderation in reference to an Athenian (or Athenians). However, cf. 6.54.5-6.

victory in this battle or perhaps even the larger war. We are reminded that it was the moderate Spartan king Archidamus who cautioned greatly against going to war.[72] We learn something more about Thucydides' claim that Sparta is moderate in prosperity – moderation in part means a concern for the regime more than a concern for victory in war and this would seem to include the desire for imperialistic expansion. Sparta is prosperous, but they certainly are not as imperialistic as Athens.

Once Cleon and Demosthenes have the Spartans on the island at the point at which they could be overtaken, they send the Spartans an offer to surrender. They do not surrender immediately but request to send to Sparta to ask what they should do to which they receive the reply that "[t]he Spartans bid you to decide for yourselves so long as you do nothing shameful" (4.38.3). The Spartans decide to surrender to the surprise of all the Greeks. It was believed that not even "necessity" would lead Spartans to lay down their arms rather than be killed in battle. The surrender is of nearly 300 men, including 120 Spartiates, Spartans from the first families of the ruling class.[73] This defeat and subsequent surrender causes the greatest distress at Sparta. The persistence of the Athenians in their prosecution of the war is something the Spartans were not prepared for, nor had ever experienced (4.55).

Despite Sparta's defeat and the accompanying distress they suffered from this shift in fortune, the Spartan commander Brasidas undertakes expeditions of his own and is successful in inciting Athenian subject cities to revolt. After being defeated at Amphipolis, the Athenians became alarmed and discouraged. Brasidas was "measured" in his conduct and advertised to Athens' subjects that he had been sent by Sparta to free them from the Athenian empire. Despite

[72] Thucydides places two chapters on the Athenian incursions to Sicily (4.24-25) between the Athenian rejection of the Spartan peace treaty (4.23) and the Athenian attack on Pylos (4.26). Sicily and Pylos are both instances of the Athenians "grasping at more," as the Spartans in the latter instance are aware (4.17.4).
[73] The number of men, 300, reminds us of the Spartans who did not surrender to the Persians at the battle of Thermopylae, which Thucydides alludes to in this context (4.36.3).

Spartan reservations about Brasidas' activities, his actions result in a one year truce between Athens and Sparta. The reasons for the truce from the point of view of each city were as follows: Athens wanted to end Brasidas inciting revolts and institute a general peace, while Sparta wanted reconciliation, their men from the island returned, and a treaty for longer duration. Thucydides emphasizes here that the Spartans were particularly concerned about the return of their men, which he had also emphasized previously (4.117.2. Cf. 108.7). They thought they would most be able to achieve this while Brasidas' "good fortune" (*eutuchei*) lasted. The Spartan view, that chance affects the course of war, seems confirmed here through the actions of Brasidas. When seeking a treaty after their men on the island were first surrounded, we noted that the Spartans argued to the Athenians that their good fortune could indeed change. Through the actions of Brasidas, the fortunes of the Athenians have changed and now the Spartans are able to negotiate for the return of their men, something they were unable to do so long as Athens was in a position of strength in the war.[74]

Sparta's Attempts at Peace

We must now consider how Sparta conducts itself in the war after their failure to secure a treaty with Athens and secure the return of their men. For at this stage of the war, Sparta had begun to admit to themselves that they are involved in a war for which they are at least legally responsible and which has dragged on despite their initial predications and strategy.

Book 4 concludes with Brasidas continuing the Spartan war effort under the pretext of liberating Athenian subjects from their empire. Sparta mistakenly believed at Pylos that Athens desired peace as well, since Sparta offered terms that would end the war, bestow honor and nobility on Athens, and offer an alliance of the two cities. But the Athenians are always "grasping for more" and precisely for this reason and the advantages they held during the

[74] Brasidas' character and his relation to Sparta are discussed in detail in Chapter IV.

negotiation at Athens that they reject any treaty and alliance with Sparta. But Brasidas succeeds in defeating the Athenians at Amphipolis and Delos. These defeats harm Athens to such a degree that they now sue for peace to stop their cities from revolting and going over to Brasidas (4.108.1-2, 117.1). Brasidas makes peace possible for Sparta. Unlike the Spartan strategy of ravaging the countryside of Attica and other allies of Athens, Brasidas successfully brings over Athens' subject cities to Sparta under the promise of liberating them from Athens. The Spartan doubt about the justice of their cause does not seem to have affected Brasidas in his conduct; Brasidas appears to wage the war of liberation that Sparta proclaimed as their cause at the outset of the war, but has been unable or unwilling to do.

And that this guilt has manifested itself in Sparta should surprise us given the support of the Delphic oracle that the god Apollo would aid the Spartans in the war. However, their guilt is connected (for them) with their misfortunes and the greatest misfortune for Sparta was the capture of their men. The Spartans did not consult the god again before concluding a truce with Athens – their guilt was due to their perception of having breached a solemnly sworn treaty. No consultation of the god would seem fitting given such circumstances. They can only hope to end a war for which they were responsible in an attempt to appease the god for this unlawful breach of the Thirty Year treaty.

Following the one-year truce, Cleon and Brasidas engage again at Amphipolis. Both Sparta and Athens now desire peace beyond their one year truce. The Athenians regret their decision not to reach an agreement after the capture of Sparta's men at Sphacteria. Now they even attribute their own success merely to good luck, not the skill or strategy of Demosthenes (5.14.1-2). The truce that was intended to give each city time to secure their next move given the difficulties that now presented themselves has become a treaty. And with Cleon now dead,

Nicias emerges as Athens' most prominent general and convinces the city to agree to terms.[75] Despite the peace, Sparta accuses their own king Pleistoanax of bribing the Delphic priestess as a means of ensuring his return to Sparta and accession to king (5.16-17.1). Pleistoanax had been exiled from Sparta on suspicion of corruption when he invaded Attica, but failed to proceed further (1.114.1). The peace has not wholly alleviated the Spartans' concern with their own breach of the treaty and perhaps they suspected that even Apollo's supposed support for their war effort was similarly due to bribery. The Spartans blame Pleistoanax for all their misfortunes and while Thucydides is silent on the truth of this charge, he allows us to observe the Spartan concern with oracles. While Thucydides states in his own name that the only oracle that came true regarded the length of the war (5.26.3), he does not disregard the significance of oracles as such – the Spartan concern with oracles affected their prosecution of the war and led them to seek pious explanations for their misfortunes.

The manner in which this treaty arose however hints at how tenuous it is. Both Athens and Sparta suffer from factions within their cities such that certain individuals favor the peace while others oppose it. Cleon and Brasidas both favored war, Brasidas due to the success and honor he obtained and Cleon due to the crimes for which he was responsible and wished to hide (16.1). Pleistoanax, the Spartan king, sought peace since he had been accused of bribing the priestess at Delphi, believing that no harm could come to him during peace time, and because the return of the Spartiates on Sphacteria would ensure that he could not be drawn into further blame for all that had befallen Sparta in the first ten years of the war. Nicias also supported peace. However, he desired both to guard his own "good fortune" as well as relieve the troubles "for himself *and* his citizens" (16.1 – emphasis added). Only Nicias has a motive in pursuing peace which is not wholly guided by his own interests. And the dissolution of the peace and beginning

[75] 5.18-19. Cf. 5.16.1. This treaty is the so-called Peace of Nicias. Nicias is discussed in detail in Chapter IV.

of the second half of war similarly will be the result of certain individuals in each city guided more by private ambitions than service to their cities.

The Spartans also face further difficulties. Their treaty with Argos is set to expire, their men are still barricaded on the island, and the potential for their allies on the Peloponnesus to rebel and go over to the Athenians is a fear that Thucydides himself confirms (14.4). But in Thucydides' repetition of these concerns, he only mentions the return of the prisoners, who he now identifies as Spartiates from the first families in Sparta (14.3-5, 15.1). Thucydides' silence on the Argive matter imitates the concerns of Sparta itself – the return of their men at this point in the war was their only true concern. The larger purpose of the war is dropped.[76]

Thucydides also reveals now that the beginning of the war was Sparta's invasion of Attica.[77] This despite his earlier claim that it was the events at Plataea that were an overt breach of the treaty. But there he did not indicate clearly that it was Sparta who breached the treaty. Thebes had invaded Plataea and Sparta came to assist their allies (2.7.1). This confusion regarding the beginning of the war seems to be due to the fact that Sparta aided their allies after the breach of the treaty. The beginning of the war is precipitated by this act; yet as we have observed, the Thebans were invited in by a faction of Plataeans. And the war between Sparta and Athens was already anticipated with Sparta and its allies voting for war.

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[76] Strassler (1998) p. 321 n2b on 5.34.2 brings out the common argument in the scholarship that the Spartans wanted their men back due to the number of Spartiates having been reduced significantly since the time of Herodotus. If the *number* of Spartiates was of the utmost concern to the Spartans, Thucydides makes no mention of this as the reason for the great concern which the Spartans clearly show for these men. He does speak of the gravity of this disaster, but in the negotiations at Pylos with Athens, we observed the Spartans implicitly raise another concern – who is to *blame* for the war. As we have argued, *this* concern is Thucydides' explanation, especially if we also consider his indication that Sparta came to believe that they were to blame for starting the war and the effect this had on their own actions (7.18.1-3). Thucydides is interested in the "psychological" or "moral" explanation of the actions of Sparta and less concerned in this instance with possible "material" explanations; he sometimes mentions other such practical considerations that affect the conduct of cities, but refrains from doing so in this case (Cf. 7.27.3). The moral explanation is in keeping with Thucydides' claim that his account of the Peloponnesian War is to be a possession for all times, so long as human nature remains the same.

[77] "…from the first invasion of Attica *and* the beginning of this war." (5.20.1 – emphasis added).

If the action of Thebes does not constitute the beginning of the war, we may consider that the place of allies in the cause of any war is difficult to determine. We note that even if Sparta is unjust by beginning the war, this does not imply that Athens is exculpated. Athens is at most here only exculpated legally, i.e. they did not breach the terms of the treaty at the beginning of the war. Sparta breached the treaty with the invasion of Attica. But this is also merely a legal breach because Thucydides' explicit judgment states that Sparta was compelled by Athens to wage war. Once fear is a valid compulsion, as the Athenians themselves admit, we must say then that breaches of treaties, i.e. acts of illegality that are viewed as injustice, will always happen should the compulsion be great enough.

And it is the Spartans who are affected by their view that they breached the treaty in the first part of the war and here the relevance of their efforts at ending the war becomes clear. Thucydides reveals that the Spartan guilt for unjustly starting the war had an adverse effect on their conduct in the war. They came to believe that they had violated the treaty with Athens through the attack of Plataea by the Thebans and due to their refusal to submit allegations to arbitration, as the Athenian envoys had offered. Thus they "deserved" (*eikotos*) the misfortunes that befell them in the war and these misfortunes included the loss of their men on the island (7.18.2). They believed that they were punished for the breach of the treaty. Treaties were solemnly sworn and oaths taken to ensure compliance, since the gods were held to support such oaths. Thus the misfortunes in the war for the Spartans were held to be a divine punishment. "Fortune" is the will of the gods to intervene in human affairs as reward and punishment for those that act justly or unjustly. And Thucydides notes at 6.105.1 that the Athenians eventually breach the treaty and alliance agreed to at 5.20 and 22 because they aided the Argives when the Spartans invaded their territory in the 18th year of the war. Thus each side had breached a treaty

and in the second part of the war, justice was on the side of Sparta, not Athens; the Spartans, recognizing this breach, now expect the war to proceed in their favor and they were full of "eagerness" (*prothumos*) in resuming it (7.18.3).[78]

Regardless of the actions of Sparta and Athens, the allies refuse to sign this new treaty, particularly Boeotia, Corinth, Elis, and Megara. The Spartans ask their allies to sign the treaty, but they refuse on the "pretexts" (*prophasis*) that the treaty is not "just" (5.22.1). The allies expect to receive back what they were in possession of before the war had begun. Sparta's particular concern is with Argos, the third most powerful city in Greece and an old enemy of Sparta (28.2, 29.1). Argos has been strengthened by their ability to remain neutral in the war thus far, but the Spartans correctly fear them as Argos desired to gain supremacy of the Peloponnesus.[79] Indeed, this is the motivation behind the Argives being willing to listen to the Corinthians, who accuse the Spartans after they sign an alliance with Athens, an alliance to prevent their disgruntled allies from themselves forming an alliance with Athens (24.2). The view of the Corinthians is that Sparta must have their own designs on the Peloponnesus given this Sparta-Athens alliance. Therefore the Argives offer an alliance to any Greek city that desired to ally with them, Mantinea being the first to come over out of fear of Sparta. Many other cities in the Peloponnesus were considering following, since they assumed that Mantinea had a good reason for leaving Sparta. However Thucydides allows us to notice that Mantinea was fearful of Sparta and "angry" with Sparta for including them in the treaty with Athens (29.2). The Mantineans act based on the view that Sparta would engage in controlling the Peloponnesus now

[78] Therefore I disagree with Crane (1998) p. 232 that "[t]he surrender at Sphacteria is not an exception, but a true indication that the Spartans are not the inherently heroic, self-denying figures that the rest of the Greeks assumed." At 7.18.3, Thucydides indicates that the Spartans overcame their guilt for the original breach of the treaty as the result of Athenian actions that *preceded* their victory at Mantinea, a victory they won by "courage" and which restored their reputation throughout Greece.

[79] Only strength seems to allow for neutrality of a city, as in the case of Argos (5.28.2). Cf. Melos.

that they were not at war with Athens and due to the perceived injustice of the treaty; their "reasons" are their own.

The fear of Mantinea becomes the fear of the other cities as well. Sparta and Athens had a clause in the treaty that would allow for either city to alter the treaty, so long as it did not breach their oaths (29.2). The cities of the Peloponnesus now fear that Sparta and Athens will act together in subjugating them. The liberation of Greece from Athens seems to have disappeared from the minds of the other cities. This had been Brasidas' concern or rhetoric and while he suggested that he spoke for Sparta as a whole, this reversal by the Spartans in signing an alliance with Athens appears in striking contrast. However, Thucydides has not indicated that this was in fact their intention. While the allies assume that Sparta has empire of its own in mind due to their new alliance, Sparta's concern was with the return of their men and a possible end to the war, given their attempts to establish a treaty with Athens.

Sparta attempts to bring their suspicious allies back to their side and into the alliance. They accuse Corinth in particular of violating their oaths because the treaty had stipulated that the vote of the majority was binding on all the allies. The Spartans correctly observe that it was Corinth who instigated the other allies to leave Sparta and join into an alliance with Argos. Corinth responds to this allegation by claiming that they cannot breach their alliance with the Thracians due to the oaths they have sworn on the trust in the gods. And the gods were the only basis on which oaths of a treaty could be violated, the assumption (which Thucydides does not state) being that the gods could interfere in such a manner that a city could not be held to conditions of the treaty. The Spartan envoys leave to return home. We do not hear any response to this claim, despite the fact that Thucydides indicates that the Corinthians merely used this "pretext" as a means to justify their failure to abide by their agreements with Sparta (30.2).

The Spartans' silence here is telling. They do not even attempt to argue with the Corinthians that they must relinquish their alliance with Argos. The Corinthians argue that they had exchanged oaths with the Thracians and therefore could not join the treaty between Sparta and Athens. But the treaty had stipulated that all allies were bound by the decision of the majority, yet the Corinthians had refused its conditions (5.25.1). It is due to their prior oaths with Thrace that the Corinthians contend that the gods stand in their way. The Spartans do not reply to this claim; they do not reply, as the Corinthians had done on an earlier occasion, that the gods view compulsion as an excuse for breaches of oaths (1.71.5). On both occasions when Sparta's allies use pretexts of justice, the Spartans are ineffectual at bringing their allies into a favorable alliance for Sparta (5.22.1, 30.4).

During the initial stages of the alliance, Athens and Sparta dispute the conditions required of each side for its fulfillment. Athens in particular accuses Sparta of failing in their obligations and become suspicious of Sparta. Yet Sparta assures the Athenians that they are attempting to fulfill all of the conditions of the alliance. Regardless of the claims of either side, Thucydides indicates that neither had given back all they were required by the treaty (26.2). And both sides were involved in the battles throughout Book 5, culminating in the Athenians' restatement at Melos of their imperial view. It seems that while the treaty and alliance is a means to end the war for the Spartans, it is only a means for the Athenians to find themselves in a more advantageous position to renew hostilities. And it is Athens that will eventually breach the alliance by an overt act that leads to open war with Sparta. Both Sparta and Athens were in violation of treaties and alliances throughout the war – neither side was just.

Yet the Athenians level specific accusations against the Spartans. The agreement between Sparta and Athens included bringing the allies into the treaty and that the two cities were to unite

in “compelling” those who refused to accept it (35.3). The Spartans argue however that they are unable to restore Amphipolis as the Athenians had requested – it is not in their “power” (35.5). They reiterate their promise to negotiate with Boeotia, Athens’ interest here lying in the return of Panactum which was held by the Boeotians. The Spartans attempt to do so, but the Boeotians will not give them access to Panactum without making an alliance. Such an alliance would be a breach of the treaty between Sparta and Athens though, since the two cities have agreed to act together in any actions of peace or war. And while the Spartans have recovered their prisoners on Sphacteria from Athens through the alliance, the Athenians still hold Pylos on the Peloponnesus and will not restore it to Sparta without Panactum. The Spartans ally themselves with Boeotia to gain Panactum, even though they are aware that this would be “wrongdoing” (*adikesousiv*) towards Athens (39.3). Thucydides indicates that this breach is due to the Spartans’ concerns – their principle one being the restoration of Pylos, a concern he repeats twice (36.2, 39.2).

This does not detract from the movement towards peace that the Spartans are animated by at this time in the war. That Sparta was acting with certain designs in mind is only supported by Thucydides’ remarks that the war party swayed certain decisions in Sparta. The guilt of the Spartans and their doubt about who started the war support the view that the Spartans were interested in maintaining peace and had no interest in continuing the war. The faction within Sparta at this time is indicated by Thucydides’ remarks regarding Sparta and Boeotia – they wished to obtain Panactum to exchange it with the Athenians for Pylos *and* because the party of Xenares wanted to dissolve the treaty between Athens and Sparta and carry on the war (39.3).

The Spartan-Boeotian alliance thus concluded, the Boeotians take it upon themselves to raze Panactum. When the news of these matters arrives at Athens, the Athenians blame the Spartans. However Thucydides indicates that ancient oaths had been exchanged between Athens

and Boeotia regarding Panactum that neither cities' inhabitants should occupy it; therefore the Boeotians razed it so that it would be kept common land (42.1). This oath and the actions of the Boeotians did not involve the Spartans directly, but led the Athenians to become angry with Sparta. Again the Spartans have not been able to control their allies. The Spartans repeatedly fail in their actions abroad and the belief amongst the Athenians is that this is due to Spartan complicity and injustice.

This conclusion is subject to one objection: the Ephors in Sparta have changed and what we have called the war party in Sparta has ascended to power. Cleobulus and Xenares were both directly opposed to the treaty and sought to dissolve it. It was this party that is pressing for the alliance with Boeotia, knowing this would be a breach of Sparta's agreement with Athens and thus may result in renewed hostilities (36.2, 39.3). Though the war party has ascended to power in Sparta, this does not allow the conclusion to be drawn that Sparta was concerned above all with waging war. The terms of the treaty were agreed to *before* Xenares and the war party came to power at 5.36.[80]

Despite a looming Athens-Argos alliance (the result of Sparta's alliance with Boeotia) Nicias is able to persuade the Athenians to attempt to negotiate with the Spartans again and fulfill some of the conditions of the treaty and alliance. Nicias wants friendship with Sparta even though Athens is in a position of strength from which to negotiate.[81] The conditions Nicias seeks include Sparta relinquishing their alliance with Boeotia, for otherwise Athens will ally with Argos. The Spartans refuse to relinquish this alliance and Thucydides again indicates that this is due to Xenares and his party (46.4). The refusal of conditions that would preserve an alliance and cessation from hostilities is not a typical Spartan action. An Athenian-Argive alliance is thus

[80] Cf. note 21 above.
[81] Nicias, in contrast to Alcibiades and the war party in Sparta, is interested in preserving the current treaty and alliance. His view of the war is closer to Sparta than to Athens.

concluded due to the "anger" of the Athenians at Spartan "injustice" (46.5). Yet despite these disagreements, the treaty between Athens and Sparta was not renounced (48.1). Apart from the continued Athenian refrain of acting only with a view to their interests, the Athenians' anger betrays their expectation that Sparta act according to the terms of justice.

Xenares dies during a battle at Heraclea and Agis (son of the former Spartan king Archidamus) will now lead the Spartans in the war.[82] Although treaties and alliances are still in place Alcibiades will lead the Athenians in pushing forward and finding pretexts for continuing hostilities against Sparta and its allies. Agis (and Pleistoanax to a lesser degree) will lead Sparta and its allies, culminating in the largest battle between the two sides (despite the treaties in place) and a key event of the central years of the war. And here Thucydides will reveal more details regarding Sparta's regime and the internal order of their city as this manifests itself in their foreign dealings, thus allowing us to consider Sparta more closely. The Athenian thesis has been strengthened by the Spartans' admission that they may have been responsible for starting the war. And while the trans-legal cause is exculpatory according to the Athenian thesis, the Spartans' guilt leads them to seek a treaty with Athens to end the war despite their admittedly weak position from which to negotiate. The Spartans fail to act according to that thesis, for this guilt was due to the capture of a relatively small number of their men. Sparta views its interests more in maintaining their city than winning foreign wars. Thucydides shows clearly in the upcoming years the tension between their concern with the city and their ability to prosecute the war, even when they are in a position of strength. There we will locate the characteristic differences between Sparta and Athens, only some of which we have seen in the war thus far.

[82] This confirms Archidamus' fear that the war would last into the following generation (1.81.6).

CHAPTER III

SPARTA AND THE QUESTION OF THE REGIME

The preliminary and most noticeable judgments of Thucydides on Sparta indicate that the city succeeded in putting down tyrannies and having good laws and a stable regime, thus combining moderation and prosperity. With its focus on Sparta, we must consider how Book 5 affects these judgments which occur near the beginning and end of his account. Here in the central years of the war, Thucydides' account of Sparta poses problems for these claims in Books 1 and 8. Book 5 shows us the peak of Sparta's war effort but we also see Sparta's errors. These errors are connected to the characteristics of the Spartan regime, particularly their adherence to law. Sparta's adherence to a law governing their conduct on campaigns is a hindrance at best and results in failures when dealing with allies and enemies at worst. Sparta's virtues that led to the good domestic order Thucydides praises did not foster success in dealing with both allies and enemies. A city such as Sparta with a regime strictly dedicated to law hinders its own ability to pursue advantageous policy during war.

Sparta and its inability to prosecute the war directs us to a closer investigation of the regime as well as Thucydides' portraits and judgments on other regimes. These statements are revealing. Thucydides allows us to see the characteristics of differing regimes when he describes the civil war in Corcyra and the factions in Athens late in the war. Thucydides also observes that the best regime of his time in Athens is the "mixed" regime of 411 (8.97.2). Thucydides has revealed more of Athens in the earlier parts of his account – we are allowed to hear the Athenian envoys at Sparta describing the motivations of Athenian empire and the justifications for it. And we hear Pericles describe the character of Athens and the Athenians. If the Athenian empire and its understanding of itself resulted in this internal discord within Athens, then the strongest case

to be made for Sparta rests on the failure of Athens to win the war due to faction within the city. Athens could have succeeded, Thucydides suggests, were it not for the factions fighting for control of the city. On the other hand, Sparta appears to have suffered none of the internal discord that Thucydides portrays at Athens. But Thucydides is not as forthcoming regarding Sparta in his account of the first ten years of the war. Sparta is more fully revealed during the nearly seven years of tentative peace than anywhere else.

At this point in the war, in the time of an alliance between Sparta and Athens, the Spartans must deal both with their prosecution of the war (despite the official peace) as well as the Athenians' complaints of Sparta not fulfilling certain stipulations of the treaty. Sparta does in fact "commit wrong" against the Athenians by allying themselves with Boeotia because Boeotia refused to give back Panactum, a city the Athenians wanted back as per the treaty. Sparta had already indicated to the Athenians that they were doing everything possible to fulfill this condition of the treaty. But there were strong parties on either side of the debate between ending the war with Athens or pursuing it despite the alliance in place. These parties also had to contend with continued complaints from their allies due not only to what they viewed as an unjust alliance between Sparta and Athens, but especially due to the fighting that continued amongst the allies on either side. The official alliance and therefore peace between the two major cities did not resolve all the differences that had arisen during the course of these first ten years; nor did most of the cities (at least implicitly) view the peace between Sparta and Athens to signal an end to the war.

Before considering Thucydides' observations on Sparta during this period, we must consider the place of the 11th to 18th years of the war in his account. These are the central years of the war, a fact that is significant given Thucydides' digression near the beginning of the 11th

year (5.26), his so-called Second Preface.[83] Here he argues that the war, despite the treaties and alliance during this period, is not two wars, but one. The limitations on truces, the fighting amongst the allies (even when Sparta and Athens were not involved), and the wars in Epidaurus and Mantinea are his proofs of this contention (26.2). For Thucydides, it seems that adherence to treaties is the only time when cities are not openly at war. The importance of agreements and their corresponding oaths is not illusory though – pretexts for war are required for war. The hostilities that occur under the Sparta-Athens alliance begin to show more clearly the relation between the domestic order of Sparta and their relations with other cities.

The deaths of Brasidas and Cleon, as well as the problems for both Sparta and Athens, have led to this alliance. The factions within each regime divided along proponents of continuing the war and those that favored peace. While Cleon's death aided Athens in securing support for a treaty and alliance due to the influence of Nicias, the situation for Sparta is more complex. Brasidas, while a proponent for war because of Sparta's cause to liberate Greek cities from Athens, was not viewed favorably by the leading men at Sparta. Further, the ephor Xenares led a charge at Sparta to continue the war with Athens for reasons Thucydides does not make clear. Perhaps he viewed the injustice of Athens as cause for continuing or perhaps he felt little for the cause of securing the return of the Spartiates from Sphacteria. It was Sthenelaidas, also a Spartan ephor, who argued vehemently for the war before its outbreak, in contrast to the king Archidamus. However this may be, Agis the Spartan king will lead Sparta during the cessation of open hostilities. But the allies of Sparta did not view Sparta's alliance as having any good end in

[83] Despite the fact that the eight book structure is today generally regarded as the correct one, there is still some scholarly disagreement (among classicists). See Bonner (1920) on the sources that argue for 8, 9, and 13 book versions of Thucydides. For evidence we cannot consider here, I regard the 8 book version as the correct one, however we must also be alert to Thucydides' own division by years, i.e. according to the natural changes of season since he directs our attention to this division as the one employed in his account (5.20.2-3, 26.1). Thucydides states that the war lasted 27 years in total. Thus part of the period in Book 5 during which the war is not officially being engaged in is during the central year of the war (14th). Thucydides' praises of Sparta occur at the beginning and end of his account (1.6.4, 18.1, 8.24.4).

view and began to fear an empire of the two cities over the rest. Corinth in particular leads this charge, but their inability to procure support for an alliance against Sparta leads them to move to Argos in an attempt to protect themselves, despite Thucydides' indication that no such designs were the reason for Sparta and Athens' new agreement (5.27; Cf. 5.22.1-2). The Corinthians fail to recall their own portrait of Sparta as a city that seeks above all to avoid the risks of war (1.70.1). But since the allies of both Sparta and Athens continue to lodge complaints, the Spartans find themselves compelled to act to support their allies and avoid the revolts occurring among them. The allies had complained to Sparta on more than one occasion, but the Spartans' sacrifices before leaving on an expedition to aid their allies had proven unfavorable, the Spartans thus unwilling to leave. But when conditions worsen, including Alcibiades securing an alliance with Argos, they finally march on Argos, Thucydides making no comment on whether the sacrifices were favorable when they finally act (5.57.1). While we could perhaps assume by this silence that they were favorable, we must wonder whether the Spartans quietly decide that they have no choice but to depart from this customary practice. Thucydides could easily have mentioned the sacrifices were they favorable. If the Spartans ignored this practice in this case due to the necessity to act to protect their interests, we still need to explain this inconsistency for they do obey the sacrifices and other signs on other occasions throughout the war.[84]

This inconsistency in the Spartans' relations with their allies and enemies reminds us of the beginning of the war. Ignoring a potential breach of the treaty by not submitting to arbitration, the Spartans still sought a pretext for commencing hostilities against Athens. The

[84] This is the first of numerous mentions of sacrifices during the years of official peace. While this is not the first act of piety by the Spartans that Thucydides has allowed us to see, it is another pious practice that we are only now made aware of (5.54.2, 55.3, 116.1). Cf. Xenophon *Regime of the Lacedaemonians* XIII.1-5 with Proietti (1987) p. 72. Proietti's interpretation of Xenophon's presentation of Sparta argues that the sacrifices performed by the king led to greater obedience to the king on campaigns.

tension between their possible breach of the treaty and their belief in the injustice of the Athenian empire left them searching for further justification; they seemed to have doubts that their cause was just or at least justifiable as a cause for war. Thucydides' later remark (7.18.2) that they came to view their breach of the treaty and thus the start of the war as the cause of their guilt implies that the Spartans, despite these doubts, viewed this cause as sufficiently justified in their own minds in declaring war. This does not mean that this cause was sufficiently justified according to Thucydides, for he fails to make any remark on their claim to be liberating Greek cities from the Athenian empire. Thucydides had stated his opinion on the cause of the war before this – the Spartans acted out of fear and thus did not require a justification. Despite Thucydides' view, the Spartans would neither admit this (for strategic reasons) nor did they believe it; their later admission (to themselves, as Thucydides presents it – 7.18) indicates that they only later came to see that their cause was not on the side of justice. The Spartans came to believe that they had been unjust. And they came to this belief because of the misfortunes they had suffered in the first ten years of the war. These misfortunes were viewed as punishments for their injustice in starting the war. The necessity of defending their interests, interests which they feared would be compromised by an expanding Athenian empire, is not for them a sufficient justification for action. Although the interests Sthenelaidas appealed to did offer such a justification (while also proclaiming against the injustice of Athens), the Spartans ultimately hold that they were responsible for a breach of the treaty. Necessity does not allow one to act against the dictates of justice and thus the Spartans believe they were rightly punished for their actions.

To understand this inconsistency in the Spartans' practice of justice and piety, along with its source, we must consider what Thucydides reveals here that he did not disclose previously. In the lead up to the largest land battle in the Peloponnesian War, Thucydides offers details of the

Spartan regime and how this affects even their strategies during battle. This feature of Book 5 has no other parallel besides Thucydides' portrait of the internal decay at Athens found in Book 8. Book 5 also notably contains no speeches after the alliance between the two cities – this has the effect of focusing the reader's attention on the actions of the war, while it is also in keeping with the Spartan distrust of speeches (see e.g. 1.86.1). The character of Book 5 seems to imitate the character of the Spartans themselves. Book 5 and the 14th year in particular is the part of Thucydides' account focused on his view of Sparta.[85]

Sparta at War Reconsidered

Witnessing the on-going strife despite the official peace, the Spartans send Agis to lead them and their allies into battle near Argos against that city and its allies. Alcibiades had aided in securing the alliance of Athens and Argos, creating a pretext for hostilities by arguing that Sparta had breached its oaths (5.56.3). The battle is thus set to commence with the Spartans having surrounded the Argives' contingent with a large force including a vast number of their own allies. But the Argives, despite believing themselves to be in the superior position, sue Agis for arbitration of the cities' complaints against one another. Despite the Spartans' vast superiority in position and strength, Agis agrees. He is offered "just and equal" arbitration and thus grants the Argives a four month truce (60.1). Thucydides notes that even if another ally had been added to

[85] Book 5 receives little or no commentary from most scholars. Both Romilly (1963) and Westlake (1971) point to the absence of speeches in Book 5 and its apparently disorderly character as an indication of its lack of "polish" and evidence of its incompleteness; however they both note its kinship to Book 8. And while Westlake does admit that the narrative in Book 5 offers more detail and subtlety than appears at first sight (p. 318), he ultimately agrees with the classicist hypothesis that Thucydides' "style" is an indication of the incompleteness of his account. By "style," Westlake and others (see note 6 below) mean in particular the lack of speeches as well as Thucydides' attention to treaties, alliances, and the other (lesser) cities involved in the war. Further, Westlake argues that in Book 5 Thucydides did not "shed much light upon the aims of Athenian diplomacy" and "to a greater extent than in his treatment of other states he seems content with a bare factual record" (p. 321). Yet if one compares Books 5 and 8, the lack of focus on Athens in Book 5 is paralleled in Book 8 by the lack of focus on Sparta. Therefore these books are more similar than different – both draw our attention to the relation between the domestic problems of each city and how these problems affected their prosecution of the war. Thucydides also presents each city dealing with the pressing necessities of the war. Cf. Strauss (1983) p. 101.

Argos and their allies, Sparta would still have been in a notably superior position (60.3). Considering this remark in its context, Thucydides implies that even if the Athenians were present (which they were not due to a delay in arriving to support their allies – 59.3), the Spartans would still have been in a superior position.

Agis is severely "blamed" (*aitia*) by the Spartans and their allies for his truce with the Argives because of the "beautiful" circumstances in which they found themselves. And Thucydides confirms that this was the "noblest" (*kalliston*) Greek army brought together at this point in the war (60.2-3). Nevertheless, Agis is obeyed by the army and Sparta's allies in accordance with "law" (*nomos*). Agis' actions here are not clear and Thucydides emphasizes that it was Agis' own decision (60.1). For the advantageous position of Sparta near Argos, recognized by the Spartan army and their allies, suggests that Agis did not shirk from battle due to cowardice or ignorance of their advantages. Agis seems to place the apparent just and equal character of arbitration above the potential benefit to Sparta in winning this battle and thus weakening Athens' allies. This near battle occurs just after Thucydides' mention of the death of Xenares. It seems that Agis, belonging to the peace party in Sparta, was not interested in pursuing such a large campaign and battle against the Argos-Athens alliance.[86] These years of the war being the low point for Spartan morale we have noted, due in particular to their defeat at Pylos as a sign that justice may not be on their side. This concern with justice (and hence the possible impiety of breaching the oaths upon which treaties were sworn) is further strengthened

[86] The divide in Sparta between those in favor of war and those opposed to it appears to be an indication of the degree to which Spartan actions move towards those of the Athenians (e.g. 8.2.3). Sparta will become more clearly imperialistic after the defeat of Athens and the end of the Peloponnesian War (see Xenophon *Hellenika*). That the Spartan regime begins to shift in this manner is best understood as one consequence of the scale of the Peloponnesian War – the extreme necessities into which this war drove all cities supports the view of the Athenians rather than that of the Spartans. But as we have seen, not all Athenians supported continuing a drawn out war of ever increasing scale, risk, and damage. Yet the views of those such as Archidamus and the moderate men at Athens are not successful in practice and it is those most Athenian in character, the Syracusans, who according to Thucydides were most successful in combating them (8.96.5).

by Thucydides' mentions here, for the first time in his account of the war, of the Spartans' customary sacrifices before going out on a military campaign (54.2, 56.3). The Spartans would refuse to cross a frontier into enemy territory should these sacrifices prove to be unfavorable. Rooted in their adherence to piety, this custom indicated to them whether the gods favored a particular campaign just as they had consulted the Delphic oracle at the beginning of the war (1.118.3).[87]

The blame of Agis becomes more severe when he returns to Sparta. The Athenians, despite arriving late, still attack Orchomenos where Sparta had placed hostages. The Spartans almost depart from their usual hesitancy to punish their own leading citizens and punish Agis by razing his house, as well as fine him. However Agis promises to recompense for his past failure through taking the field again and doing a good service for Sparta. Instead of punishing Agis, the Spartans now make a new law requiring Agis to be accompanied by ten Spartiates as counselors when going on a campaign (5.63.4). While the Spartans and their allies could have advanced the cause of the war with a victory over the Argives and their allies, Agis prefers to accept an offer of arbitration. Agis, in contrast to those at home who blamed him, preferred peace to war. Yet what precisely is the blame directed against Agis? For the offer of just and equal arbitration would appear to be in keeping with the Spartan concern with justice. The Spartans of course now find their allies in distress and have proceeded to finally march out to aid them. That the Spartans could have potentially defeated the formidable third city, Argos, but failed to do so due to Agis confirms that their anger is due precisely to his failure to strategically succeed in

[87] The first mention of Agis is at 3.89.1 where he abandons an invasion of Attica due to numerous earthquakes. In this context, Thucydides offers his explanation of inundations which were particularly common at this time – the land is overtaken by the sea, killing those who lived there. The "cause" (*aitia*) of these inundations was earthquakes. Thucydides denies that this can happen in any other way. When Agis reappears at 5.54, he is again held back, now due to the unfavorable sacrifices. For the Spartans, earthquakes, as with sacrifices, could indicate that the gods did not favor certain actions.

prosecuting the war. But it is in this very context that Thucydides allows us to notice both that Agis' position of leading the army is by law (60.2) and that the Spartans institute a new law to direct him in battle. Spartan law begins to appear both as the source of obedience of the Spartan and cultivates their sense of justice, but also the only means which Sparta has in determining how to secure their interests abroad. Agis' failure to look to Sparta's interests as victory in battle is perhaps due to the hesitancy that Spartans habitually display in going to war and placing themselves in the hands of fortune. Agis' desire to compensate quickly for his failure at Argos is therefore especially due to the severe blame directed toward him, since the battle did nothing to advance Spartan interests. The shame that Agis shows himself susceptible to is the result of his own Spartan education within the laws – praise and blame result from noble or shameful actions. The Spartans thus act immediately and with haste led by Agis' attempt to repair his reputation at home.

Facing further revolutions and a potential loss of allies to Argos, the Spartans again leave on a campaign with a force that Thucydides notes for its numbers (64.1). As they enter the territory surrounding Mantinea, Agis immediately brings the army within a short distance of the Argives, despite the strong position that the Argives and their allies had placed themselves in. Agis almost marches into a position where the Argives and their allies would have the advantage over the Spartans. An older man points out the position of the enemy to Agis, believing his unawareness is due to Agis' resolve to prove himself because of the blame he incurred (65.2). Thucydides leaves it somewhat ambiguous whether it was due to this old man or because Agis changed his own plans (65.3), but the Spartans and their allies retreat and do not engage. If the old man is one of the ten Spartiate counselors, then the Spartans' new law seems to succeed to the extent that Agis holds back after being alerted to the position of the enemy. Further, the

following day the Spartans returned to their previous encampment only to find the Argives and their allies already in position, greatly surprising the army. However Agis is able to direct the troops into battle order according to law. Spartan law indicates how the troops are to be arranged and this order is directed by the king's commands to his various ranking officers (66.2-4). The laws which governed the Spartans within the city also governed the manner in which they conduct themselves in their land battles. The use of laws to arrange one's battle order is never mentioned by Thucydides in relation to any other city; this is a particular feature of Sparta and seems to be the cause of their strength in battles on land.

In the prelude to this battle, which Thucydides indicates is the greatest to occur in some time and among the most remarkable cities (74.1), he details the forces on either side.[88] Thucydides indicates that the number of forces was difficult to determine due to the secrecy of the Spartan regime and due to men bragging about the forces of their own city. But Thucydides immediately offers a calculation of the Spartan forces based on the noticeable order of their army. Thucydides does not offer an estimate of the forces of the Athenians and their allies (68.1-2. Cf. 74.3). The bragging belongs to others, not Sparta. And this bragging leaves Thucydides

[88] Connor (1984) p. 144: "No other battle in the *Histories* approaches this one in the detail with which it is presented." Connor interprets the singularity of this description to the place of the battle in Thucydides' narrative – this was officially a time of peace and yet hostilities continued, thus Thucydides' "love of paradox" led him to place this battle here. This interpretation acknowledges that the detail of the battle draws our attention to the treaty and alliance between Sparta and Athens and thus stands out by contrast. However Connor does not make mention of the fact that Thucydides' detail focuses on Sparta in particular. And despite this apparent purpose of simply drawing our attention to this contrast, Connor's notion that Book 5 is incomplete due to its style and thus did not receive complete revision by Thucydides presupposes that Thucydides did not have an intention for presenting his account of this period of the war in a different manner than other periods. As Connor himself notes, this is the interval between the Peace of Nicias and the outbreak of renewed, open hostilities due to Athens' breach of their treaty with Sparta. And as Connor notices, Thucydides can present details of the war in a manner that contrasts with other parts of his narrative, should he choose to do so. But the conclusion that he draws from denying the Separatist or compositionalist approach (i.e. the claim that the differences in Thucydides' style are due to differing times of composition and even that he changed his mind on certain interpretations of events) only focuses on the contrast between the treaties and the actions of the cities. Thus we must consider, for example, whether the unusual features of Book 5 (the lack of speeches along with Thucydides' focus on alliances, treaties, battles, and the restoration of Sparta's renown due to the victory at Mantinea) are intended to hint that these details, centered as they are on Sparta, are to teach us something about that city and therefore the war, that he had not previously revealed.

silent on the number of the Argives and their allies. Bragging seems to disguise the numbers of men better than Spartan secrecy; this secrecy fails because their order is so precise and thus knowable. Since the Spartan battle order and numbers of troops is directed according to law,[89] the very law in Sparta requiring order and secrecy fails in its purpose, while the bragging of cities regarding their troop numbers succeeds in hiding information from the enemy about their strength. While Sparta's battle order is impressive, it is also a problem – Thucydides is able to calculate how many troops they had despite the Spartan attempts to keep this information from their enemies (68.3).

After detailing the contingents of the Spartan army, Thucydides reports the exhortations of each side. While the Mantineans, Argives, and Athenians exhort their troops based on the desire for empire, to avenge injustices, and the glory they hope will accompany a victory, the Spartans remind their troops of what they have learned from their long discipline (69.2).[90] Not trusting in noble speeches as an exhortation to virtue, they trust in this discipline to secure their safety including their march into battle. While the Argives and their allies proceed with haste and anger, the Spartans march to the music of the flute players, measured in their march, and keeping order in their formation.[91] Thucydides' purpose in relating the preparation for this battle becomes apparent with the outcome – despite errors in their battle formation and Agis' attempt to correct it, the Spartans win a victory due to their "courage" (*andreia*).[92] While the Argives and their

[89] Cf. 4.128.1.
[90] This exhortation bears comparison to Archidamus' praise of Spartan virtue (1.84.3). Despite their defeat at Pylos, the Spartans do not doubt their education and the virtues it inculcates (4.40.2).
[91] Thucydides notes that this practice was not due to piety. Aside from the kinship between law and piety, Thucydides is focused here on the Spartan order and its relation to their conduct in battle. He provides sufficient indication of Spartan piety elsewhere (Spartan sacrifices – 5.54.2, 55.3, 116.1; Spartans celebration of festivals – 4.5.1, 5.75.5-76.1, 82.3).
[92] Connor (1984) p. 144 and Price (2001) p. 13 overlook the significance of this passage by not considering Sparta's reputation after this battle. Therefore they treat it as an instance of hoplite warfare that Thucydides apparently cared to describe.

allies bested the Spartans in "experience" (*empeiria*), the Spartan virtue of courage secures their victory (72.2). The Spartan order, based on law and including their new law, is not as decisive at Mantinea as their old virtue. Their laws had the purpose of attempting to instill good order, but this order failed. While this may be due to Agis' loss of authority from the previous engagements near Argos, Agis' attempt could be viewed as a failure because the polemarchs did not have time to react to his sudden commands, as Thucydides suggests (72.1). Their king Agis makes errors in his commands and thus their order breaks down in the midst of the battle. Since this breach in the battle order was due to the fear that affects all armies (71.1), Thucydides implies that both the Spartan battle order and Agis' commands failed. But it is especially Agis that errs since he (unlike Thucydides) seems unaware until the moment before engagement that this fear will cause a breach in the ranks.

The Spartan laws and customs that inculcate the courage shown at Mantinea apparently fail to educate the Spartan commanders and generals to the experience and skill shown by especially the Athenians. While the laws cultivate or enforce courage, they cannot cultivate the judgment or intelligence of the statesman. The laws that guide life within the city cannot guide their conduct in war. And this tension, which manifests itself in their king Agis and his agreement to arbitration with Argos, is not visible to the Spartans themselves – their blame of Agis for his failures is due to the hesitation, caution, and concern with fairness he displays in this agreement. The Spartans are blind to their regime's inability to cultivate the virtues of a commander at war. It is the daring and boldness of Brasidas that was able to liberate Athens' subjects from that empire and bring about the Peace of Nicias. Their long discipline has not inculcated intelligence for command; Agis is still under the sway of a Spartan education. The Spartan regime does not breed the intelligence and art or skill of other regimes, particularly

Athens.[93] Sparta's laws direct everything for the Spartan. Their lack of innovation in battle, to combat an opponent such as the Athenians, is in keeping with their lack of innovation in laws (1.18.1, 71.3).[94]

That this tension exists is reinforced by Thucydides' remark that the new law created before Mantinea was unprecedented in Sparta (63.4). Sparta did not make new laws. The laws of Lycurgus, which were never changed until Sparta found itself in the middle of the long Peloponnesian War, were given sanction by the god at Delphi.[95] The Spartans' obedience to their laws and even to Agis' hasty commands were rooted in the divine approval of these laws, and therefore of the city itself.[96] While Spartan law is harmful to Sparta's interest in regard to foreign policy, to breach these laws "was not only unlawful, but unholy."[97] Thus these laws were adhered to strictly both at home and abroad and fostered the moderation that led to the domestic stability which Thucydides indicates in his praise of Sparta's prosperity. Thucydides offers no account of the Athenians (or any other city) conducting affairs abroad due to any laws leading them to act in a particular manner.

Regardless of the problems of these laws, Sparta's reputation is regained by this battle. Fortune (*tyche*) was viewed as the cause of the Spartans' previous failures. Thucydides indicates that Sparta's allies blamed them for "weakness" due to affair at Pylos or generally for "bad counsel and slowness" (5.75.3; Cf. 2.8.4). These causes are distinct; they had been perceived as weak due to Pylos (5.28), but were broadly blamed for the manner in which they carried on with

[93] Consider 4.55.
[94] Aristotle *Politics* 1269a19-23.
[95] Xenophon *Regime of the Lacedaemonians* VIII.5.
[96] Plato *Republic* 431d8-e6.
[97] Xenophon *ibid*.

allies and during war (1.70).[98] And even though their reputation was restored, this restoration is immediately followed by further inaction – Epidaurus is taken by the Eleans and Athenians while the Spartans are celebrating a festival at home (82.3). Only once this festival is over (a festival that is exclusively Spartan) do they go out to Argos and secure a treaty and eventual alliance. The restoration of their reputation is unwarranted then since they do not solve their problem of slowness and bad counsel. Mantinea is followed by inaction and the battle was only won by courage. And Agis or the ten new counselors, even if they had affected anything, were still dictated in their actions by laws. There is an irony in the restoration of Sparta's reputation because the problems that the Corinthians had indicated with the Spartan character are not solved by the victory at Mantinea. The other cities formed the impression that Sparta had suffered from weakness or cowardice in their loss at Pylos. But Thucydides does not share this impression. It was their belief that the gravity of this defeat was a justified punishment for their breach of the treaty and therefore beginning the war against Athens (7.18.2). While fear was the cause for Sparta going to war with Athens, Thucydides also allows us to observe the Spartans' genuine fear of the gods through their fear of the consequences of their injustice.

The cause of Spartan slowness and bad counsel is not resolved then by the restoration of their reputation; these flaws in the manner in which Sparta conducts the war are due to the fundamental characteristics of their regime – its strict obedience to the laws.[99] Slowness, as one

[98] While the Corinthians' claim is borne out by the course of the war, Thucydides only confirms this judgment in his own name late in his narrative (8.96.5). This is the only instance when Thucydides himself calls the Spartans "slow" (*bradeis*). It seems that he intends to suggest that while the Corinthians are correct, we as readers can only confirm their judgment after understanding Book 5.

[99] Crane pp. 86-87, 233-34 treats Mantinea in terms of the restoration of Sparta's reputation, but argues that this restoration was an incorrect assessment by the other cities because the Spartans' weakness was their inability to innovate. This inability is understood by Crane to mean their reliance on hoplite warfare rather than adapting to the Athenians' superiority at sea. The Spartans' resoluteness though was, according to the other cities, the same. They were blamed for weakness, bad counsel, and slowness. This interpretation is correct in noting that the view of the other Greeks was "incomplete," but the source of its being incomplete is due rather to the Spartans' guilt that their injustice started the war. The only Spartan virtue called into question by the other cities is their courage.

part of their moderation, was inculcated into the Spartans through this obedience. The other cities fail to see the cause of Sparta's inaction. For even in the arguments of the Corinthians before the outbreak of the war, their criticisms of Sparta are correct only so far as the Corinthians understand them; they do not locate the *source* of Sparta's deficiencies.[100] And Thucydides imitates this only partial understanding of the Spartan character by not allowing us to see this aspect of Sparta until Book 5. However as Thucydides reveals the source of Sparta's deficiencies, he also reveals the beginning of their departure from this source. Sparta's laws are a problem at war because they do not allow for change – in the case of Mantinea, Agis seemed correct to attempt to move the troops due to the fear that naturally arises in battle, a fear that the law regarding the battle order (in its rigidity) appears to neglect. And while Agis may ultimately be deficient as a commander, Sparta's victory at Mantinea (due to their old virtue of courage in battle) reveals that the creation of Sparta's new law to remedy this deficiency fails. Both Sparta's laws and Sparta's ability to prosecute this war as they have habitually prosecuted all their wars begins changes that will take root in the city late in the war.

Sparta's caution is further elucidated when the Spartans are victorious at Mantinea, for they only win the battle and attempt nothing further. The Spartans do not seem to be fighting to win the larger war; they fight until the enemy retreats but do not pursue a complete victory (73.4, 75.1). While this may appear to be due to this period of the war being one of peace, the Athenians do not hesitate to harm Sparta's interests (59.3, 61.1-5). Sparta would seem to be acting merely out of self-interest by avoiding potential harm, but their lack of eagerness for the war is contrary to their larger advantage. Their own intention in renewing the hostilities which led up to Mantinea was particularly to support Epidaurus, yet they fail to hold it after winning the battle at Mantinea. And their other king, Pleistoanax, does not proceed further once he is

[100] See the Athenians' claim at 1.77.6.

informed of the Spartan victory, while their other allies coming from Corinth and surrounding areas are dismissed (75.1-2) and the Spartans themselves also return home. This allows the Eleans, Mantineans, and Athenians to surround Epidaurus, build a wall, and maintain forces there (75.4-6). Sparta fails to take back revolting cities and to form and maintain new alliances, particularly with Argos, that could strengthen their position in the war.

And here Thucydides presents one further consideration of the Spartans in his conclusion of the 14th year of the war. When their new (but short-lived) ally Argos calls on the Spartans for aid due to the democrats in the city plotting to overthrow the Sparta-supported oligarchs, the Spartans again fail to act. The democrats had waited until the Spartans were again occupied with a festival and attacked the oligarchs within the city. The Spartans eventually arrive to help, but finding the oligarchic party defeated, they return home. Envoys from Argos and the now-exiled oligarchs arrive at Sparta to plead their case and the Spartans decide that the democrats had "done wrong" (82.4). Yet despite determining that justice was on the side of the oligarchs, those whom the Spartans had signed a treaty and alliance with, they fail to act in support, continually delaying in marching out to provide assistance (82.5). While the stipulations of their treaty and alliance do not include any provisions in the event of faction or civil war within the city, the oligarchic party is the ally of Sparta (76.2). Both in maintaining a regime favorable to Sparta and in deciding on the issue of injustice, the Spartans nevertheless do not act. This results in Sparta losing Argos to the Athenians since the democratic party allied with Athens, allowing them to gain hold of the city (82.5-6).

That Spartan inaction in this instance resulted from their celebration of another festival, our attention is directed to further considering these features of their regime. The laws dictated everything for the Spartans, including pious customs, and we recall the Spartan identification of

the good of Sparta with justice. Yet since this identification proceeds from the regime and cannot be separated from it, Sparta fails to calculate its advantages, its own true good, when engaged in a war it initiated due to the fear of Athens infringing on their own interests. There is a tension between the Spartan view of justice as dedication to Sparta and the true interests of the city when it is at war.

However, some Spartans do not seem wholly unaware of this problem. Before the outbreak of the war, Archidamus argued both that Sparta should be cautious in going to war because they were not prepared to do so and that to declare war against the Athenians, who had offered arbitration, would be unlawful (1.82, 85.2). In Thucydides' first mentions of sacrifices here in the 14th year, we noted that he did not indicate whether the sacrifices were favorable once Sparta decided that it had to act to stop the continued assaults on Epidaurus and the attempts by its other allies to revolt. The Spartans seem to be selectively just; their actions are inconsistent because they sometimes recognize, if only half-consciously, that they are compelled to defend their interests abroad rather than avoiding risks by staying home. Their strict obedience to the laws and adherence to pious customs which formed their understanding of justice take precedent over victory in war. The necessity to engage in foreign wars had to clearly threaten the interests of Sparta. The Athenians at Melos are therefore correct in noting that Sparta identifies its advantage with justice. And they indicate in this context that the Spartans are "most virtuous" concerning their city's laws (5.105.4). The Athenians imply then that they do not make this identification and thereby act with awareness of their interests and do not mask these interests behind proclamations of justice.[101] The Athenians are unaware however that the Spartans are not attempting to be duplicitous in aligning Sparta's interests with justice – the Spartans, educated in their city's laws, believe in their own claims to be acting justly. Their identification only seems

[101] Bruell (1981) p. 27.

false to the Athenians because they, unlike the Spartans, question this identification.[102] The Spartan devotion to virtue masks their awareness of the necessities of politics that the Athenians proudly proclaim. This identification is therefore the root of the Spartans continually fighting battles, that even when victorious, fail to act further, eagerly and with daring, for the sake of securing potentially decisive victories. Sparta's slowness and caution carrying on the war is at one with their law-bred obedience to the interests of the city.[103]

Despite these shortcomings of Sparta's laws in this respect, obedience to the regime and their rulers was a fundamental part of Spartan moderation. And Sparta is Thucydides' most notable account of a city preserving moderation at home during the war.

Periclean and Post-Periclean Athens

Athens must be briefly considered as a contrast to what we have learned of Sparta's moderation, despite the adverse effect this had on their prosecution of the war. The obedience to law at Sparta notably differs from Pericles' praise of Athens and his policy decisions in the early stages of the war. Pericles' policies, as well as his view of Athens and its character, will have a fundamental effect on the regime changes in Athens after his death, changes culpable for Athens' loss in the war.[104]

Pericles' view of Athens is presented by Thucydides in three quoted speeches and one reported speech, as well as Thucydides' own commentary on Pericles himself. With Pericles'

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[102] That the Athenians' accusations against Sparta arise in the context of their incorrect belief that the Melians share their own views (5.89, 111.3) raises the question of how the Athenians view the relation of justice and interest, along with the pleasant and the noble.

[103] For other instances of Sparta's slowness, consider Archidamus at the beginning of the war (2.18); the revolt of Mytilene (3.27.1, 3.29.1, 31.1-2); their failure to aid Melos (5.115.2, 116.1). For instances of Sparta's lack of eagerness, consider the Corinthians' exhortation (1.71.6); the criticism of Archidamus (2.18.3). Cf. their sudden eagerness after coming to believe that the Athenians were guilty of injustice (7.18.3).

[104] I therefore disagree with Romilly (1963) pp. 102-103 who claims that Thucydides "refuses to see any primary connection between home and foreign policy" and thus for Thucydides "imperialism belonged to the realm of foreign policy, and he allowed no other considerations to enter into his study of it." Cf. the section "The Spartan Regime" below.

first speech the question of how Athens is to proceed with the war is raised. He warns the Athenians that should the Spartans be victorious, Athens will be enslaved to them as well as losing their allies through revolution. Since Sparta has rejected the possibility of arbitration as stipulated by the treaty between the two cities, Athens must not acquiesce to any demands or threats from Sparta lest they set a precedent of appearing weak to Sparta or their own allies. Further, since Athens' superiority is its resources and navy, in contrast to the numerical superiority of Sparta and their allies, Athens must rely on their sea power rather than confront the Spartans on land. Pericles therefore recommends that Athens treat themselves as islanders, rather than attempting to defend both the city and its ports, as well as the countryside comprising Attica (1.143.5). His argument is that the homes and land of the Athenians are not fundamental, but rather each individual Athenian. Pericles almost goes so far as to suggest the Athenians display the lack of importance of Attica to the Spartans by destroying their homes themselves. The policies of Pericles are practical – abandoning land for sea since this is the strength of Athens; but their land is lost and this means homes, not simply property.[105]

In Pericles' next address to the Athenians, which Thucydides reports, he reiterates his policies regarding the conduct of the war by Athens, as well as adumbrating the financial situation of Athens which he had alluded to earlier. His reiteration focuses on the issue of land and property; the Athenians are to move from the country into the city and utilize the public funds found in the temples for their "safety" should they be needed (2.13.5).

At this point we notice a striking digression – Thucydides now presents the formation of Athens from the numerous cities that formerly comprised Attica in ancient times, a digression replete with references to Athens' traditional gods (15-16.1). Immediately follow Pericles' reported speech and before this digression, Thucydides had noted that while the Athenians

[105] Fustel De Coulanges (1980) pp. 32, 53; Bruell (1981) p. 25.

followed Pericles' advice to move into the city, this move was difficult for them as most Athenians were accustomed to living outside of the city (14). The Athenians had difficulty leaving their homes in the country because they left behind a certain way of life which included adherence to pious traditions and their hereditary temples (16.2). Indeed, Pericles violates an oracle (proclaiming that the ground surrounding the Acropolis is not be occupied) by moving the Athenians from the country into this area due to the lack of space within the rest of the city (17.1-4). And while Thucydides notes that this was done out of "necessity" (17.2), this necessity followed from Pericles' original policy of abandoning the countryside.

This policy of Pericles is, as he argues, with a view to defending the city and utilizing Athens' navy (13.2). Pericles' policy of moving the citizens of the country into the city seems necessary, since the defense of the country is risky and would take away for their ability to use their "skill" (*techne*) as a naval people to prosecute the war. Pericles does not mention any concern with the ties of the Athenians to the country, their homes, and ancestral traditions that Thucydides has directed our attention to in his digression.[106]

With this consideration in mind, we turn to Pericles' funeral speech. He begins by calling into question the "law" (*nomos*) that demands a speech be given to commemorate the death of men who died defending Athens, despite the fact that it is regarded as "noble" (*kalon*) to do so. Pericles understands the deeds of the men who have died to be sufficient indication of their

[106] Therefore I disagree with Reeve (1999) p. 443 who argues that Pericles governed in a moderate manner by satisfying the interests of the few and the many within Athens. Reeve's contention is based on the observation that Pericles himself was not "overcome by ambition or *pleonexia*" despite Pericles' repeated exhortations to both daring and the desire for glory (see note 27 below). And in Reeve's praise of Pericles, where he cites 2.65.1-10 as proof of his contention that Pericles "governed in a moderate way," he leaves three sentences (65.2-4) out of his quotation. In these sentences Thucydides directs our attention (again) to the suffering that Pericles' domestic policies caused the demos and thus their need to fine Pericles to alleviate their anger towards him. Further, Thucydides' claim that Pericles governed in a "measured" (*metrios*) way is qualified – Pericles governed in a measured way "during peace" (65.5). Thucydides leaves us to consider then both the soundness of Pericles' policies with regard to the domestic accord within the city and also whether these policies could have remained unmodified during a prolonged war. Cf. Palmer (1981) p. 38 and note 38 below.

nobility, but will acquiesce to the law he has just called into question (35.1-3). Pericles' questioning of this Athenian law results in a depreciation of custom and tradition generally, a depreciation only implicit in the recommendations of Pericles to move the people into the city. But Pericles also offers an account of the growth of Athens, including how Athens has come to its present state as the leading city in Greece. While seemingly showing respect for tradition by beginning with the generations preceding the present one, Pericles' view of Athens is in fact what we may call a "progressive" view – while the present generation has inherited what was left to it by the previous generations, it is the current generation that has rendered the city "self-sufficient" (36.3). While the generation preceding the present one enlarged the empire, Athens has become still greater, culminating in the present. Reverence for Athenian tradition can then only be qualified reverence since the past generations were not a golden age of heroic Athenians; rather that distinction belongs to the current generation that has led Athens to its status as self-sufficient.[107]

Through the depreciation of law and tradition, including past generations and Homer (41.4), as well as his later admission that the Athenian empire is "so to speak" a tyranny (64.2), Pericles has reduced the citizens' tie to Athens to the extent that law and piety strengthened this tie. And as Thucydides is wont to do in his order of presentation, Pericles' funeral speech is followed by the plague leaving us to consider whether the impious implications of Pericles' remarks result in the plague as a punishment of Athens. The plague brought such great sufferings on the Athenians that they recalled an oracle proclaiming that with a Dorian war would come a plague, as well as recalling the oracle proclaiming that the Spartans would win the war with Apollo's support (54.3). Thucydides leaves us to consider the fact that the plague did not spread

[107] Pericles may be referring here, in part, to the time of the Persian War when an alliance between Athens and Sparta (at least in the beginning) fought off Persia's advances (1.96.1).

to the Peloponnesus and what effect this would have on the understanding of its causes by the Athenians who suffered from it most.[108] If Athens had acted in an unjust and impious manner through the acquisition of their empire, did the gods who are the guarantors of justice bring the plague as a punishment for Athenian daring?[109] We cannot neglect the fact that Thucydides himself offers an explanation for the cause and spread of the plague apart from the possibility that it was divine justice. Nevertheless what is certain is that the plague had the effect of undermining the Athenian understanding of what noble and shameful actions were, leading them to choose pleasure and the resulting lawlessness instead of a willingness to preserve traditionally noble actions (53.1-4). These effects of the plague cast doubts on Pericles' reliance on noble actions to stem the tension between private interests and those of the city (43.2, 53.3). For Pericles had argued that private interests would be restrained by considerations that noble deeds were of greater importance to the man of pride. Even bad men could be made good by "public-spirited benefit" that they bestowed upon the city (42.3). Pericles implicitly denies a virtue of man as man apart from his city; only by service to the city does a man act virtuously and nobly.[110]

Pericles also acknowledges that the attraction to Athens and her greatness is due to the Athenian regime – Athens is a democracy that affords freedom and equal treatment of private individuals (37.1-2, 43.4). Yet despite this attraction, even Pericles is not willing to admit that dying for one's city is good for the individual and quietly suggests that death is bad and to be avoided (43.1). And Pericles' appeal to honor and nobility as that which makes a man willing to die for his city is inextricably linked to the supposedly permanent nobility of those who have

[108] Thucydides indicates that the plague at Athens also spread to other cities, specifically the most "populous" (2.54.3). See Bolotin (1987) p. 15.
[109] In contrast to Archidamus' account of Sparta (1.84.2-3), Pericles never mentions moderation, but does extol daring (2.39.4, 40.3, 41.4, 43.1).
[110] Pericles' understanding of wisdom, or one's love of it, is that it serves the city (2.41.1-3). See Bruell (1981) p. 29.

died in battle (44.1). And yet while maintaining that nobility and honor will always be recognized, he also admits that "everything naturally declines" (64.3).

Pericles urging the Athenians to "fall in love" (*erao* – 2.43.1) with Athens' power reflects the Athenians' desire for nobility rooted in the hopes of Athenian imperialism. The Athenians fell in love with the faraway; they did not simply consider sober calculations of the interests of the city and their empire, but looked to what they hoped for in the future (6.24.3). The awareness of death that arises in Pericles, but is suppressed or denied by him, nonetheless fosters a desire to overcome death. Our half-conscious admission to the fact of death and the resulting fear leads to the attempt to find ways to overcome it. *Eros* drives hope leading human beings to contrive ways to overcome any dangers or terrors (3.45.4-5). The hope for the honor that comes from noble actions can only overcome the fear of death if this honor is immortal (2.64.5-6). That the Athenians believe they are deserving of a reward for what they view as a just empire (1.76.2-3) means they implicitly hope that there are gods that reward such virtues, for without such gods, there would seem to be no certainty of the correspondence between one's virtue and reward. The Athenians' hope for immortal glory from their noble pursuit of empire agrees in a manner with the Spartans' hope that their virtue will be recognized by just gods.[111]

Apart from the divine rewards for virtue, Pericles explicitly relies on the human recognition of noble deeds. But since everything naturally declines, do the memory of noble deeds not decline as well? Pericles questioned the need for Homer, yet how else will doers of noble deeds be remembered? Pericles' own funeral speech focuses more on the greatness of the city than the individual men for whom the funeral speech is taking place, men that Pericles fails

[111] Ahrensdorf (2000) p. 590; Strauss (1964) p. 229 suggests that "there is something reminding of religion in Athenian imperialism."

to ever mention by name (41.5, 42.2).[112] While arguing that noble deeds on behalf of the city also bestow nobility on the individual, certain individuals may have considered whether one could secure the honor attending noble deeds by acting apart from Athens. And if this honor is what the individual desired, it is not clear that this private interest serves the interests of the city. Rather than sacrifice oneself for the sake of the interests of the city, the private individual may be led, through Pericles' praise of nobility generally, to sacrifice the city of Athens to their own ambitions.[113] Those individuals may seek to become themselves self-sufficient.[114]

In Thucydides' eulogy of Pericles, he ends by noting the decay in public-spiritedness that Pericles had argued would be freely chosen by the demos. Since Pericles occupied a singular position within Athens' democracy by acting as its "first man," those who sought to lead Athens after his death were forced to appeal to the demos to such a degree that even during the ambitious expedition to Sicily, political infighting within Athens occupied the city more than properly considering the best strategy for victory (65.11-12).

Domestic strife arising due to the desire to rule in Athens during the time of the Sicilian expedition included especially what Pericles *himself* undermined most – piety. The mutilation of the Hermes statues in Athens was interpreted by the demos as an ill omen for both the potential success of the expedition as well as for the democracy (6.27.3). The demos feared tyranny, as Athens had moved back and forth between democracy and oligarchy. Unlike Pericles, the other statesmen were unable to rule with his same prominence and were highly mistrusted by the demos. Perhaps due to their own realization that they acted out of private interests, they feared the demagogues were seeking their own. While the demos feared for the democracy,

[112] In keeping with this silence, Pericles only mentions death once (43.6) and here the gravity of it as a fundamental human concern seems dismissed. Pericles denies the pain of death, which would seem to include the pain that accompanies the fear of death.
[113] Cf. Chapter One "Pericles and Athenian Imperialism" with Bolotin (1987) pp. 19-23.
[114] Strauss (1964) pp. 193-94.

Thucydides' judgment on other regimes apart from Athenian democracy is not unfavorable. In the context of discussing Alcibiades, Thucydides digresses to correct a misinterpretation of the account accepted by the Athenians of the Pisistratus tyranny. Contrary to the Athenians' belief of its harsh character, it was in fact gentle, promoted virtue among its citizens, and was outwardly concerned with piety by attending to the sacrifices and temples. It was only due to a private quarrel resulting in a perceived assassination attempt on the tyrant that the tyranny came to distrust its citizens, leading to increasingly harsh measures against them (54-59).[115]

The prominence of Alcibiades in post-Periclean Athens was of grave concern as the source of this potential tyranny. Alcibiades was attacked by the demagogues who feared him taking over rule of the city and was suspicious to the demos due to his undemocratic and unlawful way of life. Alcibiades' private conduct, unlike Pericles', led his opponents to successfully accuse him of responsibility for the acts of impiety that dominated the concerns of the demos at this time (28.2, 15.3-4, 61.4).[116] Indeed, Thucydides confirms through his narrative that Alcibiades' private ambitions were his dominate concern and cast suspicious on him; yet his abilities as a general and commander seem to recommend him (2.65.11, 6.15.2-4, 53.1-3). But such a man as Alcibiades had difficulty ruling in broad daylight because both the demagogues and the demos suspected that he would use his superiority against them for his own political gain, perhaps due to his own concern with the nobility that Pericles had urged the city to strive for. Not surprisingly, Alcibiades found a means to glory apart from the city of Athens by means

[115] Consider Strauss (1964) p. 196: "[T]he admiration for the Athenian tyrannicides of Harmodius and Aristogeiton was an important part of the manner in which the Athenian democracy understood itself."
[116] Ahrensdorf (1997) pp. 258-59 argues that the return of piety in Athens was due to their fear that the Sicilian expedition, as a further expansion of the Athenian empire, may be unjust and impious. Therefore the Athenians' concern with finding those responsible for the mutilation of the Hermes statutes was a pious attempt to appease the gods.

of betraying Athens in his aid to Sparta after his exile.[117]

Thucydides' depiction of Athenian democracy indicates the tension between private and public interest, especially directing our attention toward the virtues that tie a citizen to their city. Therefore Thucydides' praises of Sparta for their regime, which had good, long-lasting laws and was moderate in character, appear in stark contrast to the immoderation at Athens during its decay. It was Sparta that Thucydides judges as combining moderation and prosperity – this regime never experiences the domestic political problems that plagued Athens and led to its eventual defeat (8.24.4).[118] Further is Thucydides' judgment on the Athenian regime of 411. It was the "best" in his own lifetime due to it being a "measured" (*metrios*) regime comprised of the few and the many (8.97.2), in contrast to the dominance of the demos after Pericles' death. Immediately before the establishment of this regime, and thus the return of moderation to Athens, their domestic situation was indeed bleak – their fleet at Samos was in revolt, almost their entire navy had been destroyed along with the death or capture of many men, they were at war with one another, and they now had lost Euboea, the source of their provisions since Attica was controlled by the Spartans through their post at Decelea (95.2, 96.1-3).[119] This control of Decelea by Agis and the Spartans meant holding the Athenian countryside that Pericles had urged them to abandon. And this strategic decision, while not originating from Alcibiades (5.17.2), was only carried out by the Spartans with the aid of Alcibiades' persuasion (6.91.6-7,

[117] Forde (1987) p. 127 argues that Alcibiades' pursuit of honor, separating him from service to any particular city, was a problem for Athens.

[118] Strauss (1939) p. 524: "According to the view of the classical thinkers, one cannot assert that war against other cities is the aim of the life of the city without being driven to assert that war of individual against individual is the aim of the life of the individual." Strauss argues in this context that Xenophon views peace as the goal of political life, not war. Part of Xenophon's criticism of Sparta's legislation (and thus Lycurgus) is that it is dedicated to war. Cf. Plato *Laws* 629b8-630e5; Aristotle *Politics* 1333b38-1334a10.

[119] In both of these passages, Thucydides uses the verbal form of *stasis*. This further reinforces or confirms his earlier judgment (after Pericles' death) regarding the reasons why Athens lost the war. This is not to deny however that Sparta could have done more here (and elsewhere) to harm Athens, but Thucydides makes both judgments with knowledge of the Spartan character, in particular their lack of daring.

93.1, 7.19.1-2). This proved effective in harming Athens externally at a time when they were also suffering from faction within (7.27.3).[120] Nevertheless, the Athenians' love of victory and daring, born out of Pericles' cultivation of noble longings in the Athenians, led to both their persistence and their demise (28.3-4. Cf. 7.28.1-3).

Civil War at Corcyra

Athens was harmed in its prosecution of the Peloponnesian War due to faction within the city. And while this faction resulted from private ambition taking the place of moderation, the city itself is not destroyed as Athens never falls completely into civil war. It is rather Corcyra that is Thucydides' gravest statement on the loss of moderation. Thucydides' description of the civil war would lend one the impression that it is the worst of all political events in its destruction and harm to human beings.[121] War at home means that all political stability has been lost; all laws and judgments upon which the regime rests and flourishes are called into question.

While cities do not adhere to justice during a foreign war, domestic stability may still exists at home. Justice or moderation is required for the city not to suffer a war worse than a war between cities.[122] Thucydides' praise of moderation and trust among the citizens, as the virtues

[120] See 7.27.3-5 for Thucydides' statement that the loss of the countryside became a serious problem later in the war. This statement occurs in the context of new preparations for Sicily, after the Spartans and Syracusans had won a battle in the port of Syracuse. The Spartans begin again to attack Attica to distract the Athenians while they attempted to send troops and supplies to reinforce their increasingly desperate situation in Sicily. The fortification of Decelea was a Spartan policy that only came to fruition through the influence of Alcibiades. And both Alcibiades and Thucydides point to the loss of money as the reason that this action by Sparta could and did harm Athens (6.91.6-7, 7.18.1, 27.3-5). This loss (due to the Spartan presence at Decelea) led to financial problems because the Athenians had no countryside and therefore needed to import all their supplies, with importation being costly due to the need to move by sea, rather than across their own (now occupied) land. Further, the Four Hundred are also able to rule in Athens due to the constant presence required of most Athenians to guard against a Spartan incursion from Decelea toward the walls of the city (8.69). This preoccupation resulted in the loss of Euboea which caused even greater panic than the disaster in Sicily (96.1-3). Therefore Thucydides indicates that the loss of the countryside also strategically harmed Athens.

[121] Strauss (1964) p. 147.

[122] This may require qualification since Thucydides states that the slaughter of those at Mycalessus, including schoolchildren and women, was an act as much to be lamented as any other during the war (7.30.3). However, this qualification is reduced or eliminated since Thucydides suggests that the entire city was destroyed (29.4) and his language here reminds us of Corcyra (7.29.5, 3.81.5). The kinship of Corcyra and Mycalessus appears to be due to the loss of moderation which in the one case disappeared from within the city, and on the other, disappeared from

of a sound regime, is seen most clearly in the extreme consequences resulting from its loss and is thus relevant for our consideration of Sparta. The gravity of what occurs at Corcyra for Thucydides is evident, as this is the longest passage in his account of the war in his own voice. While the moderation of Sparta, its rest from the ills of civil war, is the stability required for a city to become prosperous (1.21.1), the revolution at Corcyra is a "motion" (*kinesis* – 3.75.2) that destroys the city by destroying the virtues that tie a political community together.[123]

In Thucydides' order of presentation, the revolution at Corcyra begins to take shape only one chapter after the events at Plataea (70.1). While the justice of Sparta toward others is questionable after their treatment of the Plataeans, their moderation is still notable in light of the revolution at Corcyra since they did not suffer the convulsions that lead to civil war as many of the other Greek cities did, and especially in contrast to the consequences for Athens.[124] Thus moderation seems to replace justice.

Civil war (*stasis*) is more likely as the result of foreign wars due to incitement by those within the city who support "revolution" (*neoterizo*).[125] Factions can call in allies to change the regime in favor of either side (Sparta or Athens), while during peace there is neither "pretext" nor wish. The motivations of those who call in outsiders are both to harm their adversaries and to arrange matters with a view to their advantage (82.1). Revolutionary parties exist in cities and gain support by a foreign presence; this implies that these parties are small and relatively powerless outside of the larger war. That they are revolutionary, and thus demanding radical

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those at war, acting with the utmost violence because they had nothing to fear. Perhaps most notable regarding Mycalessus is that it was a city at peace and possessed a school for boys, as Thucydides notes.

[123] Orwin (1994) p. 183.

[124] Both the Spartans and the Athenians begin to suffer faction within the city due to the stresses of the larger war, although to greatly differing degrees.

[125] The prefix of *neoterizo* is related to the word *neos* or "new." The civil war is the result of attempts at something new, or more precisely, political innovation.

change, is in opposition to the characteristic of Sparta, where the laws are unchanging and have authority due to tradition and the expanse of time.

And Thucydides argues that the characteristics and motives of these parties are not those particular to the civil wars that resulted from the Peloponnesian War – the character of civil war that Thucydides will portray here is permanent so long as human nature remains the same.[126] Cities and private individuals have better thoughts during times of peace but confrontation with the "necessities" that arise during a civil war lead to changes in the virtues holding the city together. Therefore war is a violent teacher because it takes away the ease of daily life and thus affects the character of human beings (82.2).

Yet even in the horrors of civil war where necessity is most pressing on the conditions within the city (particularly the compulsion to face death), there are qualities or virtues that are held in honor. Thucydides indicates that human beings do not abandon notions of virtue altogether; rather, they redefine those qualities – thoughtless daring is courage, moderation is unmanliness, and generally the only ones trusted were those who proposed something extreme (82.4). Despite the extreme conditions of civil war in which pretexts would not seem to be needed, pretexts are sought and claimed. Even in the extreme violence and hatred of civil war, human nature seeks to *justify* its actions, not in the terms of self-interest (which would preclude any concern with justifications for action), but through changing the meaning of terms designating what is considered just and noble. Thus these words change their meaning in a

[126] Pouncey (1980) pp. 143-45 argues that there is "almost" a permanent condition of human nature, but that Thucydides has "overwritten" the claim to its permanence. However, Pouncey is only able to make this argument by focusing on *fear* as the dominant human motive behind any action. By reducing the actions in civil war merely to fear, and not to concerns with overcoming death through actions considered noble and just, Pouncey does not recognize the source of Thucydides' claim, namely, hope. It is hope's ability to overcome the greatest fears that allows human beings to strive for immortality precisely in the most dire circumstances (3.45.7, 7.28.3, 56.2, 59.2, 70.7).

manner that is not arbitrary; the concerns of human nature are fundamental and language expresses these concerns.[127]

That justice and nobility remain a dominant concern in civil war is brought out by Thucydides noting that the ties of party took precedent over even those of kinship and the family. These party relations were not tied to the "established laws" but were based on "greed" (*pleonexia*). Therefore trust does not rest on "divine law" but on "commonality in transgressing the law" (82.6). Acts of justice which had their root in the divine law no longer exist; rather acts of injustice are the bond of those of each party. The basis of justice and just actions proceeds from these established laws that are now no longer adhered to. The trust between the members of the city was previously based on the expectation that the established laws and the divine law were the source of one's compliance. Family or kinship, the laws of the city, and the divine law are then the bonds of the city for Thucydides because these legal and customary ties foster trust. In better times, the divine law restrains the passions that undermine trust.

The "cause" (*aitia*) of the particular violence and circumstances of civil war is the desire for rule which arises from greed and love of honor. And these desires are distinct from those of safety and self-preservation, advantage and interests. Rather, as Thucydides notes, these desires lead to a "love of victory" among the parties – winning in a battle for the sake of ruling over others and gaining honor for revenges and transgressions of the law was of the utmost concern (82.8). In the depths of a civil war human beings do not seek simply to protect their safety; rather, the harsh necessities of civil war and the sense of hopelessness that this entails leads to a striving after nobility and honor. It is the apparent hopelessness in the face of extreme necessities that breeds a hope of overcoming death by achieving honor after death through fighting on

[127] I therefore agree with Orwin (1994) p. 177 n10 that the root of these concerns and their expression in language is not merely conventional, but due to fundamental human concerns. The changes in language are a reflection of these permanent moral passions that Thucydides locates as the cause of the particular viciousness of civil war.

behalf of one's party (and thus implicitly, on behalf of a particular cause that is viewed as just). Therefore one is not devoted simply to one's own interests or advantage but to the claims of one's party.[128] The "fair speeches" of each side were not simply pretexts to justify the continued violence. Each party argues for a specific regime – political equality for the many or a moderate aristocracy of the few were the claims to the just arrangement of the city by the warring parties. While they did not abide by justice or benefit the city, they adhered to the pleasure of each party which implicitly made claims to do precisely that (82.8). And thus the greed and honor of each party is rooted in their sense of *deserving* to win victory over the others. Party tied men to one side or the other during the civil war and therefore it was not a struggle of every man against every man.[129]

Contrary to our expectation that the violence of civil war would alleviate the tension between revenge and interest (in this case, self-preservation), what we notice is the opposite. Revenge, an act the intention of which is to redress past injustices (and hence is motivated by a concern with justice) was pursued over concerns with self-preservation. Yet even more striking than this is the desire to act on behalf of justice, leading those involved in the war to allow an injury to occur for the sake of providing themselves with an injury that could then be redressed (82.7).[130] While the established laws and thus piety no longer tie the citizens together, the concern with redressing these injuries inflicted by others suggests that the passion for justice was even stronger during the civil war. Thucydides presents this passion as stronger than self-preservation because parties to the civil war had no manifest hope for survival. Those not involved with one of the parties were killed either from not joining or out of envy because it was

[128] Ahrensdorf (2000) pp. 587-88.
[129] Thucydides' indication that some refrained from involving themselves in the civil war at Corcyra and that those who were involved tied themselves to a particular party renders problematic Pouncey's Hobbesian claim that civil war is "the beleaguerment as one of every man for himself" (1980, p. 147).
[130] Ahrensdorf (2000) p. 589.

thought that they might escape and hence survive (82.8). This implies that those party members punished the outsiders because they believed that their party was on the side of justice in the civil war and thus refusal to participate was an injustice. Yet they were also envious, possibly realizing, if only half-consciously, that the justice of the cause would not fulfill their deeper desire – to overcome assured death. To partake in revenge, as an act of justice, implies that even though the parties were silent on piety, they were still concerned with the gods. As the Spartans expected just or unjust actions to be rewarded or punished by the gods, so too did the parties (and each individual) expect that to redress an injury would be to partake in an act of justice.

Beyond this however we also noted Thucydides' indication that the parties and individuals were concerned with virtue as a whole; the traditional virtues are not abandoned but redefined. For to act virtuously means foregoing one's advantage or interest for the sake of adherence to virtue, thus making oneself worthy of the gods' favor. As the views of the Athenian speakers on imperialism has shown, pursuing one's interest is not an indication of one's worth; only sacrificing interests could bestow such worth. Only through such actions could one hope to become worthy of overcoming one's own assured death.[131]

The civil war at Corcyra portrays human beings' permanent concern with justice and piety even after a breakdown in the established laws, laws that in the case of Sparta foster this concern. But Sparta's laws avoided the causes of civil war by somehow suppressing the desires for victory and honor as well as directing them toward service to the city. Obedience to the laws at Sparta was able to stifle the desires, greed, and ambitions by narrowing or directing these desires. Yet the Spartan regime requires closer consideration; for while Thucydides has indicated that obedience to Sparta's laws functioned within the city and educated or hindered its citizens thus avoiding civil war, the causes of the Spartans' strict adherence to the laws is still unclear.

[131] *Ibid* p. 590.

The Spartan Regime

While Thucydides offers details of Sparta in Book 5 that he does not focus on elsewhere, other indications throughout the war of the characteristics of the Spartan regime shed further light on their moderation and thus on the fundamental character of the city. Here we turn to Thucydides' account of the growth of Sparta from its beginnings, the manner in which Sparta wielded influence over other cities, and especially how the virtues of the city that saved it from what we witness at Corcyra affected the conduct of the city at war and the Spartans' relations among themselves.

The relation between regime change or destruction and external war is shown most clearly in Thucydides' presentation of the growth and destruction of Athens and the civil war at Corcyra. But Thucydides also hints at the similarities between Sparta and the other cities beginning in his Archaeology. Sparta put down tyrants in establishing their empire and Athens also involved itself in civil wars when they could install a regime friendly to their interests and empire (1.115.3). In fact, they charge the Spartans with precisely the same actions as them, arranging the affairs of the Peloponnesus as they saw fit. Indeed, as Thucydides' account indicates, the Spartans did in fact put down tyrannies and stabilize the factions that characterized the fertile Peloponnesus in those times (18.1). This liberation from tyranny was the beginning of Sparta's imperialism. But this imperialism was limited to the Peloponnesus; Sparta only arranged affairs among those mainlanders who were within their reach, thus establishing themselves as the leading city in the Peloponnesus. And in this context Thucydides makes a passing remark about these tyrannies that reminds us of Sparta itself – nothing great proceeded from them because they had to be concerned with matters at home (17). The focus of the tyrant is to maintain control of the city and therefore not be away from the city on campaigns. The greatness that could not be

pursued is empire (Cf. 3.45.6). Indeed, however strong and feared Sparta was as a city, they did not possess the abilities to control a vast empire as Athens did. Yet as Thucydides reminds us later in the context of the capture of Pylos and the Spartans on the island, the area of Messenia formerly belonged to the Messenians who also spoke the same dialect as the Spartans. Messenia is further evidence of a Spartan empire (4.3.3, 41.2). The Messenians were now located in Naupactus. And when we return to Thucydides' relation of a Helot revolt, slaves that lived within Sparta, he indicates there that these Helots were allowed safe passage out of the Peloponnesus by the Spartan due to an oracle from Delphi commanding that the Spartans do so. The Messenians, after begin driven out of their country near Sparta during the Messenian War, were those who became the Helots within Sparta (1.102.2). The Athenians received the Messenians and placed them in Naupactus because of their hatred of the Spartans (103.1-3).

At the time of this war Sparta and Athens were allies with Athenian supremacy only beginning to expand into what would become the Athenian empire (1.97.1-2, 99.1). The Spartans therefore ask for aid from Athens to subdue Helots during the initiation of their revolt. The Athenians arrive, but due to their "daring and innovating" character they are sent away by the Spartans. This resulted not only in the Athenians becoming deeply offended, but also led to the dissolution of their alliance. Besides this event being a precipitating reason for the division between Sparta and Athens, and therefore important for Thucydides' explanation of the lead up to the war, for our purposes it is instructive of Sparta's fundamental concern – their regime. They feared the Athenians because they viewed them as so fundamentally different from themselves. And this fear led the Spartans also to believe that the Athenians might attempt to incite a revolution within Sparta (102.3). While any city may fear the presence of others, it is the character of the Athenians that leads especially to this distrust of them by the Spartans.

The Spartans themselves were neither daring nor innovative. Nothing great proceeded from Sparta just as nothing great proceeded from the tyrannies at this time in Greece. Both Sparta and these tyrannies lacked the "daring" necessary (17). Sparta's moderation is then not simply due to their education in Sparta's laws – they were compelled to stay at home and guard against a potential revolt. Its laws and character but also the necessity of guarding against their Helots led to Sparta's moderation, keeping the regime attentive to itself and thus stable.

Thucydides confirms this relation between moderation and necessity in Book 8 – both the Chians and the Spartans are praised for being moderate while prosperous (8.24.4).[132] Yet in this context, both cities are also noted for having the greatest number of slaves (40.2). Sparta was unable to pursue the greatest things, especially empire (1.10.2, 3.45.6) because they were more concerned with safety at home than daring enterprises that would have kept them away and placed the entire city at risk, should those at home see this as an opportunity to rebel. Thucydides seems to imply that only the necessity to be moderate will restrain cities from expanding. Nevertheless, Sparta possessed a certain empire; they were compelled to expand to a certain degree or limit because, unlike Athens, the land surrounding Sparta possessed rich soil that led to faction (*stasis*), since those in possession of this land were able to accrue great power for themselves (2.3). All cities are compelled to expand and thus rule others; therefore Thucydides never passes judgment in his own name on the Spartans' claim to be waging a war of liberation.

[132] Romilly (1963) p. 225 n3 argues that this statement by Thucydides indicates a quality of the Spartans that "no one ever thought of denying" and thus "the admiration implied in this unnecessary remark indicates a frame of mind closer to that in the speech on Pylos than to that in the Funeral Oration." This footnote occurs in the context of Romilly arguing that Books 5 and 8 are incomplete, are "early" versions akin to how the other books would have appeared before completion, and thus "composed with less care" (p. 226). Along with our previous remarks (see note 3 above), Romilly's argument does not acknowledge that the praise of Sparta's measured or moderate conduct, whether at war or among themselves, is never stated by Thucydides himself until this instance. Cf. Strauss (1964) p. 148. Moreover, the speech at Pylos was given by the Spartans according to their view of the situation (4.21.1-2). As for Pericles' funeral speech, it suffices here to simply add that Pericles' praise of daring is the view most at odds with the Spartan view, a view which in part led to Thucydides' praise of Sparta's moderation.

The Spartans (and Chians) were moderate because they faced the necessities of war at home – revolt and civil war could result if they were away from home.

The gravity of the Helot problem for Sparta is further confirmed by the harsh measures which the Spartans undertook to guard against a potential revolt. During the affair at Pylos, the lowest point for Sparta in the war, the Athenians employ the Messenians freed from Sparta and now located on Naupactus to engage in a campaign against Laconia, the countryside surrounding Sparta. And this war against an area so near to Sparta caused them the greatest fear, including a fear of a revolution within the city (4.41.1-3). It is in this context that Thucydides presents the extent of this fear. The Spartans asked the Helots to make a proclamation amongst themselves as to who was most distinguished in war, under the pretext of granting them their freedom. However, once this part of the Helots (two thousand in total) had been selected, the Spartans killed them, fearing that these Helots would be those most likely to rebel against the city (4.80.2-4). Thucydides remarks here that the Spartans always had to be concerned with guarding against the Helots.[133]

This remark is further reinforced immediately preceding the treaty and alliance between Sparta and Athens ten years into the Peloponnesian War. Both cities were in fact weakened by the problems they encountered in the prosecution of the war. Among the greatest concerns of the Spartans were both the possibility of the Helots revolting and of those on the Peloponnesus engaging in their "former" (*proteron*) attempts at revolution (5.14.3). Thucydides reminds us of his portrait of the growth of Sparta in its beginnings – Sparta did indeed possess an empire on the Peloponnesus, an empire they maintained due to their reputation and abilities as a superior land power able to contain other cities. Their empire was limited or "moderate" and kept the Spartans from engaging in great wars abroad because of the war within the city and on the Peloponnesus.

[133] Cf. Aristotle *Politics* 1269a37-39.

It is not only in their founding as a city however that Sparta attempted to expand and exert their influence. During the Peloponnesian War they also attempt the founding of a colony at Heraclea (3.92-93).[134] The Malians and the Dorians sent to Sparta for assistance. The Malians were hoping for Sparta's assistance and security after a war with their neighbors and the Dorians also joined for the same reason. The Spartans decided to grant their request because they wanted to be of assistance, but also because Heraclea was strategically located near Euboea and therefore would allow them to maintain a fleet nearby to harass this principal source of Athens' revenue. While Thucydides had mentions that the Malians were composed of three distinct tribes, when he relates the Spartans' decision to send out a colony as assistance he only mentions the Trachinians. Further, the Spartans also sought to aid the Dorians, who Thucydides notes were originally from Sparta and seemed to have settled near Heraclea some time ago. Indeed, it was the Dorians who were the first to settle Sparta (1.18.1). Despite the strategic reasons for the Spartans' decision, they also found Heraclea with a preference for certain peoples over others.[135]

After consulting the god at Delphi and receiving a favorable response, they send colonists to Heraclea led by three Spartans to be its founders, Leon, Alcidas, and Damagon. They also invited other Greeks to join and settle at Heraclea, with the exception of the Ionians and some other peoples (*ethnos*). And many peoples did join the colony from the belief that any place established by the Spartans would be prosperous. Yet this belief is disappointed. The Thessalians nearby harassed the new colony and reduced its population to ensure it would not become a powerful neighboring city. But most notably, the Spartans themselves harmed their own efforts

[134] This is not Sparta's only colony, but the only one that Thucydides describes in detail. Cf. 4.53.2, 7.57.6.
[135] Consider 7.57.2 where Thucydides lists the cities allied with the Syracusans or the Athenians. While he notes the divisions of cities and the peoples to whom each city belonged (Dorians, Ionians, and Aeolians) he argues that it was not justice or kinship that led to the alliances as much as interest or compulsion. The exceptions seem to be the Corcyraeans, fighting against their colonial city of Corinth due to "hatred" (57.7). Those from Argos, being Dorians, also fought against the Spartans due to hatred as well as private interest (57.9). Thucydides thereby implies that hatred and the resulting desire for revenge had an effect on their decision, even when it also served their interests.

by governing the colony "harshly and in some cases not nobly" (3.93.2; Cf. 5.52.1). The Spartans both failed to protect their new colony from the Thessalians and were unable to rule the colony in a manner that would make it prosperous. The Spartans were unable to govern with any gentleness despite the fact that holding a colony near Euboea would be advantageous to them in the larger war. Indeed, it was their ability to control the flow of Athens' resources later in the war that was the cause of great harm to that city (8.96.1-2).

Thucydides' mention of Alcidas as one of the three commanders of the colony at Heraclea is a reminder of this harshness toward others. Alcidas was the Spartan commander who was urged by allies of Sparta to refrain from harming Athens' subjects, who were only so by necessity. To continue would have led to Sparta creating more "enemies" than "friends" (3.32.2). And as Thucydides subtly indicates in the founding of Heraclea, the Spartans preferred only one of the Malian tribes and their own peoples, the Dorians. Not only Alcidas but the Spartans generally distinguished between their friends and enemies, offering assistance to their own while treating the others harshly. And this treatment harms their own intentions in founding Heraclea, intentions which could in fact have caused Athens some trouble; the Athenians were originally alarmed by the new colony (93.1).

Thucydides only quietly presents Spartan imperialism and in this way seems to imitate the manner in which other cities viewed that imperialism – we do not hear any blame of Sparta by other cities for this empire, but only for their lack of eagerness in prosecuting the war. It is Athenian imperialism that receives the blame because it is visible to everyone, or more precisely, the Athenians do not even attempt to disguise their ambitions. Yet even with the threat of the Helots, the Spartans also needed to establish stability on the Peloponnesus. Domestic order within Sparta presupposes their control over the region so far as they would not be constantly

under threat from their neighbors. Rest or peace, as the opposite of motion or war, requires controlling an empire that does not place the city at risk of invasion or of attempts by outsiders to incite a revolution within Sparta among the Helots (1.21.1). Thucydides warns of the possibility of external wars inciting civil wars because every city has, to varying degrees and kinds, factions within the regime. But despite their empire, the Spartans could not rule nobly; their rule was harsh; thus Sparta could not expand in the manner in which Athens did. Yet this raises a question: was it the necessity of staying at home or the character of the Spartans that led to this limited imperialism?

Thucydides states that the Spartans did everything with a view to the Helots at home (4.80.3). This then was the cause of Spartan moderation. Yet Thucydides also shows the piety of the Spartans, as well as their tie to the city and the law-abiding character that it cultivated. Their character was also a cause and this means that human nature is a cause; human nature is a necessity as well as the material conditions that presented themselves during the war. For if this were not the case, all cities would approach war in the same manner; yet the Athenians strive forward where the Spartans retreat (8.2.4; cf. 8.92.3, 106.5). And while for the Athenians this striving is due to their concern with nobility and the honor that attends it, the Spartans hold that the noble is service to their city – the praise and blame among the Spartans was a strong compulsion on their actions. This is due in particular to their fear of acting shamefully in disobeying the laws, including their defense of Sparta (4.19.3, 5.9.9, 5.104). And the Spartan view of justice is what the laws dictate. The laws of Sparta, or rather Lycurgus, being sanctioned by the god at Delphi are especially the cause of their fear. But their harshness towards others is where no law directs them. However the Spartans still obey the sacrifices before campaigns and show genuine concern with the oaths consecrating treaties.

If the Spartans adhered to their treaties and this resulted in good fortune in the war, then the Spartan view of justice would be correct. But the Spartans win the war because of the ambition of the Athenians; and this ambition is of doubtful piety. While the Athenians believe that they have the support of the gods as well, it is because the gods excuse human beings in the case of necessity (4.98.6).[136] The gods would not blame the Athenians for pursuing their interests (and acting out of fear) because it is a "law" set down that all human beings obey. If this "law" directs human nature itself, then one cannot be blamed for acting in accordance with it (5.105.2-3). But for the Spartans the gods are not subject to necessity. Human nature is able to navigate fortune by being just and thus winning the favor of the gods. Human life is fundamentally susceptible to fortune and thus the gods that control fortune will reward those who act justly (2.74.2).

Fearing the gods and being highly susceptible to shame among their fellow citizens, the Spartans possessed a strong moral attachment to their city. Placing the individual above the city was unheard of and punishing each other even when it was suspected placed the Spartans in a difficult position, so strong were the restrictions of the laws.[137] The problem that certain individuals create for Sparta is the sting of a Spartan who is able to attain honor outside of the city, freeing himself from the praise and blame rooted in the laws. Since their domestic order depended on these laws, the possibility of an individual acting outside of the authority of Sparta abroad could lead to the diminishment of authority within the city.

The problem of the individual for Sparta begins before the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War with the Spartan general Pausanias. While Pausanias was successful in this capacity and able to push back the Persians, his conduct abroad caused problems for Sparta. Eventually

[136] Strauss (1964) p. 178; Orwin (1994) pp. 87-90.
[137] Cf. Rousseau *Considerations on the Government of Poland* Chapter 2 "The Spirit of Ancient Institutions."

recalled back to the city for his violence and actions that were more in keeping with a tyrant than a general, Pausanias contributed to the ascendancy of Athens. Those cities liberated by Sparta and Athens from the Persians sought Athens to rule them because of Pausanias' harsh conduct (1.95.1-4). In this manner, Athens became the hegemon of Greece both voluntary on the part of the allies and due especially to the hatred of Pausanias (96.1).

And while Pausanias was recalled to face these accusations, the Spartans only found him guilty of injustices against private individuals and not of the charge that he was conspiring with the Persians, a charge that Thucydides himself states was the most evident (95.5). Fearing that others might be corrupted in this manner led Sparta to remove its citizens from the rule of the other cities in Greece. But Sparta thereby only solves the problem of corruption, i.e. its own citizens turning against the city, by denying their citizens the temptations that arose when they travelled abroad. That a Spartan would remain virtuous appears to require the watchful eye of all the others.

Pausanias does not allow his recall to quell his ambitions though, going out of Spartan as a private individual to renew his relations with the king of Persia. And Thucydides allows us to see that the most serious of the charges against Pausanias were indeed true and he had sought (and was now again seeking) to rule over all of Greece with the aid of the king (128.3). Thucydides suggests that the source of this ambition was the support that Pausanias was granted by the king, but also due to the great "worth" (*axioma*) that he was held in among the Greeks for the victory at Plataea over the Persians themselves. After believing himself to be in a position where he could affect matters as he saw fit, Pausanias further turns to adopting Persian customs and again returning to his violent and harsh treatment of others.[138] Thucydides reminds us again

[138] Cf. Plato *Republic* 573d2-5.

here that it was this violent temperament that led the freed cities of Greece to turn to the Athenians (130).

Pausanias' ambitions and the manner in which they manifest themselves break with Sparta's customs and way of life. While we have seen instances of harshness by the Spartans for the sake (as they believe) of Sparta, Pausanias contrasts with the measured way of life that the Spartans adopted from early on, a way of life that was intended to reduce the differences between the few and the many (6.4). And the honor that he had received due to his victory at Plataea resulted in further ambitions, ambitions which could not be restrained away from Sparta and which placed Sparta at risk once he seeks to act privately for this gain. In the context of Thucydides narrating that the Spartans became aware of his conduct, he notes problems for the Spartans – to punish a member of the first family was difficult and required the most trustworthy of evidence to proceed. But for the Spartans the charges were very serious since Pausanias' actions suggested that he was acting contrary to the laws and contemptuous of the things established by these laws (132.1-2). The Spartans thus needed evidence against their general for the Ephors to proceed with further charges. Eventually, they discover that in seeking to separate himself from Sparta Pausanias had engraved his own name on a pillar intended to commemorate the cities who had fought with Sparta to defeat the Persians, while the Spartans had to correct this pillar to read "Sparta" along with the other cities. Further, Pausanias was conspiring with the Helots by promising them freedom and citizenship if they aided him in rising up against the city. Pausanias' victory as a general in war and the honors that attended it made him ambitious to take command of Sparta for himself.[139]

Yet the Spartans still mistrusting of this abundance of evidence delay and are slow (132.3-4). The Spartans' customary caution and slowness affects them even within the city and

[139] Cf. Aristotle *Politics* 1333b31-35.

amongst each other. Where we noted their suspicion of the Athenians and fear of possible innovation to their laws during the Helot revolt, even the laws in place that direct the Ephors in protecting the city by guarding against the office of the king[140] seem ineffective due to the unwillingness of acting against one of their own. And when they finally seek his arrest (after hearing Pausanias incriminate himself), some of the Ephors nevertheless signal to him as they approach, allowing him to escape to a temple where he could not be retrieved without an act of impiety being committed. Thucydides indicates that these Ephors acted out of "kindness" (*eunoia*) in signaling to Pausanias (134.1).

While the Spartan laws instilled moderation in the relation of the ruling offices, these laws were unable to restrain the ambitions of an individual such as Pausanias. The honor that he received in war could not be satisfied within Sparta where no one individual could distinguish themselves above all others. But the obedience to these laws and education in them, as in all laws and customs that Thucydides notes, did not restrain all ambitions. And the Spartans themselves seem at least partially conscious of this shortcoming, as they feared to send Pausanias out again on a campaign.

Yet Pausanias was not the only Spartan accused of corruption. And while Thucydides is clear that he was in fact guilty of the charges against him, others who are blamed by the Spartans leave doubts as to the charges against them. When Thucydides relates the reasons for Pleistoanax desiring peace after the deaths of Brasidas and Cleon, the Spartans' treatment of their leading men is further revealed.

Pleistoanax had been exiled from Sparta (during the hostilities between Sparta and Athens after the Persian War) for advancing toward Attica but failing to invade the countryside

[140] Pausanias was the guardian of his first cousin, Pleistarchus, who was still a minor and thus could not hold his inherited position as the Spartan king (1.132.1).

nearest to Athens. The opinion of the Spartans was that he had been bribed (1.114.2, 2.21.1). However, Pleistoanax was still able to restore himself to the kingship at Sparta during the Peloponnesian War. Yet his restoration was accompanied by severe blame from the Spartans as they believed Pleistoanax had done so "unlawfully" and is therefore further blamed for every loss befalling them at this time of the war (5.16.1). The accusation against him was that he had bribed the prophetess at Delphi to give a response favorable to his restoration when the Spartans went to consult her. The Spartans had restored him with their pious customs including the dances and sacrifices that were practiced when they first instituted kings in ancient Sparta. The Spartans seem compelled to obey these pious commands despite their suspicion. When Pleistoanax was in exile, he built his house inside the precinct of Zeus, being sacred ground, to ensure that he would not be further punished by the Spartans. The Spartans, in contrast to the Athenians at Boeotia, would not attempt to attack him here (16.3; Cf. 4.97-99).

For all the detail with which Thucydides portrays this incident, he does not offer a judgment on the charges against Pleistoanax.[141] His exile seems mysterious since we do not know why he was suspected of bribery. But being the son of the shamed general Pausanias, the Spartans may have been suspicious of him simply by his family relation. Moreover it is striking that the Spartans restore him with the most pious customs, yet blame him nonetheless. And in blaming Pleistoanax, they are in fact blaming themselves for being unable to act outside of these customs when it would seem prudent to do so. The Spartans seem to implicitly recognize the potential misuse of piety for the private ends of a Spartan individual, yet cannot act apart from it.

The question of the bribery charges against Pleistoanax though is solved through the Spartans' earlier blame of Archidamus and Agis. In both instances the lack of notable battles

[141] Westlake (1968) p. 94 notes the detail of Thucydides' presentation of Pleistoanax despite his lack of importance to the overall war. This would seem to support the view that Thucydides relates these details on a Spartan in the book which he most clearly elaborates that city and its individuals.

and, generally, victorious prosecution of the war leads to this blame. Yet as we have observed, the slowness, caution, and lack of eagerness of the Spartans are the very characteristics inculcated by Sparta itself. The blame of Agis before Mantinea is in keeping with that of Archidamus at the beginning of the war.[142] Archidamus was accused of weakness, lack of eagerness, and even of siding with Athens (2.18.3). And we suspect this must have been due to his caution regarding the potential injustice of breaching the treaty by declaring war, the same kind of caution that Sparta seems to show in allowing for the return of Pleistoanax, despite their suspicions. Their caution is both with a view to obeying the laws and from a concern with possible impiety. And this habitual caution and avoiding risks, in striking contrast to the Athenians, manifests itself among the best of the Spartans, men such as Archidamus. During the attack on Attica that led to accusations against him, the Spartans were seeking a "quick" (*tachos*) advance for the sake of harming the Athenian countryside (18.4). But Archidamus' delay was not simply due to his caution or corruption in aiding the Athenians. Thucydides indicates that Archidamus had reasons for delaying at Oenoe and later at Acharnae; he believed that the Athenians would not let their land be wasted and therefore waited for them to come out from the city to defend it; Thucydides himself confirms that Archidamus was correct (20.1-2, 21.2-3). Pericles incites the anger of the Athenians and is blamed by the city for his policies once the Athenians realize how close the Spartans are to the city and especially when they have to stay back while witnessing the Spartans destroying their land.

The blame of the Spartan kings and generals for poor policy decisions, bribery, and weakness is based on an inconsistency in the Spartans' own understanding of themselves. While

[142] Cnemus also incites the anger of the Spartans for the loss of a naval battle at Arcanania. While they accused him of weakness or cowardice, Thucydides' description of the battle (and Sparta's angry response to its result) implies that it was a lack of familiarity with naval maneuvers that allowed the Athenians to attain victory over the Spartans (2.84.3, 85.1-3).

the laws of Sparta could not restrain a man of the ambition of Pausanias, the laws failed to cultivate the daring of the Athenians, the need for which the Spartans implicitly yet unknowingly acknowledge in their criticisms of their own generals. And near the end of the war, Thucydides reminds us again both that the Spartans typically seek peace and that a capable Spartan general must act apart from Sparta to serve Sparta.

Following the Athenians' disastrous defeat in Sicily, the Spartans begin to hope for a quick end to the war. For the Spartans did not desire a war such as the Peloponnesian War nor did their education and city prepare them for it. Thucydides states, for example, that they were "compelled" to adopt a navy (8.2.3). However after Athens' defeat in Sicily, they had good hope for a noble ending to the war, leaving Sparta in secure hegemony of Greece (2.4). Though yet again the Spartans are too ready to cease from prosecuting the war before it ends; for Thucydides in this context notes that the Athenians had not ceased from continuing with the war (4, 15) and thus it is left to their king Agis to act. However, Agis arranges matters differently here than in Book 5. Perhaps due to his enmity with Alcibiades (12.2), Agis, despite the protests of Sparta's allies, compels them to provide money for a fleet and brings them into alliance with Sparta (3.1).[143] And when Euboea and others seek to revolt from Athens, Thucydides notes emphatically that Agis sets this in motion and all of it was done without authority from Sparta (5.3). The reason is that Agis had the "power" to send out troops and levy money and men. The result is that the allies of Sparta obeyed him more than Sparta itself since he showed himself to be feared (5.3). Before the near battle at Argos in Book 5, Agis had received the blame of both the army and the Spartans at home (5.60.4, 63.1). But here, in acting on his own authority, he is able to secure allies and expand the Spartans' overall forces, as well as inciting revolts of

[143] One of Archidamus' main policy objections to going to war with Athens was due to Sparta's monetary deficiency to carry on such a war (1.83.2-3).

Athens' subject cities. It was Brasidas who also employed this strategy eventually leading the Athenians to agree to the truce and subsequent alliance after the first ten years of the war. And similarly Agis is only able to do this apart from Sparta; thus Thucydides begins here to treat them as distinct (8.8.2) and when the Corinthians delay accompanying Agis and his allies on an expedition to Chios because they are celebrating a festival, Agis proposes that he do this himself as a private action (9.1). It is Agis that holds Decelea at the time that the Athenians also lose Euboea to the Peloponnesians and in this context Thucydides notes this loss as especially troubling precisely because Attica was held by the Spartans (95.2).[144]

However Agis' vigor first arises only after Thucydides notes that the Spartans no longer felt guilt for breaching the treaty and beginning the war (7.18). And this vigor, along with the power that he holds for himself, follows on Thucydides' statement that the Spartans believed Athens to be on the brink of defeat and thus Sparta hoped the war would soon be over (8.2). Lastly, when Agis is holding Decelea and the Four Hundred in Athens sue for peace, he first rejects it, hoping either that the appearance of the Spartans would frighten the Athenians into surrendering, or that the city might surrender due to the internal discord happening at that time. Agis wants to take Athens without encountering any risks. But the city remains at a calm and the Athenians only engage against a small number of Agis' men. Thus when the Four Hundred again sue for peace, Agis now agrees and sends envoys to Sparta to negotiate (8.71). Agis becomes more willing to use his reputation to pursue Sparta's interests, but all his caution is in the first part of the war and his only vigor is after Athens' official breach of the treaty and alliance between the two. The justice of Sparta's cause was important for the city as it was for Agis; Agis is still fundamentally Spartan. If this is true, Agis is still significant as a Spartan that at least *begins* to separate himself from his city and pursue policies (i.e. troops and money) advantageous

[144] See note 38 above.

to Sparta and may have been had they been pursued earlier in the war. Agis is a Spartan portrayed by Thucydides as partaking of the Spartan concern with justice, yet led to confront the necessities of the war and thus compelled to act apart from the restrictions placed on him by the city. It should also be noted that although Thucydides gives no explicit indication of Agis' possible motives, he does note his enmity towards Alcibiades (12.2). This may suggest that Agis is the seed of the growth of private interest, interests apart from Sparta's perceived or true interests as a city.

If Agis was ultimately directed by private interests or by believing that Sparta's cause was now justified in prosecuting the war, we notice that the result the same – only now does Agis as Spartan king utilize the means necessary to successfully lead Sparta. The account of Agis in Book 5 reveals not simply the shortcomings of Spartan law, but the changes to a Sparta now compelled to face the necessities of war. The necessity to innovate in the art of war to accommodate for the demands required for victory leads to an innovation directly related to the structure of the regime. We are thus reminded of the Spartans' decision to do the opposite with Brasidas (at the end of Book 4) – his successes in the war led, not to a new law, but to the Spartans disobeying one of their own laws (4.132.3). And in this case, the disregard of their law was for the sake of maintaining authority over cities newly liberated by Brasidas. With both Agis and Brasidas, Thucydides reveals what would be required for the Spartans to truly challenge the Athenians in the war. And Thucydides clearly indicates that with more "daring" the Spartans could have sailed into the Piraeus late in the war, initiating strategic possibilities that would have led one way or another to Sparta and its allies possessing the whole Athenian empire (96.4). But Sparta will ultimately fail, strictly speaking, to defeat Athens on their own; however, we cannot

fail to notice the manner in which even the peculiar Spartan regime is unable to maintain strict control over itself when confronted with a war of such a scale.

Thucydides' criticism of Sparta's slowness and lack of daring is directed not only towards the city acting as a whole, but against Spartan individuals, of the men themselves. The causes of Sparta's moderation were both part of the city but also part of the character of its citizens. And this moderation leaves most Spartans either constrained by the weaknesses of their education or ineffectual for the city because their ambition strays from it. What we have seen of the Spartans thus far is nothing exceptional – Pausanias' ambitions do not materialize, Agis' vigor is tied to justice, and even if Pleistoanax bribed the Delphic priestess he only did so to restore himself in Sparta from the previous (and doubtful) bribery charges. Pleistoanax' exile and restoration is comical in light of Alcibiades' exile and restoration. Yet Thucydides also presents other characters akin to the Spartans, but that add to his portrait of their character and view.

CHAPTER IV

SPARTAN CHARACTERS

Of Thucydides' "characters" three recommend themselves for our consideration of both Sparta and the Spartan view of the war. First is the city of Melos or its spokesmen, who proceed in their speech and actions from what they believe the dictates of justice demand. No other city in Thucydides' account of the war states as directly the strength of justice and the gods on the course of war and thus human life. Second is Nicias, the Athenian commander eulogized by Thucydides and who prosecutes the war in the Spartan manner, with caution and also a noticeable concern with piety and justice. Third is Brasidas, Sparta's most notable commander who rises through the ranks of the Spartan army and does significant harm to Athens' interests under the banner of liberating subject cities from their empire. Most importantly, Brasidas is one of the most highly praised individuals in all of Thucydides. Thucydides' view of Sparta as a city and their characteristics is only complete through a consideration of these three different manifestations of the Spartan view.

The Melians versus the Athenian Thesis

The Melians are "the most conspicuous spokesmen for justice in Thucydides."[145] Yet they are also the most problematic, for their unwavering belief that the justice of their cause will allow them to persevere against the significantly stronger Athenians leads not to their victory but to their demise. Therefore their statements to the Athenians, concerned as they are with justice, casts light on the Spartans and their view. And their dialogue with the Athenians is also significant for bringing out the boldest and most frank statement of Athenian imperialism in Thucydides' account. It thus offers the strongest contrast, as the Athenians themselves imply, of Sparta and Athens. Despite the Athenians arguing for sober calculation in deciding foreign

[145] Bruell (1974) p. 15.

affairs, claims made during their discussion with the Melians will reveal both errors in understanding the Melians' view as well as hopes that they themselves harbor in the very act of exhorting the Melians to ignore their own.

5.85: The Athenians begin by proposing a discussion[146] between their leading men and those at Melos precisely so that both sides may be frank with one another. To speak before the people is to resort to arguments that are merely persuasive, i.e. not true in whole or in part. The Athenians imply that by speaking only with the leading men at Melos both sides will not need to use such arguments. If we consider the previous arguments put forward to support Athenian imperialism at Sparta and by Pericles, we will note that those arguments were moral in character. They appealed to Athens' worthiness, justice, measure, and greatness. The discussion then between the leading Athenians and Melians would seem to have no need to resort to arguments about justice and instead can frankly deal with the interests of either side. But this Athenian expectation will be disappointed.

5.86: The Melians have no objection to discussion amongst only the few. But given that the Athenians have arrived in force, the Melians find the negotiations dubious – the only possible outcomes are war or slavery. Even if the Melians have justice on their side, they will nevertheless be compelled to fight. If they simply submit to the Athenians, they will be enslaved. The Melians imply that the Athenians will not be swayed by issues of justice as well as assuming that the Athenians will impose the harshest circumstances on them even if they do surrender. The Melians fail to mention or consider the possibility that the Athenians will only demand tribute

[146] Due to Thucydides' presentation of this episode as a discussion between the two cities (the so-called Melian Dialogue), the only such instance in his account, I will borrow Palmer's approach (1992) pp. 64-74 and present a chronological commentary on the arguments contained in each exchange.

from them and allow them to live autonomous, i.e. that the Athenians will allow Melos to submit on measured terms relatively agreeable to the interests of each city.

5.87: The Athenians reply that the Melians should only be concerned with their immediate safety. Suspicions about what the future may bring or any *other* considerations are not worth discussion – the Athenians quietly note, without directly addressing the Melians' claim, that somehow justice may remain as the basis of the Melians' appeals. Denial of this possibility as the basis of negotiations will become clear as the discussion proceeds.

5.88: The Melians concede that their safety is the question to be discussed, although they cannot help but add that they will likely "twist and turn" in what they are thinking and saying. Their position, as is obvious and as they imply, is not a favorable one. However, if their safety is their only true concern it is not immediately clear why the Melians suggest a difficulty here. But since they have already alluded to a concern with the justice of Athens' invasion and their potential surrender, it is not amiss to note that the Melians do not truly believe that the only issue to consider is their safety or that their safety may be secured through other means besides their surrender. The Melians seem unable to admit that their safety cannot be considered apart from the question of which city, invader or defender, is on the side of justice.

5.89: The Athenians, perhaps sensing this difficulty for the Melians, frankly state that they will not offer "noble pretexts" to support their right to their empire. They imply that they could make such arguments based on their defeat of the Persians that freed all Greeks from that war. Nor will they argue that the Melians are their enemies, despite the fact that Melos is a colony of Sparta and the Peloponnesian War is a war of so to speak all Greek cities allied with either Sparta or Athens. Thus the Melians should similarly not claim that they have maintained neutrality, although Spartan colonists, nor that they have committed no wrongs against Athens.

All such claims have no place, the Athenians argue, since justice is only a question among equals and clearly Melos and Athens are not equals. And in cases of obvious inequality, the strong act as they will and the weak must simply acquiesce. We note however that the Athenians imply both that Melos deserves to be conquered by the Athenians because they are a colony of Sparta *and* that the Athenians deserve their empire because they were left to finish the war against Persia. While claiming that justice will not bear on their present discussion, the Athenians do not deny or are not aware that their remarks betray a concern with justice. In the very instance that they prompt the Melians only to be concerned with safety, i.e. the good of the city, Thucydides compels us to raise the question whether the Athenians are concerned only with their own good, apart from other considerations.

Further, the Athenians also imply that claims about justice might be part of a negotiation, such as this one, if Melos were a more formidable city. Therefore a situation such as the "Peace of Nicias" is an incident where considerations of justice may come to bear. There, Athens had been harmed by Brasidas' victory at Amphipolis and the revolt of Athens' allies that he was able to initiate, while the Spartans sought peace because they desired the return of their men who had been taken prisoner on Sphacteria. Each city agreed to a truce and subsequent alliance when they were in a position of weakness and further open hostilities would not have advanced their interests.[147] Yet as numerous recent scholars have argued, the Athenians do not therefore claim here that "might makes right."[148] The strength of the Athenians does not mean their actions in attacking Melos are in any way just; justice is not a consideration because Melos has no strength from which to negotiate any conditions with Athens (besides offering surrender and hoping that

[147] It could be argued that Sparta was in error for not supporting Brasidas' strategy and aiding him in continuing the revolts underway. But the issue here is only Sparta's perception of its interest, not what their true interests were in fact.
[148] Bolotin (1987) p. 18; Orwin (1994) p. 99.

Athens accepts measured terms). Justice is a consideration among equals; the source of justice's power is the ability of each city to have the sufficient strength to compel the other. After Sparta's defeat at Sphacteria and Athens' loss of Amphipolis, neither city had sufficient strength to threaten the other by use of compelling force that could not be matched and thus offered as a counter threat; therefore each city sought a treaty to establish a period of peace.

5.90: The Melians would speak of justice if they could, but the Athenians have compelled them to avoid these terms. But the Melians argue that it is expedient to the common good of Melos and Athens to discuss issues of justice because if the Athenian empire should fall, others would exact the worst revenge upon an Athens that had rejected justice.

Justice is expedient according to the Melians because issues of justice will arise for Athens once they are again in a position of weakness. The Melians are picking up the argument of the Athenians regarding the position the weak find themselves in and suggesting that Athens should heed their own advice. This is in disregard of the Athenians' earlier remark that the Melians not consider the future (87), but only their immediate safety. Here the Melians argue that the Athenians should consider their future safety, since revenge will be taken on them. The Melians presuppose that the Athenian assault on Melos is unjust and thus by not considering their unjust actions, the Athenians may commit acts that will be recompensed with acts of revenge. This issue again does not consider Melos' current safety, but only Athens' safety should they destroy Melos (which is not even clearly Athens' intention, although the Melians believe it is). And therefore the expediency of justice according to the Melians is that there exists a common good between Melos and Athens premised on current actions of a just or unjust character, coupled with future actions done with a view to past justice or injustice.

5.91: The Athenians hint that they do not wholly believe that their empire will decline. This reminds us of Pericles' claim that all things by nature decline (2.64.3). Yet Pericles also argued for the everlasting glory that the Athenian empire would bestow on those who served the city and contributed to its glory. The Athenians do not even respond to the Melians' claim of revenge but only indicate that they are willing to take risks for the sake of their empire. And in response to the Melians' claim of a common good between the two cities, justice as good deeds and resulting rewards, the Athenians offer an contrasting account of what is in the interest of each – the conquest of Melos is in the interest of the Athenian empire and the safety of Melos is in the interest of Melos. Therefore the preservation of Melos (for the sake of serving Athens) is the true common good between the cities, since it preserves Melos from destruction while adding another city to the Athenian empire. It is not immediately clear how Melos serves Athens' interest though: they are a small island out of strategic distance from either the Peloponnesus or Sicily; their resources cannot be significant enough to influence the Athenian navy; and Melos has been neutral up until this point in the war, more than sixteen years along.

5.92-97: Of more immediate significance is the Melians' response. They ask how it is as useful for them to serve Athens as it is for Athens to rule them. The Athenians reply that submission by the Melians is good both for the Melians and Athenians. The Melians will not suffer a worse fate and the Athenians will apparently derive some use from Melos. The Athenians do not want to destroy Melos, for the city is of no benefit to them in this case. Athens' interest according to them is to extend their empire. The Melians offer neutrality rather than being an allied city of Athens. The Athenians deny this possibility because their failure to reduce Melos would be taken by their subjects as a sign of their weakness. The Athenians are concerned with the perception of their power by their subjects, perhaps especially in light of the revolts that

have taken place during the war, especially those of Brasidas that led Athens to agree to peace with Sparta. Besides, Athens tends to extract tribute in money and ships from their allies and assuming Melos has something to contribute in this regard, Athens' interest is served with the addition of Melos to their empire at least to this extent. Yet the Athenians, here and below, seem to be more concerned with how they are viewed by others. The Melians counter by attempting to distinguish those cities that are colonies of Athens and those that have no attachment to Athens. They argue that Athens' subject cities seem to make no distinction between the two. The Melians want to maintain that Athens' reputation is not harmed by failing to conquer Melos, for Athens' subjects should only be concerned with cities that belong to Athens. The Melians' distinction though seems problematic, for could Athens have sent colonies to places that they did not first reduce? Could Melos not itself be such a city? The Athenians therefore correctly respond that the issue the Melians are implicitly raising is one of justice – Athens' subjects should recognize the justice of the Melians' right to live independent of the Athenian empire. Therefore the Athenians note that not justice, but strength is the only means by which one can live independent of Athens. Thus Athens' subject cities will take those who live autonomously to be able to resist the Athenians. The security of the Athenian empire is strengthened by the subjugation of Melos because it will indicate to those other subjects that no city (especially islanders, as the Athenians note) can escape the reaches of their empire; and the Melians' weakness is additional proof of Athens' strength. For the Athenians this weakness is not less but more significant, for why should Athens be unable to conquer so weak a city as Melos?

However, questions arise as to the soundness of this argument on the part of the Athenians. They contend that the failure to subjugate Melos will be interpreted by others as weakness and that this will further harm Athens. Yet Melos poses no threat to Athens or their

security. And the Peloponnesian War's outbreak was due to the significantly stronger Sparta and its allies being fearful due to the continued encroachments of Athens. The Athenian empire was already sufficiently feared; their subjugation of Melos would not seem necessary. And even the revolts of their subject cities were only possible with the support of Sparta (or Brasidas). Perhaps not surprisingly then, the Athenians also note in this same argument that they will extend their empire by including Melos as one more of their conquests. And this extension appears to be limitless in character – it does not shore up the potential revolts that have arisen during the war. The question of whether Athens acts out of a genuine fear of their subjects appears problematic. And we are reminded of the other motives that the Athenians at Sparta noted, especially honor, as well as Pericles' praise of Athenian daring and the glory to be obtained from empire.[149]

5.98: The Melians now turn to attempting to prove that the security of Athens and the interest of Melos may coincide, despite the Athenians barring them from discussing justice and having already denied any common good between the cities as Melos understood it. The Athenians will make further enemies through their policy of attacking neutral cities and create more enmity for their empire than already exists. This will strengthen the resolve of Athens' existing enemies and create additional enemies as well. The Melians appeal to justice because they assume that Athens' subject cities will not become more fearful of Athens and thus stay quiet, but will be more likely to rebel because they are angry with Athens.

5.99: That the Melians do appeal to justice is brought out by the Athenians' reply that those outside of their empire and those already subject to it would be rash to act against Athens.

[149] Orwin seems to argue both that Athens feared their subjects and revolts (pp. 101-102) and also that the Athenians conquer Melos "because it is there" (p. 114). He ultimately sides with the latter view that the strong expand to the limits of their empire, perhaps without sound consideration of these limits. Cf. Pouncey (1980) pp. 96-97 who argues that the Athenian claim of conquering Melos due to fear is an example of the Athenians smuggling in "fair words" (despite their previous prohibition against it).

Such cities would place themselves in clear danger through attempts at escape or rebellion. The Athenians bring out their objection to cities seeking revenge against the Athenian empire – such revenge is not in the interests of those island or seafaring cities that Athens holds or is most likely to seek to hold. The Melians then have failed in their attempt to locate a common good between themselves and the Athenians. And they reject the common good that Athens did locate. The good of each city is at odds with one another and thus no arrangement between the two cities could serve the interests of each, since the Melians have also denied the possibility of being subjected at all to Athens. But their objection to that subjection is not merely based on the injustice of Athens – there is another facet to their claim of Athenian injustice.

5.100: The Melians, noting that the Athenians risk much to retain their empire, claim that they too must take great risk to defend themselves. Failing to mount such a defense would be base and cowardly on their part because the failure to do so would not allow them to live autonomously. The Melians, like Athens' subject cities, should be willing to venture risks for their freedom. It seems as though the Melians have given up any attempt to find a common good between the two cities. But even though they have abandoned finding such a basis, they have not given up moral considerations altogether. Their appeal here is not to their interest directly, since that interest, given the disparity in strength, would seem to be subjection to Athens. Only subjection guarantees that they will not be destroyed; but to repeat, this is not in Athens' interest nor was it their intention, as the Athenians had claimed. But the Melians appeal to their own interest as *they* understand it. To be subjected to Athens, however mild the terms, is to lose their autonomy.

5.101: Refusing to acquiesce to Athens would not be "moderate" (*sophron*) according to the Athenians. The Athenians imply that honor and shame do exist but only amongst equals. The

Melians, being weak, can only concern themselves with safety. No shame would fall on the Melians for agreeing to moderate terms of subjugation to Athens, terms that would of course include their preservation. And conversely, Athens will not gain any honor from bringing Melos into their empire.

5.102: While agreeing with the Athenians that the difference in strength between the two cities is great, the Melians rebut by mentioning "fortune" and "hope" for the first time in the discussion. Fortune and hope seem to belong together since the hope the Melians have must be great to overcome what they admit is a disproportion in the forces on each side.

5.103: While the Athenians (or anyone) cannot deny that fortune has some place in war, the Melians' view of hope is open to grave doubts; thus the Athenians do not mention fortune, but focus on hope. They implicitly recognize that the Melians' belief in fortune is tied to their hope. Only a great hope could expect that fortune could overcome the disparity the Melians themselves recognize. As the Athenians note, the material conditions of the Melians is vastly inferior. But the Athenians recognize that the "nature" (*phusis*) of hope is both a support for those in danger and also leads entirely to reliance on it. Thus they urge the Melians not to rely on hope and thereby abandon human means to preserve themselves. For those that rely on hope will turn away from such means altogether, blindly following prophecies and oracles, and leading to their destruction.

Again the Athenians urge the Melians to consider only their safety and what is manifestly visible to them. For since the Melians have recognized that the Athenians are superior they may be tempted to look to non-human means – the Athenians introduce the issue of the divine in

human life with their reference to prophecies and oracles.[150] These are not to be trusted, although we immediately note that both before the war and during the plague at Athens at least some, if not most, Athenians were themselves susceptible to such claims.[151] Hope and fortune belong together for the Melians because their hope rests on divine favor. And this divine favor is related to their view that they are just men, standing up against the unjust encroachment of the Athenians. The Melians sought to invoke justice to persuade the Athenians of their case and warned that should Athens act harshly they would be punished by those who follow them. The Melians cannot draw themselves away from the view that a concern with justice is a fundamental concern of all cities.

5.104: The Melians' reply to the Athenians' rejection of hope rests on their "trust" (*pistis*) in the divine. They will have at least as good of fortune as the Athenians because they are just men contending against unjust men – the Melians draw the conclusion only implicit in the previous concerns they revealed earlier in the discussion. The divine is concerned with justice and the Melians being just men can expect divine justice to accompany their human efforts. However the Melians also add that such efforts will be supported by the Spartans. The Spartans will be "compelled" (*ananke*) by "shame" to aid Melos as their own kind (*genus*); therefore their confidence is not "irrational" (*alogos*). The Melians seem hesitant to place their hopes entirely in the divine or perhaps believe that any such claim will be disputed by the Athenians.

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[150] Strauss (1983) p. 96 notes that the term "gods" is not used in the Melian dialogue, but only "divine." It seems that the issue under discussion, as Thucydides presents it, is the question of human beings' understanding of the relation between themselves and the cosmos. The use of the term "divine," in contrast to "the gods" raises the issue at the heart of the Melian-Athenian debate – whether human beings are compelled to rule or demanded to refrain from ruling, i.e. whether nature is directed by knowable necessity or whether "nature" is directed by something that we cannot know and thus itself is fundamentally unknowable. Related is the fact that the only mention of "divine law" by Thucydides is during the civil war at Corcyra and the term refers to the effects of its loss within a city (3.82.6). This could indicate that the relations governing citizens within a city are directed by the laws and that these laws receive divine sanction; Thucydides mentions the "established laws" of the city immediately before noting that divine law was transgressed. It appears that while the result of transgressions of divine law is civil war, the result of the Athenians' view of the divine is not always or necessarily war.

[151] However, it should be noted that the Athenians do not mention the divine or the gods but merely prophecies and oracles, i.e. human interpretations of possible signs or signals of the gods in human life.

The Melians, like the Spartans, do not view fortune as merely the chance occurrences that may befall participants in war. Fortune is directed by the divine in accordance with justice. And the Athenians it would seem cannot expect divine favor as the Melians can; the Athenians are unjust by their attack on a neutral city in the war. But then the Melians must also provide an account of precisely what constitutes Athenian injustice. From the discussion thus far, their view of this injustice includes the Athenians' unwillingness to negotiate without the presence of force; that the Athenians are refusing the Melians their autonomy; and that Melos has remained neutral in the larger war, despite belonging to the Spartan tribe. Yet on all points the Athenians have had a response: the situation cannot be considered apart from the Athenians' superior forces; all cities that rule look to their interests; and the common good of Melos and Athens can only be the terms set out by the Athenians. And these terms are in fact in the interest of both cities – Athens wants to preserve Melos as a city to become a tributary ally or subject and Melos wants to preserve Melos. But the Melians cannot free themselves from the view that to submit in any manner to the Athenians is unacceptable because shameful; therefore they should take any and all risks to preserve absolute independence from Athens. This view perhaps more than any other that the Melians state or imply raises doubts about the sobriety of their hopes for the outcome. Yet it is also a view we are most familiar with – defense of autonomy or freedom at any cost. But as the Athenians had argued, hope is by its nature at odds with viewing danger in this sober manner. And further, is not the hope for autonomy from empire that the Melians desire not the reverse side of hope for great glory from holding an empire, an empire that as Pericles described it could expand so to speak everywhere should the Athenians possess the requisite daring? The argument that the Athenians would use to counter our question can only be that the Melians lack the resources to engage entertaining such risks; but they cannot deny the appeal of such risks

themselves and the hoped-for outcome of these risks. For the Athenians seek glory for taking risks in acquiring and holding an empire, while the Melians do not want to bring shame on themselves by not defending their freedom and autonomy. And freedom and empire are the greatest things for which cities, and perhaps also individuals, are willing to fight to the death to obtain (3.45.1-7).

5.105: The Athenians' reply is striking for what it reveals of their understanding of the divine and the Spartans. The Athenians believe that they may also expect the goodwill of the divine, since they do not claim as their right nor act contrary to what human beings hold regarding the divine or want for themselves. The Athenians believe of the divine and know of human beings that according to natural necessity they rule whenever they can. This "law" (*nomos*) was not made by the Athenians nor are they the only ones to act upon it. All that have the power to use this law use it. Therefore they are reasonable not to fear the gods.

According to this new articulation of the Athenian thesis, both the divine and human beings rule when they possess the power to do so. To rule when one is able is to act according to nature and nature is governed by necessity; no one it seems, city or individual, can act contrary to this. And the Athenians go even further by implying that it is also believed that the divine themselves are subject to this necessity. If this is so, then both human beings and gods rule and considerations of justice do not hinder this rule. Ruling, including especially Athenian imperialism, is not unjust since to rule is simply to act on the compelling necessities of nature. Yet the Melians' claimed that they are in a favorable position since the divine reward justice and punish injustice. But the Athenians counter that their supposed "injustice" would be excused even by the gods. The Athenians thus present themselves as not impious while nevertheless

presenting a view of justice and injustice that is wholly foreign to the Melians; the Athenians do not view justice and piety as connected in the manner in which the Melians and Spartans do.

Now as the actions of Athens indicate and as the Athenians previously argued, their superior strength does not necessitate brutality or cruelty towards others – they have been urging the Melians to surrender on terms that will be in keeping with the Melians' concern for their safety. And recalling the arguments of Diodotus during the debate on the fate of Mytilene, the interests of Athens are at odds with this kind of brutality. It was Cleon who claimed that angry punishment was the proper (i.e. just) manner in dealing with subject cities that revolted from Athens' empire (3.38.1, 39.6, 40.7). And in keeping with this view, we have seen the brutality of the Spartan Alcidas who believed, at least implicitly, that he was justified in killing those belonging to cities "allied" with Athens. The Melian view leads more directly to punishment than if a city considers how its interests are best served. Thus the Athenians had also argued, in contrast to the Melians, that should the Athenian empire fall, those who ascended to hegemony and built their own empire would not seek revenge on Athens but would merely rule with a view to their own interests. But the Melians presume that the Athenians can refrain from ruling others altogether despite their superior strength – necessity does not lead to rule. All actions by human beings may be judged in terms of justice and injustice because to act virtuously requires that human actions are not governed by necessity but are freely chosen. Thus regarding the divine, the Athenians have "no reason to fear" a different treatment than the Melians.

Further, it is an error for the Melians to trust that "shame" (*aischros*) will lead the Spartans to aid them. While the Athenians argue that the Spartans are the most virtuous citizens regarding their laws (and hence towards their city), toward others they are most conspicuous for

holding what is pleasant as noble and what is advantageous as just. The safety that the Melians hope for in reliance on Sparta is therefore "unreasonable" (*alogos*).

The Athenians' account of the Spartans implicitly suggests that they do not make these same identifications. The noble would seem to require avoiding the pleasant; it requires that one engage in risks and the Athenians note their willingness precisely in this regard. And further, one's advantage is not necessarily just; the advantage or interest of a city is at odds with justice. The Athenians' argument to the Melians confirms this – the issue of justice only obtains among equals while the strong will pursue their interests at the expense of the good of other cities. There is no common good between the strong and the weak, or at least not in the perceived good of the subject city. Melos will not accept the terms of surrender set down by the Athenians since they place their freedom from any alliance or rule above Athens' interests.

An additional consideration here is the Athenians' contention that the Spartans place the interests of Sparta above a concern of justice. It is this argument that relates in particular to Melos, since the Melians (being a colony of Sparta) are hopeful for support from the Spartans. The Spartans are the most virtuous with regard to their laws and their regime and Thucydides' account, as we have seen, confirms the Athenians' view. But the Melians assume that the Spartans have an attachment to Melos as a colony that is noble; they will nobly defend the autonomy of their colony. But Sparta only defends noble or just causes when their interests also compel them to do so. The honor of Sparta is of consequence for the Spartans only when the city itself is at risk in the most obvious way (including attacks on their important allies, i.e. not on irrelevant colonies such as Melos). In this misunderstanding of the Spartans, which is based on the Melians' own misunderstanding of their motives, they erroneously place hope in the Spartans and thus in fortune or the future.

5.106-109: The Melians now refrain from discussion of the divine and only focus on the Spartans. As with Archidamus and Sthenelaidas before the outbreak of the war, they do not respond when the Athenians directly justify their imperialism due to its apparently compulsory character. Rather, the Melians turn to the issue of advantage – the Spartans will lose the trust of their allies if they fail to aid the Melians. But as the Athenians imply in their response, the Melians do not abandon a notion of justice since the Spartans will have to take risks in aiding Melos, while advantage belongs with security. Therefore the Spartans look to superior power for action more than others (supported by the claims of Archidamus that Sparta needs time to sufficiently prepare before declaring war) and only attack with numerous allies.

And that the Melians turn to offering some manifest reason for their view implies that the Athenians have compelled them, in the argument, to recognize (albeit only partially) that they must offer a defense of their position that does not rely simply on hopes in the divine. The contention that Sparta will come to their aid is an admission that they also rest their hopes on human beings, i.e. on something the Athenians claim to know, not merely believe.

5.110: The Melians reply to the Athenians' further elucidation of the Spartans' views by adding that their position will make the Athenians' defense of themselves difficult and the Spartans will come to their aid with others besides. Further, the Spartans are also able to attack Athens at home as well as the other subject cities of Athens that Brasidas did not live to incite into revolt from the Athenian empire; thus the Athenians will have to fight for both their own country as well as secure their empire. We notice that the Melians are aware of the exploits of Brasidas; however they are unaware that these exploits were not supported by the Spartans at home. Even the Athenians were stunned by the daring of Brasidas compared to the other

Spartans. Thus the irony of the Melians' mention of Brasidas is this aspect of his character at odds with the Spartans.

5.111: However even leaving aside the dubious claim that Sparta will derive some benefit by aiding Melos, the Athenians correctly note that the Melians' argument rests on hopes and the future rather than the present situation. The sheer number of contingencies that would have to occur even if the Spartans were willing to aid the Melians leads the Athenians to note how far the Melians have strayed from consulting for their safety. Therefore according to the Athenians, the Melians would show great "irrational thought" (*alogismos*) if they do not judge the present more "moderately" (*sophrosyne*) than they have done thus far.

Further, the Athenians exhort the Melians not to be overtaken by the notion that they will act "shamefully" (*aischros*) by only considering their safety. Rather, it is shameful to engage in risks that all must recognize. And while the Athenians note that this is a tendency of human beings, they continue to exhort the Melians to avoid it. Shame is so powerful a motive that one may act even more shamefully and in error rather than simply succumbing to misfortune; if the Melians engage in good counsel among themselves they will not view as shameful their submission to what the Athenians call "the greatest of cities" but will accept the "measured" (*metrios*) terms that Athens offers. While this is the first instance of these terms being made clear by the Athenians, the preservation or safety of Melos was the key term of debate from the beginning of the discussion; therefore the Melians cannot be said to have misunderstood the terms of alliance as destruction or enslavement.[152] Instead the Melians should bear themselves "nobly" (*kalos*) with their superiors and those who are "measured" with their inferiors act

[152] The Athenians use the term "tributary ally" (*hypoteleis summachos*) here, not the Melians. The term indicates that the Melians would be required to provide monetary support to Athens. This contrasts with the regime change required by Sparta's "allies" (1.19.1), a policy which would appear to be more akin to a loss of autonomy than tributary payment. It is also notable that the terms at Melos are those that Athens has always demanded, or at least accepted, from their "allies" (1.99.3).

correctly. According to the Athenians, there is still nobility in the Melians' submission to Athens. This is also in keeping with the interests of Melos and that interest in this case is their safety or preservation in particular.

5.112: After the Athenians withdraw and the Melians discuss the matter among themselves, they reiterate their view (despite the conditions stipulated by the Athenians) that to surrender without fighting is to relinquish their autonomy. For the Melians, it is the Athenians' encroachment on their autonomy that decides the matter. And this resistance is not cast in terms of mere safety or interest. The Melians consider the possibility of submission to be shameful.[153] But is it shameful to submit to Athens by becoming its tributary ally, as the Athenians mention in this context? For had the Athenians been intending to destroy Melos, then the preservation of the city, its safety, would require its defense regardless of the strength of the antagonist. But the Athenians are not threatening to destroy Melos; the island city is merely not being permitted to remain neutral; therefore the Melians casting the conditions of their decision in terms of freedom and slavery (86) is an inaccurate assessment. Their view places this dispute in moral terms that blinds them to what the Athenians are actually demanding. And this blindness is in keeping with their inability to understand and reply to the Athenian claims regarding the compulsions that a weak city is confronted with by a stronger one.

5.113: Therefore the Athenians claim that the Melians alone regard the future as more apparent than the present. Trusting in Sparta, fortune, and hope will lead to their ruin. The Athenians thus implicitly deny that they are moved by belief in good fortune or hopes.

[153] Consider Crane (1998) p. 249 on the comparison between Thucydides' Melians and Herodotus' Athenians (drawing on 8.143.2).

With the decision of the Melians announced, the Athenians commence hostilities against them but do not press forward vigorously since most of their force returns to Athens. Thucydides does not relate the conclusion of the affair at Melos immediately though. Instead he interrupts the narrative to indicate that the Athenians at Pylos were pressing the Spartans there, resulting in the Spartans proclaiming to their allies that any who wished could attack the Athenians; the Spartans themselves however would not openly attack, as they sought to avoid breaching the treaty that was still officially in place (115.1-2). The mention of Pylos reminds us of Thucydides noting during that incident that the Spartans had intimated that they were to blame for initiating the war and this belief was due to their defeat and loss of men (4.20.2). That Thucydides reminds us of Pylos in the context of Melos reinforces the similarity between the Melian view and the Spartan view. And in another interruption by Thucydides before relating the outcome of the Melian affair (a single sentence separating a Melian attack and their destruction), the pious Spartans intended but refrained from invading Argos because the sacrifices they carried out before crossing into enemy territory were again found to be unfavorable (5.116.1). As the Spartans believe that guilt for injustice will lead to suffering misfortunes as punishment, the Melians believe they will persevere against the Athenians because they are just men and the Athenians unjust. Reward and punishment in the form of victory and defeat is decided by the gods. The Spartan-Melian view is the one most at odds with the Athenian thesis stated at Melos. Contrary to this statement, claiming that human beings and the divine are subject to necessity and cannot help but rule, the Spartan-Melian view contends that human beings must refrain from acting unjustly. It is not clear whether the Spartan-Melian view holds that the gods are just among themselves; but the gods are at least *concerned* with justice among human beings (along with adherence to pious practices) and intervene in human affairs on this basis. And should it be the case (as the

Athenians argue) that gods rule where they can (and perhaps even unjustly), the Melians and Spartans never argue that human beings are compelled to imitate the gods. Compulsion would seem to have no place in their understanding. However when pressed by the Athenians, the Melians could not help but admit that their safety is in their interest (87); and when the Athenians state that the strong rule the weak and only under necessity among equals does justice come into consideration, the Melians attempt to locate a common good of the two cities. But by attempting this, the Melians implicitly admit that the good of each city *is* of the utmost concern (90) and further that it is not good for Melos to submit to Athens (92).

Despite this momentary recognition of the primacy of their own good, it must be noted that for the Melians an encroachment on their absolute autonomy must be defended because it would be shameful to fail to resist. The Melians implicitly believe that if they are worthy, their city can live free of Athens and therefore of any encroachment by more powerful cities; they fail to recognize precisely the necessity of the strong to rule the weak. But it is this failure to recognize necessity that is the cause of the Melians' stubborn resistance. To submit to Athens is shameful because the Athenians are unjust – they do not present any arguments that they are worthy to rule the Melians and thereby fail in any way to potentially dissuade the Melians from resisting. Therefore the Melians cannot possibly agree to any terms, no matter how mild or moderate, because they believe that to submit *at all* to a shameful aggressor would be a failure to stand up for the *cause* of justice itself. In defending themselves against the Athenians, they defend not merely themselves but the cause of justice and their belief in its power to affect human affairs. And as they argue, it is the divine that support the victory of justice against the hubris of injustice.

Scholarly debate still surrounds the question of whether the Athenians at Melos articulate a version of the Athenian thesis that differs from that of other Athenian speeches in Thucydides' account. Some scholars contend that the Athenians at Melos present a much harsher version of that thesis and thus that Athens has succumbed to a moral decline in their claim to rule. For example, while the Athenians at Sparta before the war had claimed that they rule with justice or a certain measure of restraint and are worthy of their rule, at Melos no such claims are advanced and are in fact criticized as merely "noble pretexts" not worth mentioning (5.89). Further, the result of the discussion at Melos is the slaughter and enslavement of its citizens, while at Mytilene the Athenians spare all but those who initiated the revolt from Athens.[154] Other scholars however argue that there is no fundamental change in the Athenian thesis; rather, the Athenians at Melos differ in tone and what they explicitly state, but this can be attributed to the specific empire before the Spartans and their allies, while Euphemus' appeal to Athens' fear is stated when the Athenians are in a less than favorable position.[155] Further, the salvation of the Mytilenians requires the speech of Diodotus, an individual in Thucydides who is noted by nearly all scholars as singularly rare. Besides, even Diodotus' amazing speech barely saves Mytilene. And lastly, the Athenians at Melos could not claim to rule justly or with measure or appeal to their worthiness to rule for precisely the reason that they had prohibited the Melians from invoking such claims.

Most notable for our interest in the Athenian thesis however is that its statement here did not anticipate the outcome – the Athenians are genuinely surprised at the Melians' decision (113) because they expected that only the many would be susceptible to deception (85). The Athenians' failure to understand the Melians, specifically their rulers, is of importance for our

[154] Romilly pp. 286-90; Pouncey (1980) p. 92; Cogan (1981) pp. 92-93. However, cf. Johnson Bagby (1995) p. 178.
[155] Bruell (1974) p. 13, (1981) p. 28; Bolotin (1987) p. 14; Forde (1989) p. 51 n46; Orwin (1994) pp. 111, 113-14; Ahrensdorf (1997) pp. 236-37.

consideration of Sparta because the Athenians thereby fail to understand the Spartans as well.[156] While the Athenians correctly predict that the Spartans will not intervene to aid Melos, they fail to notice the connection between the Spartans' genuine concern with justice and their virtues as citizens, virtues that the Athenians themselves praise. As for the Melians, they place their good, their interest as a city, in the hands of fortune which for them is determined by the justice and injustice of a city. The Athenians are the unjust party attacking a just and neutral city; Melos is a colony of Sparta but has not provided any material support or been involved in the war. The Spartans, as the Athenians claim and as we have observed, also unite the good of their city with justice. The growth of the Athenian empire is unjust since it encroaches on Sparta's interests. And while the Spartans claim that liberation of Greece from Athens is their purpose in the war, this proclaimed purpose is not followed through on and seems to be an extension of their own concerns with maintaining the autonomy of Sparta. In other words, they do not provide a clear account of how Athens is unjust besides claiming that Athens breached the treaty, a claim which Thucydides denies; Sparta broke the treaty by invading Attica (and at least breached one of the treaty's stipulations by not submitting to the Athenian offer of arbitration). What the Athenians fail to recognize in the Spartans is their blindness to this conflation of their good and justice; for while the Spartans do not distinguish justice from service to their city, the Athenians do make such a distinction. The Athenians fail to take seriously the necessity of confronting other cities that take the claims of justice and piety seriously. And by failing to recognize this, they fail to recognize the necessary fact that their view of the relation between justice and necessity will never be the predominant or only view – justice and its demands are at odds with the apparently exculpatory strictures of necessity because justice denies precisely that any human action is

[156] Cf. Machiavelli *Florentine Histories* I.10.

fundamentally necessary. The decisive consideration is whether the action to be taken is just or unjust, thus resulting in reward or punishment.

Yet since even the Athenians refrain from claiming that human beings can know the divine with certain knowledge, the Melians' decision is not entirely baseless. But this lack of knowledge means that to act as the Melians do is to base one's safety on hopes, hopes the Athenians believe they are immune to. Thus Thucydides allows us to hear the bewilderment in the voices of the obviously superior Athenians after the Melians abide by their original decision to resist. Yet the Athenians are too hasty in believing that others will share their view – as we have noticed throughout Thucydides' account, what appears to be the hypocrisy of the Spartans is in fact bound up with other concerns both the Spartans and Melians share. As a neutral city, the Melians believe they are free of injustice and thus will be saved from the imperial ambitions of the Athenians. But if we consider the beginning of the war, we note a difference in the Melian view and the Spartan view. While the Melians refuse to act outside of their belief in divine justice even in the face of Athenian compulsion, the Spartans did declare war against Athens. And as Thucydides states (as his own judgment), it was Spartan fear that was decisive in this declaration. The Melians assuage their fears where the Spartans do not; the Spartans seem less certain of the justice of going to war against Athens, and this doubt is revealed in Archidamus' hesitation on the legality of the war. Even though the Spartans hid this fear from themselves and proclaimed that the liberation of Greek cities from Athens was their aim, their departure from what justice demands in this case (i.e. arbitration as per their treaty with Athens) is in keeping with their interests, since Athens' continual growth would encroach on the Peloponnesus and eventually Sparta. Necessity, in this instance, led to departing from what justice would demand. And thus later in the war they are plagued with guilt for (in their view) declaring war unjustly.

The Melians however did not take this step; their view is entirely governed by their hopes, while the Spartans' is governed by fear. But in neither case do the Athenians recognize the deeply held convictions of these cities. The Athenians are daring not only at war, but also in their thought and frank statement of it. While they claimed to know human nature and its responses to the necessities of war (and human life), they fail to recognize that one's understanding is fundamentally guided not by a clear-sighted view of their interests or good, but by viewing their good as *inseparable from* justice and piety as they understand it. By understanding themselves as just men fighting against the unjust, the Melians view justice as good for themselves since the divine guarantee rewards for those who live in accordance with justice's demands. To depart from the dictates of justice as the Athenians have done is to deny divine justice. By contrast, the Spartans are cautious and fearful both in the war and in their thought.

Thucydides' presentation of the two cities thus leads the reader to consider his own view and the needs of a theoretical investigation of these competing claims. Perhaps such an investigation of morality requires the daring of the Athenians but also the caution of the Spartans.[157] The Athenians are too hasty in believing that others will share their view, while the Spartans reject Athenian arguments, educated in their laws and refusing to call their customary and traditional understanding into question. To lack daring in this manner means to fail to ask any questions. And this failure by the Spartans leads to an obedience (which they can only occasionally breach) blindly in tension with their own interests, despite their concern precisely with their interests.

The Athenians go too far, thereby neglecting to thoroughly consider their own claims. They doubt that their own empire is susceptible to decay and neglect that other cities may seek to punish them should the Athenians find themselves in a position of weakness. And the

[157] Strauss (1953) pp. 148-50 with n24.

Syracusans, as Thucydides argues, were motivated both by fear, but later by glory, once they believed that they could defeat the Athenians attempting to invade Sicily. Once they had defeated the Athenians, their treatment of them could perhaps be described as unduly harsh. The Athenian envoys at Sparta had themselves argued that their empire was more measured or just that it needed to be, implying comparison with an empire such as the one they had previously defeated – the Persian empire. But does their own contention of a harsh Persian empire not lend support to the Melians' view, i.e. that those who rule may not do so exclusively or even primarily with a view to their own interests? The Athenian daring in their thought and stated arguments is confused and this forcefulness disguises from themselves their confusion. The tensions in Athens and confusions in the Athenian thesis are revealed most clearly in the Sicilian expedition, for there Thucydides allows us to observe Athens at its most daring, yet alongside its most cautious and public-spirited commander, Nicias.

Nicias' Law-Bred Virtue

Thucydides' portrait of the Athenian commander and statesman Nicias requires consideration for investigating the Spartan view of the war, since Nicias appears as the Athenian that most shares this view. Thucydides' eulogy on Nicias' life notes that he least of all deserved his death (having been one of the generals of the failed Sicilian expedition and dying at the hands of his captors) since he lived his life in accordance with law-bred or customary virtue (*areten nenomismenen* – 7.86.5).[158] As some scholars have noted, Thucydides appears then to present Nicias' life as a tragedy – striving for virtue, Nicias suffers a fate that he does not deserve.[159] Thucydides' portrait of Nicias is striking for its relation to the Spartan view of the war, since

[158] I use the term "eulogy" with some hesitation. Thucydides' final remark on Nicias appears initially as praise; however the reader should be aware that this praise raises questions given Thucydides' presentation of the Athenian thesis and its doubts regarding divine justice.
[159] Most notably, Cornford (1907).

Thucydides seems to imply that a life of just and pious actions towards men will result in a favorable outcome, i.e. the Spartan view. Yet if Nicias did not deserve his eventual fate, then Thucydides casts doubt on the Spartan view of divine justice and his portrait of Nicias, including his eulogy, is a puzzle. The Spartans believed their losses in the first part of the war were due to their breach of the treaty with Athens that stipulated arbitration of disputes; thus in the second part of the war, they gained confidence that their injustice had been punished by the capture of their men on Sphacteria and expected to be successful (especially given the Athenians' subsequent breach of the Peace of Nicias – 7.18). However if Nicias' fate was not deserved, we must decipher the character of Nicias' virtue and the incidents that led to his death. Most scholars focus on Nicias' conduct in the expedition to Sicily, on strategic errors he makes during its prosecution, while also arguing that Nicias is a rare instance where Thucydides notes the "psychological" motives of one of his characters.[160] In addition we must add that Thucydides presents Nicias in an unparalleled manner, as there are numerous mentions of him *before* the Peace of Nicias and Books 6 and 7 (his most noticeable involvement in the war). These earlier mentions are notable features of Thucydides' presentation that receive little or no scholarly attention.[161] Further, Thucydides' eulogy on Nicias' life is unique; for in the case of Brasidas, Thucydides does not remark on whether his death was deserved or not (5.11.1). Only in the case of Nicias does Thucydides reveal an opinion on the justice or injustice of one of his character's

[160] Pouncey (1980) pp. 117-30 (1980) and Connor (1984) pp. 200-209 focus on Nicias' errors. Westlake (1941) p. 59 argues that it is unusual for Thucydides to focus on the "private virtues" of one of his characters. In his later work, Westlake (1968) p. 96 argues that Thucydides' reasons for this focus are obscure and "speculation on the problem would be unprofitable." But this is unsatisfactory given the importance of Nicias in Thucydides – the assessment of Nicias is among the most notable of any character and is especially relevant for Thucydides' view on divine justice, since Nicias least deserved his fate and this is due to his adherence to law-bred or customary virtue.

[161] For example, Westlake (1941) pp. 59-60 argues that before Nicias' appearance in the debate over Pylos, he is invoked in "operations producing no important result." The exceptions here are Pouncey (1980) and Strauss (1964). Pouncey (1980) pp. 118-19 notes that these actions of Nicias are generally overlooked, but he only provides a list of them without explanation. Strauss (1964) pp. 200-202 persuasively presents each of the seven actions of Nicias prior to Book 6 as significant for understanding Thucydides' complete portrait of his character.

deaths.[162] And as we have seen throughout, Thucydides' presentation is always purposive. If Nicias' life and the manner in which it ended was undeserved, then Thucydides presents Nicias as the culmination of the Spartans' view of the war – Nicias' last speech is the last speech quoted in Thucydides and it states most clearly the Spartan view of divine justice. Yet Thucydides allows us to notice the numerous errors of Nicias' prosecution of the war, raising doubts about how precisely Nicias' fate was undeserved. This is even more striking in light of the fact that Nicias' most infamous error is his failure to leave Sicily due to an eclipse and the subsequent interpretation of it by the soothsayers, when the Athenians still had an opportunity to escape successfully. These observations then raise doubts specifically about the relation between Nicias' piety and his prudence. We are reminded of the Melians and wonder whether Nicias shares their hopes; or perhaps Nicias himself was a victim of divine justice for being involved in the Sicilian expedition, following as it does on the Athenians' slaughter of the Melians and thus raising the question of whether the Athenian defeat at Sicily was not punishment for their continual expansion, a punishment that the Melians themselves had forecasted.[163] Therefore Nicias is connected by Thucydides both with the Spartan view of the war and with the actions of the

[162] Both Pouncey (1980) and Westlake (1968) argue for a diminishment of Thucydides' remark at 7.86.5. Pouncey pp. 129-30 claims that Thucydides' remark is an "irrelevant anachronism" and Nicias stands "out of pace with the war." Westlake p. 209 argues that Thucydides' focus is *only* on Nicias' "virtue" which is a "moral term" that indicates Nicias' "goodness." However, Westlake does not elaborate on what he understands by "goodness." Both appear to minimize Thucydides' remark because they focus, not incorrectly, on the strategic errors of Nicias. These errors, it is argued, form the basis for our judgment of Thucydides' view of him. Yet Thucydides could have refrained from this remark and despite their attempted diminishment of it, they confront it because it is so noticeable – this is one detail of Thucydides' account that he does not attempt to disguise. That Nicias' errors are also both apparent and significant draws our attention to the puzzle or problem of how these errors relate to Thucydides' noticeable remark.

[163] Many scholars view the Sicilian narrative as displaying Thucydides' tragic view of the war, e.g. Westlake (1941) p. 59, Lebow (2003) pp. 115-167, Rawlings (1981) pp. 136-39, and especially Cornford (1907). Cf. Connor (1984) pp. 207-208 with n57. In the context of discussing Thucydides' description of the suffering of the Athenians as they leave their camp in Syracuse to begin their final attempt at escape (7.75), Connor is cautious in his interpretation of the possibility of divine retribution arguing that "[t]he passage seems to me to raise the question of theodicy but to leave it quite open."

Athenian empire – Nicias appears to share characteristics of both cities and we are compelled to wonder if his view of the war sheds light on the shortcomings of the Spartan and Athenian views.

Thucydides' Introduction of Nicias

Although Nicias' initial appearances in Thucydides' account are brief, each is purposive and telling of his character when considered in light of his more noticeable involvements in the war. Thucydides' first mention of Nicias is at Minoa (3.51) when the Athenians are attempting to free up a passage between an island and the mainland. This incident is related by Thucydides in one paragraph that falls between the Athenians' decision on Mytilene (i.e. their salvation) and the surrender of Plataea to the Spartans (i.e. their destruction). Nicias' first appearance is between two of the most striking events in Thucydides, each depicting Athens and Sparta in dealings with cities now hostile towards them due to the war. Nicias' next appearance occurs in an Athenian attempt to subdue Melos (3.91). Nicias is unsuccessful in forcing Melos to submit, while Athenians without Nicias are later successful. It would not be remiss to note here that Nicias is never described by Thucydides as "daring," the characteristic most often noted of the Athenians. The third incident involves Nicias and Cleon debating a resolution to the problem of the Spartans trapped by the Athenians on the island of Sphacteria (4.27-28). The antagonism between the two leads to Nicias retiring his command once he notices that the Athenians are hostile to Cleon. Thucydides notes that the Athenians in question are the "moderate" men in Athens, who are more interested in ridding the city of Cleon than of capturing the Spartans. The moderate men are on the side of Nicias and not Cleon (who was most popular with the people but also most violent). The preference for moderate policy at home versus victory in the larger war, favored by the moderates in Athens, reminds us of Sparta's prosecution of the war.

Following on this preference, the next action of Nicias is at Corinth (4.42), when he hastily claims victory over the Corinthians and their allies after defeating a contingent but allowing others to escape. And when a reinforcement of Corinthians arrives, the Athenians are forced to flee leaving behind the bodies of two of their men. Nicias later ensures that these two bodies are retrieved after a truce is agreed to by the two sides – the retrieval of bodies was a pious duty of those in command, although during the Sicilian expedition, necessity will force the Athenians to leave their men behind as they attempt to escape Sicily, both the wounded and the dead (7.75). Further related to Sicily is the fact that here the Athenians prevailed over the Corinthians in the first part of the battle due to their cavalry. In preparation for the Sicilian expedition, Nicias will argue that the Syracusans' "chief superiority" over the Athenians rests with their cavalry (6.20.4), yet when he is consulted after being unable to deter the expedition, Nicias fails to mention the cavalry at all. Thucydides quietly suggests Nicias' error by noting immediately that the Athenians granted the commanders sent to Sicily complete autonomy (*autokrator* – "one's own master") to arrange matters as they believed best for Athens, but Nicias, in his obvious dismay at finding himself susceptible to fortune given such a dangerous expedition, fails to note in his advice on the preparations for Sicily that it must include a cavalry to match this notable Syracusan strength (25.2). And while Thucydides tempts his readers to overlook strategic and material elements of the war (particularly given his remark after the death of Pericles on the cause of the fall of Athens and its connection to Sicily) in this instance he offers a competing or perhaps complementary explanation.[164]

[164] Strauss (1964) p. 201 and Liebeschuetz (1968) pp. 296, 301 both notice the significance of cavalry. Instances of the cavalry abound once we are attentive to them: 6.70.3, 71.2, 98.4 (Athenian cavalry defeats Syracusan cavalry); 6.101.4-5, 7.4.6, .5.2-3 (cavalry of no use and thus close combat ensues with the Athenians winning the battle; Gylippus admits strategic mistake related to misuse of cavalry); 6.2-3 (Gylippus wins due to cavalry, routing the Athenians); 7.13 (Nicias notes problem of cavalry); 7.24 (defeat at Plemmyrium leads to problems for Athenian access to supplies. Cf. 7.4.6 and 7.13); 7.55.2 (horses are mentioned along with ships in enumerating similarities

The fifth action of Nicias is an attempt to subdue the island of Cythera, a colony of Sparta (4.53-54). The Athenians are prepared to expel the Cytherans from the island, located as it is near Laconia (notably, the inhabitants of the island are Spartans). Nicias becomes involved in negotiations with a faction within the city and offers an agreement with terms more advantageous (*epitedeios*) than the Athenian plan of expulsion. Thus in this case, Nicias and the Athenians find themselves at odds over foreign policy. Nicias offering terms more favorable than the Athenians, reminds us of both Archidamus and Brasidas (2.73.1, 4.114.2). And Nicias' negotiations with the Cytherans do in fact aid Athens in subduing the island. During the campaign in Sicily, Demosthenes and Eurymedon will agree to remain in Sicily because Nicias appears to have some information that they lack. As Thucydides relates, Nicias is in secret negotiations with a faction within Syracuse that seeks to end the war with Athens. This faction leads Nicias to hope for a resolution, despite the desperate situation of the Athenians as well as the other commanders pressing Nicias to agree to an Athenian evacuation from Sicily (7.49). Nicias' strategy of negotiation is successful at Cythera, but his hope for a successful negotiation leads directly to the Athenian failure to depart from Sicily, while Nicias himself will endorse this attempt shortly thereafter. Similar to his generous plan in dealing with Cythera, when the city of Mende revolts from Athens, Nicias aids in negotiating gentle terms (4.129). This is in contrast to the treatment of the city of Scione, where the citizens are slaughtered on the advice of Cleon after inciting a revolt from Athens.[165]

The seventh and final action in Thucydides' introduction of Nicias involves negotiations with Sparta for peace (resulting in the so-called Peace of Nicias – 5.18-19) and the enforcement of their subsequent alliance. Nicias acts as an envoy to Sparta, as he attempts to fulfill the terms

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between Athens and Syracuse); 7.78.6, 84.2, 85.1 (cavalry severely hinders the Athenians' attempted escape by land).

[165] Burns (2011) p. 222 n13.

of the existing treaty between Sparta and Athens. Here Nicias wants to maintain peace, while the many Athenians were angry with the Spartans, in particular for their refusal to relinquish their alliance with Boeotia. Nicias argues that peace is in the interests of Athens because the Spartans would seek war to restore their reputation. And while the Spartans sought a treaty with Athens after the death of Brasidas, the ascendancy of the war party in Sparta led by Xenares wants to dissolve the treaty (5.39). Therefore, while the Athenians agree to allow Nicias to negotiate with the Spartans, Xenares and the war party refuse Nicias' terms and he is compelled to return to Athens without having achieved his objective. Nicias is blamed by the Athenians for this failure and they immediately sign an alliance with Argos, creating decisive problems for Sparta and its allies, Argos being the third major city in Greece. The Athenians' tendency to blame their generals and statesman when their hopes are disappointed will also be a consideration for Nicias in his decision to remain in Sicily – part of his argument for staying in Sicily is to avoid charges of bribery and incompetence from the Athenian demos. Despite this blame for Nicias' failure to secure the treaty conditions sought by Athens, his demands and attempts do not seem unreasonable – Thucydides does not comment on the negotiations directly, but does note that the war party was decisive in Sparta's refusal of Nicias' proposals. Preceding these negotiations and the cause of them, Thucydides had also noted the change of key individuals in each city (5.16).[166] With the deaths of Brasidas and Cleon, Nicias becomes the leading man in Athens. However in contrast to the other men mentioned (motivated as Thucydides argues by private interests), Nicias was *both* motivated by private honor *and* by a concern with the other citizens (*kai tous politas* – 16.1). Nicias sought to maintain peace because his own reputation was already well-established and he had been the most fortunate Athenian general to date; he did not want to

[166] I do not number this mention of Nicias in the actions currently under consideration. However, Thucydides' comments on Nicias' motives at 5.16 belong together with his attempts at maintaining the treaty at 5.46.

risk his reputation or safety by continuing the war, nor did he want to place his city at war. It therefore appears that the private interest of Nicias and the public interest of Athens are in agreement.[167] Yet the Athenians do not share this view and the alliance between Argos and Athens will compel Sparta and their allies to march out against Athens' renewed hostilities. Thucydides leads us to wonder whether continued peace would not have been of interest to Athens as well. However that may be, it is also significant that Nicias here suffers bad fortune for the first time – Thucydides will later note that the Spartans were favorably disposed toward Nicias due to the peace he aided in establishing which included the return of the Spartans held on Sphacteria (7.86.3). But the war party in Sparta ruled when Nicias attempted to preserve the treaty and alliance between Sparta and Athens. Previously, Thucydides states that Nicias had been the "most fortunate commander of his time" (5.16.1).

Given the striking similarity between these actions and later events during the Sicilian expedition, perhaps the significance of Nicias is hinted at by the particularly artful manner in which Thucydides presents him. Taken with Thucydides' eulogy on Nicias' virtue, these initial actions present his character as at least sharing similarities with the Spartans. Nicias prefers peace to war, his concern with the city and resulting policies are in keeping with the moderation that Thucydides praises in Sparta, and even the seemingly passing mention of Nicias retrieving the bodies of Athenian soldiers displays his concern with piety through this customary practice.[168] But the mention of Nicias' private or psychological motives, specifically his admitted concern with private honor and preeminence within the city, is at odds with what we have seen in Sparta. We are reminded of Sparta's king Agis and the faction arising between himself and the

[167] Strauss (1964) p. 202.
[168] Strauss (1964) p. 202 n68 argues that Nicias "is the representative *par excellence* of moderation in the city of daring," while Connor (1984) p. 206 concurs arguing: "Nicias has, moreover, been a spokesman for and a representative of the cause of self-restraint and moderation so strongly, if tacitly, articulated in many of the earlier parts of the *Histories*."

Ephors, leading to the new law that the king must be accompanied by overseers on any foreign campaign. This is in contrast to the unfettered autonomy granted to Nicias and the other generals before departing for Sicily. And as we have seen of the Spartan regime, no one individual was able to gain preeminence, nor was Spartan moderation wholly separable from the Helot population. Thus Nicias comes to light as sharing the Spartan view of the war, while also in a qualified manner, replacing Pericles as the leading statesman in Athens.

Nicias may then offer a corrective to the problems of Sparta, particularly the lack of outstanding statesmen able to conduct the war. For Nicias' ascendancy in Athens is partially the result of the deaths of Cleon and Brasidas, and Brasidas was the only Spartan who (alone) furthered the possibility of either peace or victory for Sparta over Athens. But Brasidas' policies, though successful, were not supported by his city and incurred the envy of the leading men despite being the only statesman to further the Spartan war cause of liberating Athens' subject cities. In turning to the Sicilian expedition, Nicias will immediately depart from the view of the Spartans by openly stating his own private motives, while also defending his policies with a view to the interests of Athens and gaining the Athenians' trust as one of its commanders. Nicias reminds us of Pericles through his influence over the Athenians; yet Nicias' influence over the city is not clouded by the problem we have observed of Pericles' depreciation of law and tradition, of the old Athens (2.35.1, 36.2-4, 43.3, 45.1-2, 46.1). Nicias' piety, generosity, and dedication to his city strike the reader as novel at this point in the war – for neither city has been led by such a notable individual.[169] Thus Nicias may offer an instance of the public-spirited individual most able to benefit his city. But with Nicias' Spartan view of the war comes the question of how this view will be received among certain Athenians and in his prosecution of the

[169] This judgment presumes to some degree that the reader has begun to notice problems with Pericles' depiction of Athens. But even without this insight, Thucydides leads readers to notice Nicias' prominence as one approaches the Sicilian expedition more than Pericles, Demosthenes, and without the unattractive difficulties which Cleon presents.

war. From what we observed of the Athenian thesis at Melos and throughout Thucydides' account, Nicias' moderation, piety, and justice cannot but be at odds precisely with this thesis.

Nicias' View of the Sicilian Expedition

Nicias' advice to the Athenians regarding the Sicilian expedition is, as he admits, not advice related to the Athenians' preparations for Sicily, but urging them to refrain from the expedition (6.9.1). Nicias had been one of those chosen to command despite disagreeing with the aim of the expedition – for Nicias the expedition is based on "slight and fair-seeming pretexts" but actually being undertaken for the conquest of Sicily (8.4). Thus the intention of Nicias' speech is to dissuade the Athenians from Sicily or more generally, from the imperialism that has driven Thucydides' account of the war. But this attempt immediately encounters difficulties.

Nicias first must dispense with the possibility that some may accuse him of having private motives and thus that he advises Athens for his own private interests and not with a view to the good of the city (9.2. Cf. 3.42.3-6). Nicias acknowledges this objection by noting that he would gain in honor by leading Athens to Sicily, if indeed it succeeds. And he even contends that one may still be a good citizen while still concerned with one's own person and property; for Nicias these concerns appear to be united – he does not deny his motive of honor but this private concern will not dispense with his service to Athens. Nicias has been a successful (and fortunate) commander and therefore his honor seems to be derived from these successes. If Nicias is victorious in the Sicilian expedition, he will further gain honor for himself; if he fails, he will be blamed like he was blamed for not ensuring that the terms of the treaty with Sparta were enforced (5.46.4-5). And although Nicias may accrue honor, we will come to observe that he does not believe the expedition is best for the city. It appears that his advice is genuinely due to his concern with the common good of Athens and not with his own private good. But he now

admits the Athenians are unlikely to listen to him due to their "character" (*tropos*) – the Athenians refuse to keep what they have and willingly take risks for uncertain and future things (6.9.3). This reminds us of the Spartans, as the Corinthians note before the war – they are satisfied with what they possess and thus are slow to act and lack daring (1.70.2). Therefore Nicias advises the Athenians as if they were Spartans. Nicias and Athens are at odds in spite of Nicias' argument that his private interest, honor, is in service of the public interest of Athens, conquest of Sicily. But since Nicias is satisfied with what he possesses, his private interest is no longer in agreement with the daring of the Athenians. Indeed, it is not the public good or interest that, according to Nicias, drives the expedition – the Athenians are risking their present advantages for uncertain and future good things (6.9.3). Thus he argues that the Athenians should not place their current empire at risk for the sake of conquering Sicily – their characteristic daring is a danger to their empire (10.5). Therefore he can only, as he admits, show the Athenians their ill-timed haste and the difficulty of what they desire.

With a view to deterrence, Nicias first reminds the Athenians of the war at home which is still a danger since peace with Sparta is not secure. Nicias correctly notes that Sparta's allies have not accepted the terms of the treaty (10.2-3); thus Athens should not seek a new empire. And while this argument appears to echo Pericles (1.144.1), Nicias' policies are even more cautious. Pericles' concern with the glory of empire and the unlimited capabilities of the Athenians to conquer any land would have supported, in principle, the Sicilian expedition (even though practically he argued, in anticipation, against it). Nicias though continues to emphasize the dangers of Sparta throughout, particularly since the treaty has led to Spartan shame (6.10.2, 11.6); he expects Spartan honor to rouse them to reengaging in open hostilities. But Thucydides has continually portrayed Spartan caution and slowness – the very peace named after Nicias was

the result of the Spartan desire to end the larger war, despite the relatively small number of men they were concerned with.

In keeping with Nicias urging caution on the Athenians, along with preservation and maintenance of their empire, he criticizes the Athenians for grasping at another empire while some allies have openly revolted and others are only precariously obedient to Athens. Therefore, the Athenians are wrongly concerned with Sicily while allowing other injustices to go unpunished. Yet in this very statement, Nicias does not refrain from admitting that Egesta is an ally of Athens and has been treated unjustly (10.5) – this was the pretext that Athens had for going to Sicily, but the one that Thucydides reports as the basis for Nicias' objection to the expedition (8.2). At least part of Nicias' objection to the Sicilian expedition thus appears to be its injustice. The Athenians are not concerned with Egesta, but merely use the Egestaeans' appeals to achieve their *main* purpose – conquering Sicily for the expansion of their empire. Nicias will also refer to the Egestaeans as "barbaric" implying it seems they are not worthy of Athenian aid, and thus (perhaps unknown to himself) that the oath of the Athenians need not be kept (11.7). Striking is what Nicias reveals in these objections – while he explicitly argues that the expedition is not in Athens' interest since their continued expansion ignores other compelling interests closer to home, he also reveals objections because he believes that the expedition is unjust. Therefore quietly the charge of injustice becomes the theme of the remainder of Nicias' speech.[170]

Continuing Nicias' accusation is his thinly veiled criticism of Alcibiades. Nicias argues that Alcibiades only has his own ends in view, especially the desire for private profit to support his extravagant way of life. Further, Alcibiades is too young and would endanger the city –

[170] It is significant (at least rhetorically) that Nicias fails to address the issue of the oaths that the Athenians had made, presumably in their alliance with Egesta (6.6.2). Strauss (1983) p. 97 notes that both Alcibiades (18.1) and the Egestaeans (19.1) remind the Athenian assembly of these oaths.

Alcibiades lacks the wisdom bestowed by age (reminding us of Archidamus' appeal to his own age and experience – 1.83.1). Thus Nicias appeals to the older men (we presume some of whom are the moderate men – cf. 4.28.5) not to be cowardly or soft (*malakos*); they should speak up against the expedition as ill-advised. Is Nicias himself one of these men? Does he fear appearing cowardly and is this why he ultimately partakes in the expedition? Nicias does not attempt to retire his command, as he had previously (4.28). Instead Nicias now states that he disagrees with the expedition because the Athenians are affected by "sick *eros*"[171] and success does not proceed from this desire (6.13.1). Indeed, this desire has led to the greatest danger Athens has ever faced. Even Nicias, noted for his law-bred virtue, is willing to possibly breach the law against the assembly reversing previous decisions if the Athenians are willing to reconsider their decision (14.1). And if the expedition risks Athens itself, an Athens that Nicias is dedicated to and has displayed a genuine concern with, then the sick *eros* of the Athenians is counter to the public interest or common good of Athens – from the point of view of the city, as embodied in Nicias, this Athenian desire is a further injustice, i.e. it threatens the city, if that is, other cities or the gods will punish the Athenians for it. Certainly Nicias believes he himself is free of this sick *eros*.[172] This passion manifests itself, in Nicias' view, as the pursuit of private interests, particularly profit. Both his blame of Alcibiades and the demos reveal this. And Thucydides confirms that the desires of the demos were for private ends and not with a view to the good of Athens (24.3). Nicias is aware however that Athens risks extending its empire to a point that it can no longer hold onto what it has. Nicias believes the empire is unjust because it is driven by

[171] The term Thucydides uses is *dusepotas*. It is used only here and by Nicias in particular.
[172] Diodotus would simply call this *eros*, led on by accompanying hopes (3.45.5). Nicias' usage thus implies a problem with the Athenians' desire, i.e. that the Athenians need to purge this desire. We also note that Nicias further implies that being possessed by this desire will result in harm to Athens, i.e. that they will be punished for it. How this punishment is assured is only fully revealed by Nicias' later actions and speeches in the war.

desires that Nicias is not possessed by; rather, the "noble ruler" ought to benefit their fatherland as they are able (14).

This observation allows us to understand how Nicias can admit his own private benefit from the expedition, i.e. his honor, but then chastise the private motives of Alcibiades. While Nicias views his concern with honor as private, he also urges the city that he seeks its safety and thus advises caution. Therefore Nicias appears to forgo entirely his own desire for honor, while Alcibiades recommends the expedition only for profit and private glory. However if we consider Nicias' motive of honor, his urging of caution to the Athenians appears to be congruent with this interest – he was already an honored commander and thus for Nicias his argument for avoiding the expedition due to safety is also for his own private benefit; he seeks not to place himself at risk. Yet is Nicias aware of this? Does he seek to simply avoid command under the guise of impugning both Alcibiades and the Athenians? The expedition *is* a risk to the city, as he argues (6.8.4). And by arguing against the desire that is directing the Athenians toward Sicily, Nicias insinuates something with which he is genuinely concerned. Nicias refuses to accept their "sick *eros*" – Nicias expects or wishes that they were not possessed by this desire. His hesitation in openly claiming that the Athenians are thereby acting unjustly reminds us of Archidamus. However with Nicias, the problem of the injustice of the Athenians is more complex. Archidamus feared that Sparta could commit an injustice by not submitting to arbitration; but Nicias fears that he is implicated in this injustice along within the city – his first speech is indeed genuinely public-spirited.[173] And as we have observed with Sparta, the problem of the needs of the city domestically and the needs of the city at war differ yet intertwine in such a manner that the city cannot wholly abandon concerns with justice when at war.[174] We are reminded that

[173] Burns (2011) p. 221.
[174] See Chapter III note 36.

Thucydides does note the problem of Alcibiades' relation to the city and that Nicias' appraisal of his motives is correct, even before we are allowed to hear Alcibiades' response (15.1-4). Yet despite Nicias' objections (that the Athenians are proceeding with an expedition that neither is beneficial to the city nor proceeds from the public-spiritedness Nicias endorses), neither Alcibiades' character nor anything revealed about him in his speech would seem to have been able to deter the Athenians. Alcibiades' speech and the Athenians being reminded of their oaths by the Egestaeans made the city more "eager" for the expedition (19.1).[175]

Nicias introduces his response to the Athenian decision to proceed with the expedition by wishing it the success that "we" wish for. But Nicias will nevertheless offer his judgment on it and this speech abounds with references to himself ("I" – 20.1, 23.3). Nicias reveals more clearly in his response the tension between his view and the Athenians'. Yet Nicias does not refuse to command it, but will only resign his command if the Athenians fail to heed his advice. Nicias appears both to desire to lead the expedition and for it not to go forward. This confusion appears to animate his first two speeches – what he was supposed to offer in his first speech, an assessment of what is needed for success, he now offers in his second speech. But Thucydides notes in his introduction to this second speech that Nicias still believed he could sway the Athenians from the expedition if they were aware of its great scale and risks (arguments that he had attempted to use, without success, in his first speech – 9.3, 10.5, 11.1-3, 13.1). Yet despite these previous appeals and their failure, Nicias continues to argue in this manner: great cities such as Syracuse will not be ruled (20.1) and the expedition is not like any other (21.2); the Athenians will be wholly independent and have no reliance on others (22) since they are entering a "land of strangers" (21.2, 23.2); and therefore the Athenians will need "good counsel and even more good fortune" (23.3) to proceed along the "safest" course (*soteria*).

[175] See note 23 above. Cf. Bolotin (1987) p. 22.

Thucydides notes that Nicias believed that either the Athenians would be deterred from the expedition *or* they would equip it such that they would proceed safely, with the preparations that Nicias believed to be requisite for success (19.2). In attempting to appeal to the extravagance of the expedition, Nicias appeals to the great risks involved and argues that the cities Athens seeks to rule will not easily allow this. But this is little deterrence to the *eros* of the Athenians, that despite Nicias recognizing, he does not quell with his implicit appeal to the daring needed on the expedition. Rather, Nicias reinforces the extravagance of the expedition (and thus its attractiveness to the Athenians) by indicating that it will be an expedition like no other. Indeed, the Athenians will be wholly independent in carrying it out with no reliance on others and being "mere humans"[176] place themselves at the greatest risk (23.3). While Pericles had intentionally urged the Athenians to fall in love with their city, Nicias unintentionally leads the Athenians to falling in love with the Sicilian expedition (24.2-3).

Nicias' own motivations for his speech are therefore ambiguous or even confused – he seems uncertain whether he wants to truly avoid the expedition or not. Nicias perhaps still desires the honor of a successful expedition so long as it can be undertaken safely.[177] With these confused motives, Nicias come to light as between the Athenian and Spartan views. We also note that in his second speech Nicias only focuses on the material conditions he believes are necessary for success – nothing is said about the command of the expedition; specifically, he does not attempt to deter the Athenians from sending Alcibiades. Nevertheless the results of Nicias' speeches are problematic. His intention had been to frighten the Athenians by the scale of the expedition or to bring large preparations to ensure their safety. But the Athenians only

[176] See Chapter III note 33.
[177] Orwin (1994) pp. 119-120 suggests that Nicias may have been fearful of the political ascendency of Alcibiades. Alcibiades perhaps reminds Nicias of his past contest with Cleon, who was able to elevate himself with his capture of the Spartans at Pylos. If this interpretation is correct, it further reinforces the view that Nicias is concerned not merely with himself, but with the possible dangers of an Athens led by Alcibiades.

became more "eager" (*prothumos*) than before because they trust his advice – with the proper preparations, the danger of the expedition could be averted entirely. Thus, *eros* fell upon all for the expedition – even the older men viewed the expedition as possible and the younger men longed to see and consider "absent sights and spectacles" and had "good hope" that they would return from it "safely"; further, the demos and the military not only expected to earn their wages in the present, but also that the power gained from their conquest would allow their wages to continue *forever*;[178] and with this desire of the many[179] others remained quiet and would not speak up for fear that they would be seen as speaking against the city (24.1-4).[180]

Nicias' appeal to safety required that he emphasize the danger and risk of the expedition, but this appears to have contributed precisely to the Athenians' *eros* for the expedition. Yet we cannot neglect that it also appealed to their concern with these risks. The Athenians were not wholly unmoved by fear, and therefore the safety of Nicias' involvement, due especially to his good fortune (along with the good counsel of Alcibiades) was the strongest endorsement *for* the expedition. The Athenians are able to combine their hopes with their concerns for safety (while concerns with justice and piety were not absent). They were more hopeful for the expedition because it had the counsel and presence of Nicias, the lucky general who preached service to the city (24.3). Nicias' virtue, as he understands it, is also attractive to the demos. Nicias appears to

[178] This account of the Athenians' response to the speeches of Nicias and Alcibiades, stated by Thucydides in his own name, appears to confirm that the Athenians did not believe their empire to be susceptible to failure or "death." In the Athenian speech at Melos, the Athenians are only able to *conditionally* agree when the Melians argued for precisely this possibility (5.91).

[179] Connor (1984) p. 168 argues that *pleonon* could refer to the majority or to *pleonexia*. Hobbes (1989) translates this as "vehement desire" but Crawley (1996) renders the phrase as "enthusiasm of the majority" ("enthusiasm" translating *epithumia* perhaps distances the reader from Thucydides' use of "love" [*eros*] in describing the Athenians in the preceding sentence). Given the context, perhaps we could argue both that this desire applies to the majority, but also that this desire was vehement, resulting as it does from both hope and *eros*. Thus Woodruff's translation (1993) p. 122 "this vehement desire of the majority" renders both possible interpretations of the passage.

[180] On the motivations for the expedition, Thucydides comments on four parts of the city: the older men, the younger men, the demos and military, and those who feared to speak against it. This contrasts with 4.28.5 where he speaks of "the Athenians" and "the moderate [men]," the latter siding with Nicias against Cleon. Nicias' appeal to safety in preparing the Sicilian expedition perhaps reduced the number of moderates within Athens if we presume that the moderates mentioned at 4.28.5 included the older men in Athens who now favor the expedition. Cf. 1.83.1.

them to genuinely serve the city. And Thucydides does confirm some of Nicias' claims regarding the expedition. That Nicias is wrong about the Athenians raises problems for the attempt in his speeches. These speeches were part of an assembly considering the preparations for the expedition, yet it had already been decided upon; and it had already been decided that Alcibiades and Nicias would lead the expedition, with unlimited powers, together. Therefore when Nicias assaults Alcibiades' character and despite Thucydides' partial agreement with his assessment, Nicias assaults the commander he will be sharing command with, on an expedition of no small risk and danger.

Between the Athenians' decision to prepare for the expedition and its commencement, Thucydides relates the recall of Alcibiades from his position of command to face charges of impiety (27-29). An act of impiety occurring in Athens, Alcibiades is implicated due to his private way of life (61.1-4). Thucydides allows the reader to doubt the charges against Alcibiades but the relevance of the charges against him are significant – regardless of Alcibiades' guilt, the belief of the demos signals the problem of Alcibiades' private ambitions. The trust that the Athenians place in Nicias appears as due to his observable public-spiritedness. And since Thucydides argues that the recall of Alcibiades harmed the expedition, we are led to the view that Nicias is in part responsible for the recall of Alcibiades, even if only because he confirms the demos' fears of Alcibiades' private ambitions.[181] Yet Nicias is unable to refrain from blaming Alcibiades because of his private motives; for Nicias, Alcibiades lacks *his* virtue because he does not serve the city in any manner. Notably, Thucydides implies that the abilities of Alcibiades would have secured victory over Sicily and perhaps beyond (6.15.2; cf. 2.65.10-12). Whatever blame Nicias casts on Alcibiades, he possesses talents that Nicias lacks. But Alcibiades' virtues are both suspicious to the demos and harmful to the city domestically; thus

[181] Strauss (1964) pp. 203-204; Orwin (1994) p. 126.

the demos' recall of Alcibiades, along with trusting Nicias' counsel, confirms that the Athenians were affected by Nicias' speech. We are therefore reminded of Pericles. Pericles was also trusted by the demos and Pericles himself derived honor from the glory of Periclean Athens. Pericles gave himself to the city because his virtue depended on the city. Pericles sought honor as Nicias did. They appear then to share the same political stature within Athens. However by abandoning what Nicias believes to be the interests of Athens, the Athenians are abandoning the virtue on which Nicias prides himself. And therefore Nicias' blame of the Athenians begins to appear as the realization that in pursuing Sicily, they are acting shamefully – he urges those like himself, i.e. possessing law-bred virtue, not to be ashamed to speak against the expedition since it is only the Athenians' *eros* that leads them on. But the law-bred character of the Athenians had already begun to decay in Pericles' openly expressed doubt of established law (2.35.1). If the Athenians' desire for Sicily is thus in tension with Nicias' virtue and Nicias has come to see this, then the union of Nicias' private interest with the public interest or good of Athens begins to fall apart. And this is only the first instance in which Thucydides allows us to hear and see Nicias' concern with this divergence between his interests and those of Athens. That the expedition's preparations were beautiful and especially pious (6.32.1-2) reminds us of the latent Athenian piety that presents itself especially in times of danger (2.21.3, 54.1-5; cf. 2.16.1-2).[182] The safety that Nicias' speeches offered, as well as his pious and virtuous character, appear to belong together.

While we are aware of the great defeat that awaits Athens, we must not neglect Nicias' exhortations without consideration of their merits. Thucydides confirms the passionate character of the expedition in the preparations undertaken as it is set to depart. These preparations were both animated by hope and fear (6.30.2) as the risks became more apparent to the Athenians

[182] See Chapter III note 34 above.

(31.1). Thucydides' description particularly emphasizes the Athenians' concern with its appearance – it was the "fairest looking" (*euprepes* – 31.2-3), an attempt to display Athens' power, and accompanied by "daring" and a "great hope" (31.6). On the eve of the riskiest attempt to expand their empire, the Athenians are more affected by the nobility of the expeditions than by a sober calculation of their interests in the war at hand.

Nicias' Initial Errors at Sicily

After a digression on the Pisistratids' tyranny, presented by Thucydides in the context of the Athenian demos' fear of Alcibiades and his recall to Athens on charges of impiety, his account turns to the Athenians preparing to attack Syracuse. In the debate preceding Alcibiades' recall, Nicias argues for securing funds for their force and generally to settle affairs in Sicily without endangering the Athenians (47). Lamachus (the third commander of the expedition) argues that the Athenians ought to sail to Syracuse immediately before the Syracusans are able to fully prepare, with the purpose of creating panic among them. Lamachus' entire strategy rests on surprise (49.1-3). With the recall of Alcibiades, the Athenians are now divided into two forces (62.1). Nicias sails to Egesta and is able to receive the money he had gone there to secure, but then sails to the city of Hybla yet fails to take it (63.2). In the following winter, when the Athenians finally prepare to attack Syracuse itself, the Syracusans had regained courage from the failure of the Athenians to attack them immediately; the Syracusans had initially both feared and believed that the Athenians would do so. Thucydides intimates that this strategy was that of Nicias, for Lamachus had advised precisely the opposite. But we also note that Nicias himself had previously argued to the Athenians that they must attack Syracuse immediately if they hoped to overtake the country (23.2). And while the Athenians do gain a victory over the Syracusans, they do not continue an assault on the city due to the apparent difficulties of doing so during

winter (71.2). In this context, Hermocrates exhorts the Syracusans by noting that their defeat was due to strategic errors and not the result of cowardice or fear; thus it seems that had the Athenians done more to harm the Syracusans' resolve, they may have been less eager to receive Hermocrates' advice. And Hermocrates further urges the Syracusans to use the winter for additional preparations against the Athenians (72.4). Thus given the Athenians' failure to attack, the Syracusans are able to commence with these preparations including sending to Sparta for aid. Under the influence of Alcibiades, the Spartans agree to send forces to both Syracuse and Attica (93.2). We are meant to notice that Thucydides only states that it did not *seem* possible to fight against the Syracusans in winter. When Demosthenes later arrives in Sicily, he decides on his own strategy against the Syracusans in direct contrast to Nicias'. Indeed, Thucydides confirms here that it was Nicias who believed that Syracuse could not be attacked in the winter (7.42.3).

Nicias' decision to remain in Catana for the winter (instead of attacking immediately) was seemingly justified by the need for cavalry to match the Syracusans' and to secure other supplies for a future attack. After his defeat in the initial debates and with the expedition being prepared, Nicias' counsel was sought on the forces required (6.25.1-2). Yet despite Nicias' previous emphasis on the superiority of the Syracusan cavalry in his second speech (20.4), he only mentions triremes, hoplites, archers, and slingers, along with allies in the required forces (6.25.2). Nicias' oversight has now harmed the Athenians and seems to compel his delay at Catana. While Nicias was correct to note the disadvantage of Athens' cavalry, his delay to recompense for this disadvantage has only created further problems by strengthening Syracusan morale and also allowing them further time for preparations. Nicias allowed both the fear of the Syracusans to dissipate (since they expected the Athenians to attack immediately) and allowed them to send for Spartan aid (resulting in Gylippus' arrival), which they would not have done

otherwise. They initially believed, incorrectly as Thucydides presents it, that they could fend off the Athenians on their own (7.42.3). We cannot help but being reminded of Nicias' concern with the overall safety of the expedition as well as his continued strategy, which is noticeable for its lack of daring.[183]

Nicias' policy of safety continues to result in errors: he underestimates the reinforcements led by Gylippus and fails to attack the disorganized Syracusan army that Gylippus is attempting to order before engaging the Athenians (a notable problem for the Syracusans throughout Thucydides' narrative – 7.3.3-5). Moreover before Gylippus' arrival, the Athenians had been successful in building a siege wall to surround Syracuse and cut off their access to supplies, placing Syracuse in a desperate situation. However due to Gylippus' land forces and the building of a counter wall to block the Athenian wall, Nicias moves the Athenians' supplies to forts on Plemmyrium (across the harbor from the city of Syracuse – 4.4). Yet this strategy will later prove to be a failure – Gylippus attacks the forts while the Athenians are occupied fighting the Syracusans at sea, thus leaving the forts unguarded. Thucydides notes that this is an error of Nicias and a "major and principal" incident leading to the ruin of the Athenian army due to their loss of supplies (7.24.3). And Nicias' contempt for Gylippus' force, as well as his characteristic delay, was a contributing cause of Gylippus' success.

During the building of the counter wall, Gylippus also continued to attack the Athenians by land. He fails in his first battle as the result of a strategic error that hindered the Syracusan cavalry, thus rendering it useless. But Gylippus corrects his error and the Syracusans and their allies are successful in the next engagement (5-6.3). This subsequent victory of the eager Gylippus cuts the Athenians off from completing their siege walls and allows the Syracusans to complete their counter wall. And Gylippus is also successful in later raising more forces (again)

[183] Pouncey (1980) pp. 124-25; Westlake (1968) pp. 174, 192-94.

for strengthening their land and sea capabilities. Ironically, it is the Spartan Gylippus who learns from his mistakes and shows a certain vigor in conducting the war. Nicias is even more cautious and reserved than a Spartan. We also note that the cavalry that Nicias failed to recommend shifts the battle from a near defeat of the Syracusans to securing them a significant victory (7.7.1-4).

With this defeat and the resulting problems for the Athenians, Nicias sends a letter to Athens recommending either a recall of the expedition or to provide further reinforcements. But Nicias' purpose can no longer be the splendid victory that the Athenians had hoped for. Thucydides mentions twice in his introduction to the letter that Nicias was only concerned with safety (8.1) and avoiding danger (8.3). The daring expedition to Sicily which would require a daring commander now has at its helm Nicias, who seeks to avoid danger through a defensive military policy characterized by delay and safety. Nicias reminds us of Thucydides' Spartan narrative of the war: continued Spartan delays and incomplete measures in battles, securing supplies and allies, and most notably, any concern with a victory in the overall war.

Apart from the strategic issues that Nicias betrays in his letter to the Athenians, his concluding remarks are particularly striking. Nicias blames the Athenians themselves arguing that their "difficult natures are hard to rule" (14.2); the Athenians desire to hear the most pleasant things rather than the truth and blame (*aitia*) the bearer of the bad news for disappointing their expectations (14.4); therefore Nicias will tell the Athenians the truth as the safest course. Given the issues the expedition is facing (including the problem of supplies and cavalry, along with desertion by foreigners who came to Sicily for the promise of pay – cf. 6.24.3), Nicias argues that the Athenians need to allow for a retreat *or* send reinforcements and replace him as

commander (because of his illness). Nicias returning to Athens would occur given either Athenian decision, but the Athenians refuse Nicias' resignation and a return to Athens.[184]

Considered in light of his concern with safety, Nicias' proposed resignation seems to be concerned with his *own* safety. For if Nicias was also concerned with the safety of the Athenians and was convinced of the desperation of their situation, he would not have allowed those in Athens to decide the issue, potentially leaving his men in the circumstances they now find themselves. On Nicias' own assessment of the circumstances, both here and before the expedition, merely sending more ships would not suffice. Therefore Nicias appears to be duplicitous or "hypocritical" in calling for reinforcements from Athens as a tenable strategy, while proposing a return for himself. Fear resulting from the potential consequences of acting against the Athenian assembly at home is something that Nicias knows well (5.46.4-5; cf. 4.65.3). Nicias is fearful of being blamed for the failure of the expedition and thus refuses to *recommend* his recall to Athens. Bringing more men to Sicily would not seem to alleviate the current difficulties of the Athenians and therefore safety would only seem to reside in a return to Athens.[185] And in his failure to acknowledge his own errors leading to these difficulties, Nicias instead blames the natures of the Athenians. While this blame includes ruling over a mercenary forces, it is especially the problem of telling the Athenians the truth (14.4; cf. 3.42.1-6). Nicias' advice seems most motivated by the fear he has of being blamed for any decision; thus he offers *the Athenians* a choice rather than stating a decision himself. Nicias appears then as utterly

[184] Orwin (1994) p. 121 argues that "By now [Nicias] really ought to know which of these options [the Athenians] will adopt." While this interpretation of Nicias is certainly plausible, Orwin's "ought" raises a difficulty in his interpretation – he overestimates the fact that Nicias, in this very context, is not wholly able to *accept* the difficult natures of the Athenians. Nicias wants to be able to subdue the Athenians' stubbornness and therefore hopes that they will take his advice – writing a letter was to avoid misunderstanding and blame. For why would Nicias send the letter if he truly believed that it would not be convincing to the Athenians? To accept their difficult natures, rather than attempt to sway the Athenians to his view, would be to undermine Nicias' own belief in the possibility of virtue. But Nicias' hope means that he *wishes* the Athenians to act contrary to their natures, i.e. in service of the city, as Pericles had also admonished the Athenians to do.

[185] Strauss (1964) p. 205; Burns (2011) pp. 226-28.

concerned only with saving himself at the cost of failing to save the Athenian forces already beleaguered in Sicily. But in the context of blaming the Athenians, Nicias also offers a justification for his recall – he has proven dedication to Athens in the past with his good service. Therefore Nicias hopes the Athenians will allow for his recall now that he is ill and can no longer carry on his duty. Nicias' apparent hypocrisy in failing to recommend the best way to save his men (yet able to recommend the best way to save himself) is complicated by a belief that his virtue should be recognized and rewarded by the Athenians. Believing that he deserves recompense for his past service, Nicias' request for his return to Athens is not intended by him to hide his errors and subsequent blame, but indicates his own lack of awareness of these errors and of placing himself above his troops. His expectation that the city benefit him now contrasts with, but appears also to be informed by, his stated claim that he has benefited the city. Nicias' confusion stems from the tension we have noted between his private interests and the interests of Athens. Appearing to exhort the city to safety, Nicias is in fact exhorting Athens to act for *his* safety. That he is unaware of placing his private interest above his men is signaled by appeal to his public service. His concern with virtue and its reward disguises from himself his placing private safety above that of the city.[186]

We must also note a further complexity in Nicias' view. In Nicias' blame of the Athenians in his letter, we are reminded of his blame of the sick *eros* of the Athenians before the expedition. And if we are correct to understand the cause of that blame as owing to the injustice of the expedition, then Nicias' letter states his continued disagreement on this basis. Nicias may have wished that he could counsel the Athenians to return from Sicily, but he is unable to combat their difficult natures, which includes not only that their hopes not be disappointed (as Nicias fears doing to them here) but also their unjust desires. Indeed, while Nicias' errors in prosecuting

[186] Burns (2011) pp. 226-27 argues that Nicias hides the unpleasant truth of his own errors from himself.

the expedition have led to problems, these errors were due to his caution and lack of daring. The counsel of safety that led the Athenians to trust in Nicias (and thus not in Alcibiades) is therefore in part to blame for the failure of the expedition. And Thucydides reinforces Nicias' concern with the injustice of the expedition by following Nicias' letter with his statement relating the renewal of Sparta's prosecution of the war – the Spartans became encouraged due to the belief that the Athenians had acted unlawfully and thus breached the treaty (7.18.2-3). Previously, the Spartans became slower and more cautious in their prosecution of the war, most notably after they stated openly the possibility that they were to blame for originally breaching the treaty (4.20.2). That Nicias has also betrayed a concern with the injustice of the expedition appears to have affected both his initial lack of eagerness, as well as contributing to further decisions leading to its ruin.[187]

Nicias' Hopes and Athens' Defeat

In response to Nicias' letter, reinforcements arrive from Athens. Demosthenes as commander (along with Eurymedon) believes he has only one chance to shift the advantage in the war, but this opportunity fails (although through no fault of Demosthenes). After this serious defeat at Epipolae, with Gylippus and the Syracusans gaining a victory both through daring (43.6) and good fortune (46.1), the Athenian commanders consult on their defeat and also on the conditions of their men. While Demosthenes counsels for a return to Athens (including carrying on the war against the Spartans in Attica, one of Nicias' original objections to leaving Athens), Nicias votes against it. Despite the arguments of his letter, Nicias has hope both due to the arrival

[187] Thucydides does not initially state precisely why this delay (staying the winter in Catana) occurred – there is no mention of Nicias in particular (6.63.1-3); however, the mention of the cavalry and a concern with supplies and money echoes Nicias' speech before the expedition departed (6.71.2; cf. 6.22). And when Demosthenes arrives, Thucydides reveals that it was Nicias who caused the delay in Catana (7.42.3). Demosthenes seems to have little or no concern with supplies – he only wants to ensure that the Athenians strike fear in the Syracusans and their allies, something Nicias failed to do (6.63.2).

of Demosthenes and because he is in contact with a faction inside Syracuse that wanted Athens to take the city (42.3). This strategy had been successful for Nicias at Cythera. Nicias is also hopeful due to the large costs that the war is placing on Syracuse (48.5). These causes of hope are perhaps connected, if we assume that Nicias is in communication with those few within the city who are funding the war. However that may be, more striking is Nicias again stating a concern with the Athenians at home regarding how they will judge of his conduct should the commanders vote to return to Athens – Nicias fears that the soldiers would report to the Athenians that the commanders had been bribed; hence Nicias declares that he did not want to die by an unjust verdict but "privately" (48.4). Again the city of Athens is accused by Nicias of injustice – they blame commanders should they return without securing victory, just as they are suspicious of the private motives of those who seek to counsel the city. Whereas the Spartans could hardly believe or admit that private motives existed among their first men, the Athenians could hardly believe or admit that a commander acted with a view to the good of the city, possessing the quality all cities must inculcate – public-spiritedness. Yet Nicias' concern here indicates more than his objection to the Athenians' judgment on their commanders; it reveals Nicias' concern that his death may be an unjust one. For to die "privately" means to die in battle, courageously, fighting for one's city during war, and thus in an honorable manner. On the other hand, to be sentenced to death on bribery charges in Athens means to die shamefully. Therefore in his stated preference, Nicias reveals that he is concerned with himself, apparently above the possible safety of his troops. But Nicias is not malicious in this decision, for he also had hopes that the enemy was weakening and that his secret conferences with certain Syracusans would be successful in ending the war. For Nicias, these hopes further justify his decision to remain in Sicily despite the difficulties facing the Athenians. Strategically, Thucydides' own objection to

Nicias' decision is perhaps contained in Demosthenes' response to Nicias' hopes – Nicias, in contrast to Demosthenes, relies on others within the city and not on himself or what he can manifestly affect (49.1-3). But Thucydides is more intent on allowing us to notice that Nicias' policy is based on these particular hopes, yet these very hopes arise in response to his fear of dying unjustly by returning to Athens. These hopes cover over his fears and allow him to avoid confronting those fears. In other words, Nicias disguises the difficulty of his own views from himself – the doubtfulness of his hopes casts a shadow over the manner in which he places his concern with a just death over the strategic benefits to his men and thus to his city. Nicias' demand for a just death by not succumbing to the false judgment of his city is in keeping with the appeal to his public service in his letter to Athens. To retreat would be to risk appearing as weak or cowardly, something that Nicias had specifically exhorted the other elder Athenians not to do. Nicias fears then that he will appear vicious, to be lacking in civic virtue, by returning to Athens. Despite knowing that the "Athenians' nature" (48.4) is suspicious and that the soldiers are liable to protect themselves from the accusation of acting cowardly by accusing the commanders of bribery, Nicias is more disturbed by the thought of being judged unjustly by his city. It appears that despite his implication that the Athenians are unjust judges, Nicias still fears the shame of such a judgment.

Nicias has openly stated his objections to Athenian imperialism, as a policy issuing from Athenian *eros*. This desire being at odds with Nicias' own, he fears the blame of the city should he disappoint their hopes. This fear, together with his hopes, results in delay, notably his vacillation on which policy to pursue.[188] If the Athenians attempt escape, Nicias may be punished in Athens, particularly if we consider the Athenians' *eros* for the expedition which

[188] Pouncey (1980) p. 126 observes Thucydides' numerous mentions of "delay" in characterizing Nicias' actions during the debate regarding whether to remain in Sicily or attempt an escape (7.47-50).

continued despite Nicias' own report. And even Nicias glimpses the suffering of his men as well as that of his own. His fears of an unjust death in Athens conflict with his hopes not only for his own escape, but also for that of his men. But by failing to act decisively either way, Nicias' vacillation – from both fear and hope – results in failed policy. It allows for a delay in any possibility of the Athenians escaping Syracuse. When matters worsen and additional troops arrive to join the Syracusans, even Nicias cannot deny the dire circumstances. However most of the Athenians were impressed with the eclipse now occurring and Nicias refuses to consider the circumstances due to the interpretation of the soothsayers. Thucydides remarks here that Nicias was too addicted to divination and the like. The Syracusans, despite being pious, did not interpret the eclipse in the same manner as Nicias and the Athenians (51.1).[189] Reminding us of Sparta's sacrifices before leaving on foreign campaigns, the Athenians now interpret the eclipse as a cause for further delay, implying that any action would risk a vengeful response from the gods and in stark contrast to the Athenian thesis as stated at Melos. Thucydides thus signals the shared piety of Nicias and the Athenian demos, i.e. those who do not necessarily share the view expounded by the Athenian thesis (Cf. 5.105; 2.14, 16.2). Nicias is trusted by the demos as the result of his piety and public-spiritedness; but the demos is nevertheless distrustful of those who distinguish themselves from the city.

Due to the Athenian delay as the result of the eclipse, the Syracusans attempt to "compel" (*ananke*) the Athenians into a naval battle. And the Syracusans gain a decisive victory. The "great hopes" of the Athenians are now gone; they had lost their "vigor" (*athumos* – 55.1). Seeing this, Nicias delivers the last speech in Thucydides. He becomes eager and serious about reaching as many men as possible with his words, his intention being to benefit as many as possible. Nicias remains hopeful in face of the Athenians' "unworthy misery" (7.77.1). However

[189] Thucydides implies that Nicias could have interpreted the eclipse otherwise.

as Nicias must admit, despite his previous good fortune, his fate is now that of the other Athenians, including the "meanest" among them. While Nicias has lived his life with piety and justice toward gods and men, what the Athenians may suffer will fall on him as well. Fearing punishment for the injustice of the expedition, Nicias turns again to hope. If the Athenians offended the gods, they have already been sufficiently punished with their previous defeats. Implicitly, Nicias suggests that the gods recognize necessity since they would judge human beings based on what they reasonably deserve – an act of injustice followed by a punishment that human beings could understand as proportionate to the transgression. Thus while the expedition may have been unjust, punishment has been meted out by the gods. But Nicias seems reluctant to wholly exculpate himself or the Athenians from further punishment – while Nicias claims to have hope, he does not wholly deny that the Athenians (and himself) face potentially graver dangers in their attempts to escape. And most notable from these observations is that Nicias admits to fear, if only for a moment; he admits to fear because his hope rests on his own virtue – his life has been directed by piety and justice. But Nicias also has to note that his fate has been brought down to that of his men other men, those who desired the expedition for profit. In other words, Nicias has hope because he does not wholly accept, despite raising the possibility, that he has been unjust. [190]

Nicias' admission to his fears of further punishment from the gods is a particularly troubling claim. For if there is a correspondence between living a pious and just life and receiving favorable or just treatment from the gods, then Nicias should not be fearful. Only if he has been unjust should he fear punishment. Thus both his belief that the Athenians have been punished and his fear that they may be punished further implies that the injustice of Athens is also Nicias' injustice. Recalling the tension we have noted between Nicias and Athens, the

[190] Burns (2011) pp. 228-29.

virtuous life of the pious and just man who serves his city honorably finds himself at odds with an Athens that can only, at best, vacillate in its uneasy acceptance of a man such as Alcibiades. In conflict with the city he has dedicated his life to serving, Nicias is a more complete portrait of what remains only germane in Thucydides' Sparta – the tension between a virtuous citizen and the regime. But for Thucydides, Nicias lacked the virtues required to conduct the foreign policy of a daring city. Nicias' lack of daring harms Athens. We are left though with the difficulty that the Athenians could not trust a man like Alcibiades, one who does not attempt to disguise his private interests and ambitions and possesses none of the traditional virtues that a man such as Nicias displays. Alcibiades appears then as a manifestation of the Athenian thesis and this thesis creates grave problems within the city.[191]

Returning to Nicias: one cannot help but feel the nobility of Nicias in his surrender on the condition that his men are allowed to live (7.85.1). And despite the fact that his surrender to Gylippus in particular was a calculation based on his trust of that Spartan (and thus appears to be a decision with a view to his own safety) Nicias proceeds from the belief that Gylippus would judge him more justly. Indeed, the Spartans were friendly (*prosphileis*) to Nicias because he had "eagerly" worked to secure the peace treaty and the return of the Spartan men imprisoned on the island. Gylippus believed it would be a "noble deed" to return to Sparta with their greatest Athenian friend; but the Syracusans and Corinthians both feared Nicias and therefore he was put to death against the wishes of Gylippus. However we notice that Thucydides renders these specific reasons for Nicias' death of little significance – "it was said" that the Syracusans he was

[191] See Chapter III note 36. Bruell (1974) p. 15 argues that the praise of Nicias by Thucydides is related to his view of the civil war at Corcyra and corresponding praise of Sparta – this praise is from the point of view of the needs of the regime. The virtues of Nicias and the Spartans are both law-bred, whereas the Athenians of post-Periclean Athens seem to have no concern with law, e.g. the regime changes in Book 8 based on private interests. The piety of Nicias and the Spartans is connected to their obedience to laws, but the piety of the Athenians is not – one of Thucydides' most striking examples precedes their expedition to Sicily, an expedition that from the point of view of the Spartans and Nicias would be regarded as unjust. Justice and piety do not belong together for the Athenians as they do for Nicias and the Spartans.

conspiring with feared him revealing them; “these or the like” were the “causes” of Nicias’ death (86.4-5). Thucydides distances us from the causes of Nicias’ actual death because his eulogy of Nicias is intended to direct us to the manner in which Nicias lived his life and how precisely his fate was undeserved.

We return to Thucydides’ remark that Nicias “least of all deserved his death since he lived his life in accordance with law-bred or customary virtue” (7.86.5). Nicias possessed the virtues that the city endorses and educates its citizens to through its laws. Therefore Nicias is the Athenian that reminds us of Sparta because he is a representative of the old Athens, i.e. the Athens at odds with the openly stated Athenian thesis. Thus the people (the many in the city who cannot be said to adhere to the Athenian thesis or understand its full import) trusted Nicias because he was law-abiding and pious; he may pursue private honor but he also serves the city; he is not suspected of tyranny as Alcibiades is because his habits do not strike fear in the demos. And from the citizen’s point of view, adherence to virtues that benefit the city are not connected to a concern with one’s own private good. Thus when Nicias admits openly that his is not unconcerned with benefiting himself as a private individual, the benefits he receives are in union with his public service to Athens. Yet even Nicias’ virtue ultimately reveals a concern with his own good, since adherence to virtue requires a sacrifice of one’s private good. The Athenians who die in the trenches of Syracuse after their capture gave their own private lives in Athens for the imperial ambitions of their city. And along with this sacrifice and the demands and duties that it places on one’s life, are the rewards by gods and men, including the honors of the city and the just judgment of the gods. Nicias himself reveals this expectation when he solicits the Athenians to allow for his retirement from the Sicilian expedition; Thucydides therefore reveals this expectation in his eulogy of Nicias. But as commentators have noted, we cannot help but

draw the conclusion that Nicias' belief in virtue or his "theology is refuted by his fate."[192] What Nicias expected from being a pious and just man, a man who lived his life according to virtue, was not death in battle. And even in turning himself over to Gylippus, he hoped for a just judgment on his life, i.e. he expected that Gylippus, being a Spartan, would reward him for the manner in which Nicias had previously benefited Sparta. Therefore whereas the law-abiding Spartan did not seek to distinguish himself from the city (cf. 7.86.2), Nicias did, even while serving he city. Brasidas offers a striking contrast to Nicias and Thucydides intends the comparison – for while Brasidas also perishes in battle fighting for his city, Brasidas achieves honors that Nicias is unable to achieve. And Brasidas does not appear to suffer from the hopes that Thucydides allows us to notice as the basis of Nicias' strategic errors in battle. Yet the noted concern that Brasidas accords to honor (5.16.1) and therefore to the honorable actions that he undertakes (apparently on behalf of Sparta) raises the question of whether he perhaps too shares Nicias' view (and its basis) of human life that Thucydides presents as unsupported, thus revealing another facet of the Spartan view of the war though their most noteworthy commander.

[192] Strauss (1983) p. 101. Connor (1984) p.205 n53 concurs arguing that Thucydides is "emphasizing the failure of Nicias' own expectations" (see Connor's footnote for scholarly debate on the passage). Burns (2011) p. 230 uses the same phrase as Strauss.

Brasidas' Virtue

Despite the important role that Brasidas plays in Thucydides' presentation of the war, scholarly accounts are rare.[193] When Brasidas is mentioned, scholars often note the striking praise by Thucydides but ultimately conclude that Brasidas does not receive enough commentary to distinguish his importance, compared to Nicias, whom he appears to resemble in a certain manner.[194] We recall that Nicias' shortcomings cast a shadow on the coherence of conventional or law-bred virtue and thus on Thucydides' praise. Nicias' virtuous actions were governed by hopes and an attendant blindness both to the good of the city he purported to serve and also to his own continued success and honor. Since Thucydides' eulogy of Nicias appears to surpass his praise of Brasidas (as a judgment by Thucydides himself), the question raised for the reader is whether Brasidas' virtuous actions recommend him as a statesman able to overcome the shortcomings of the admirable, yet flawed, Nicias as well as the limitations on him that have

[193] Burns (2011) p. 508 n3 correctly notes the lack of scholarly attention to Brasidas and summarizes the most relevant treatments. Connor's (1984) pp. 127-140 narrative account offers many important observations on this period of the war. While Connor is correct to note the importance of understanding the issue of Spartan liberation and the reaction of the cities in the northern Greece region (p. 138), he hesitates to explicate Brasidas' motives and culpability for the revolts of Athens' subject cities. Heilke (2004) investigates Brasidas as an instance of Thucydides' narrative, educative as it is for potential statesmen. Burns (2011) is the most recent account and focuses on Brasidas' virtue, specifically how Thucydides' Brasidas contributes to an understanding of moral virtue and its potential limits. Burns pp. 509-510 contrasts his account with Heilke by arguing that Heilke begins from the realist assumption that one cannot refrain from pursuing their self-interest and that this assumption is unproblematic. By beginning at this point, Heilke arrives at the conclusion that Brasidas' virtues fell short of achieving the success he desired. But Burns correctly argues that Brasidas' concern with his own private interests is far from clear – Thucydides praises Brasidas especially for his measured or gentle conduct and his justice. And it is these virtues (as we have observed in the case of the Melians and Nicias) that demand precisely foregoing one's self-interest. The Melians' sense of injustice and Nicias' blame of the Athenians' *eros* are the moral reactions of those who expect others to pursue moral virtue as they themselves have, since moral virtue promises one the best way of life.

[194] Cartledge and Debnar (2006) p. 573 argue that Brasidas is one of the most enigmatic characters in Thucydides' account – they object that we do not know Brasidas' political goals, only his military actions. Further, they argue that Brasidas sought personal glory, but this "does not preclude more ambitious aims," although what these aims might be is unclear; thus they claim that Thucydides does not impute motives to Brasidas apparently because he lacked information. But Thucydides states directly that Brasidas desired success and honor (5.16) and these motives may not simply fall under Cartledge and Debnar's category of "political goals" especially if one considers the fact that the only individual in Thucydides to be honored by a city as a demi-god is Brasidas. As for Thucydides' sources of information, the authors rely on instances of Thucydides offering or refraining from making judgments to determine when he did or did not have the relevant "source information." Suffice it here to mention that Thucydides could have been forthcoming should he have wished to inform his readers that his portrait of Brasidas was incomplete. Cf. 5.68.1-2.

come to light in Thucydides' eulogy. For Brasidas' virtue is not qualified by Thucydides as "law-bred" (7.86.5. Cf. 4.81) nor is any other character in Thucydides accorded the honors of a god by another city for actions in the war. Brasidas thus recommends himself as Thucydides' portrait of Sparta's most admirable statesman and even of one of the most notable statesmen in Thucydides' account as a whole. Observing what we have of Sparta and the Spartans, the prominence of Brasidas is both promising and troubling. For Brasidas' qualities will quickly strike the reader as a departure from the problems of slowness and lack of daring that the Spartans habitually betray. And by comparing the attribution of virtue to Nicias and Brasidas, we wonder whether Brasidas' virtue, in lacking the qualification of "law-bred" (or "conventional") is the result of the laws of Sparta or if Thucydides' judgment on Brasidas must not be understood to distinguish him in some manner from Sparta. And if Brasidas proves to be as notable a statesman as Thucydides leads us to believe, his place within Sparta draws us back toward a deeper consideration of the Spartan individual and the aims of the city as a whole.

Thucydides' Introduction to Brasidas

Thucydides' initial mentions of Brasidas in his presentation remind us of the hints he presented when introducing the reader to Nicias. Thucydides' first mention of Brasidas is during an attack by the Athenians on the area of Laconia on the Peloponnesus. Attacking the Peloponnesus was part of Pericles' strategy to combat Spartan and its allies since he had argued against fighting on land to protect Attica. By chance, Brasidas is present when the Athenians land in Laconia and he quickly gathers some hoplites to defend the coastal city of Methone, repelling the Athenians' attack. This victory wins the praise of the Spartans – Brasidas was the first to receive such praise during the war (25.2). By contrast, the anger and blame against both Archidamus (for his hesitation in attacking Attica directly) and Pericles (for refusing a full

engagement with the Spartans outside of Athens' walls) is mentioned by Thucydides in this context (2.18.1-4, 21.2-3). Brasidas' quickness and initiative distinguish him from the Spartan king Archidamus' delay at Attica – the first instance of a difference between Brasidas and another Spartan is due precisely to his quickness or daring or vigor.[195] In addition to this distinction, Brasidas will also be characterized by both the praise and blame he receives from those in Sparta.

Thucydides next mentions Brasidas after the Spartan Cnemus is defeated by the Athenian commander Phormio in a naval battle at Naupactus. Brasidas is sent, along with two other commissioners, to aid Cnemus in further engagements. Sparta sends the commissioners, as Thucydides notes, out of "anger" (*orge*) toward Cnemus for the defeat, believing that some "misconduct" (*malakos* – literally "weakness" or "softness") on his part was responsible; Thucydides suggests rather that the inferiority of the Spartan navy and their lack of experience was the cause of the Spartans' defeat (85.2). We are reminded of the blame directed toward Agis after the near-battle with Argos, resulting in the Spartans creating a new law sending counselors with the king on campaigns. Here, perhaps due to his previous victory at Methone, Brasidas appears to have the trust of the Spartans on his side. Thucydides' own view of the cause of Cnemus' defeat though is a reminder of the Spartan tendency to blame their own men, fearing corruption in their intentions, rather than questioning whether they had done what was necessary to gain victory in battle. Sparta was known after all for its strength in fighting on land; the sea, as Pericles argued, was the domain of Athens, a shortcoming of Sparta Archidamus himself knew well (1.80.4).

[195] Connor (1984) p. 128 n45 notes a "surprising number of passages" where Thucydides uses forms of the verb "to run" (*trecho*) connected to actions of Brasidas, including the passage we have been discussing above (2.25.2. Cf. 2.94.3, 4.112.1, 5.9.6, 10.6).

With Brasidas and the commissioners arriving, the Spartans and their allies prepare for another battle. Thucydides now presents a speech preceding the battle, a speech delivered by one of the commanders of the Peloponnesians (4.86). The speech addresses their previous defeat while also preparing the men for the upcoming contest. In so doing, it offers us a rare account of Spartans speaking about themselves. The speech most noticeably appeals to the daring of the Spartans, a daring apparently superior to that of their Athenian opponents (87.4-5); it ends by arguing that any misconduct on the part of the men will be deservedly punished, while honor will be the reward for the man who conducts himself with virtue (87.9). While Thucydides notes that daring would have aided them most in possibly defeating the Athenians (8.96.3-5; 2.94.1, 3.29.1), the Spartans' lack of daring in the war is by now apparent. This speech then appears to endorse the Spartans' view of themselves and perhaps also endorses Brasidas' own view of what the Spartan virtues are and those which he himself strives to cultivate. The speech at least does not seem to distinguish Brasidas from the other commissioners.[196] However besides these remarks, the Spartans also partially admit that experience, i.e. Sparta's lack of naval experience, may have contributed to their loss in the previous naval battle. If this is the more decisive cause of their loss (rather than cowardice), then the Spartan view that their virtue should prove decisive in battle appears problematic. If Spartan virtue, which appears to be courage or daring in battle (considering their continual charge of "misconduct" against their own as well as invocation to daring), does not compensate for their lack of experience in certain types of warfare, then Sparta must innovate in their arts of war if they hope to achieve victory. But as the Corinthians argued, innovation in laws and arts seems to occur together – seeking improvements in the arts and finding that innovation does indeed produce superiority, human beings naturally begin to legislate with a view to what appears to be best (1.71.3). However Sparta's virtues were

[196] Burns (2011) p. 512 n21.

traditional and law-bred, i.e. unchanged over a great length of time and also had the approval of the god at Delphi, Apollo. If Sparta was to innovate in their arts of war to confront the contingencies of the Peloponnesian War, it appears that their regime could also be susceptible to innovation unless Sparta could improve its laws and still remain fundamentally "Spartan."

With this question as background, we note that it is in the context of Thucydides' presentation of Brasidas that we witness the Spartans speaking about their virtue, a rare occurrence (Cf. 1.84). The question of possible reform required by the Spartans for success at war is connected by Thucydides to Brasidas and the question of virtue, i.e. whether Sparta and Brasidas do indeed agree on how they understand virtue. Later Brasidas himself will employ "art" (5.9), in opposition to Spartan virtue and their strict battle order (5.68), once he realizes that the Spartan army is not equal in "worth" (*axioma*) to the Athenians.[197]

Brasidas' Ascent

Brasidas' initial appearances are a reminder of the problems facing Sparta even in the early stages of the war, i.e. problems of their prosecution of war generally. The Spartans act decisively only when they believe that no danger is present (3.15.2, 16). When Mytilene is set to revolt[198] from Athens with the support of Sparta, the Spartans again exhibit slowness (27), while Thucydides provides his own judgment that they should have made haste (29.1). Further, Alcidas' lack of willingness to proceed to Mytilene to challenge the Athenians' attack on the city (who the Mytilenians were eventually compelled to come to terms with – 27.1) and his rejection of a proposal by some of Sparta's allies to attempt to effect the revolt of Ionia (which Thucydides notes did in fact have hope for success) does nothing to aid Sparta's interests in the

[197] Wasserman (1966) p. 294 notices that Brasidas extols Sparta's virtues over Athens' experience (here and throughout his account), but does not consider the tension between the needs to innovate in war and the source of the Spartan virtues. Thus he argues that Brasidas is a "mean" between Archidamus and Gylippus (and Xenophon's Lysander) without wondering if this mean can be maintained. Cf. Proietti pp. 79, 111.
[198] See Chapter III note 43 above on *neoterizeiv*, to revolt.

war. And besides Ionia, the Spartans generally were in a position to be successful if they capitalized on those cities wanted to liberate themselves from Athens – this would allow Sparta to deprive Athens of its sources of revenue, a strategy successful later in the war that severely harmed the empire (6.91.6-7, 7.18.1, 27.3, 28.4). This denial of aid to Mytilene and further rejecting the proclaimed purpose of Spartans' declaration of war, Alcidas is immediately presented by Thucydides as affecting nothing through his slaughter of the prisoners of those Athenian allies that Sparta and its allies harass on their way back to the Peloponnesus (3.32).

After the Athenian debate on the fate of Mytilene and the Spartan debate on the fate of Plataea, Brasidas reappears as counselor to Alcidas sailing to Corcyra where the revolution there was now beginning (69). Brasidas' stature in Sparta has increased. Thucydides thus bids us both to consider the placement of this reappearance, following as it does on one of the most visible instances of Sparta's doubtful justice, and Brasidas as he relates to Alcidas, infamous in Thucydides for what we have seen previously – his thoughtless killing of subjects of Athens, the very cities that Sparta is presumably liberating.[199] When they arrive at Corcyra, the Spartans and their allies are able to push back the Athenians in a small sea battle. With Corcyra in disorder and expecting Sparta and its allies to attack, Brasidas urges an attack of the city but Alcidas again refrains. The Spartans, led by Alcidas, fail to support revolts from Athens, even when the city expected a Spartan assault. Instead, Corcyra falls into civil war and despite a faction of the few appealing to Sparta to aid their restoration within the city, Sparta fails to offer support (85.3). With the chance to liberate a subject city of Athens, a typical Spartan decides against an opportunity which offered to fulfill both the Spartans' pretext for waging the war and serve their strategic interests in gaining victory in the war. Instead, the Spartans (including the central Spartan Alcidas) establish a colony in Heraclea, Thucydides noting that they governed harshly

[199] See Chapter III "The Spartan Regime" above.

and eventually the colony revolted. Those who joined expected that it would prosper, since Sparta was a prosperous city (93.2). But Sparta's laws and customs were unlike those of any other city and failed among others.

It is in this context and with the Spartans now being attack by Demosthenes and the Athenians on Pylos that Brasidas reemerges. He is now a captain and "distinguishes" (*phaneros*) himself in this battle (4.11). Brasidas gives an exhortation to the men because he believes that they are not forcing their ships through the difficult position they find themselves in. To the "allies" in particular he urges them to sacrifice their ships because of the many "good deeds" (*euergesia*) Sparta has done for them (11.4); the allies must now be willing to do so to secure the fortification at Pylos. Brasidas follows his own exhortation in deed, proceeding forward himself by compelling the pilot of the ship to run it aground, but is wounded and faints. Thucydides seems to confirm that the landing was in fact difficult, but also reminds us again here (similar to his remarks regarding Cnemus versus Phormio) that the Spartans were not a naval people (12.2-3). But this remark appears starkly out of context, for he had already established each city's strengths in his Archaeology, in Pericles' speeches, and in the strategy of Archidamus. Yet Brasidas seems not to have considered this or is attempting to alter the Spartan manner by urging them to uncharacteristically daring (and naval) actions. Notably eager himself in all of his actions thus far, this error may have been caused precisely because he was too tenacious – Demosthenes knew where to expect the Spartans to attack and was correct, while Brasidas failed to account for the difficulty of the positions (which Thucydides notes – 12.2) and the inexperience of the Spartan navy (2.85.2). Yet Thucydides does not blame Brasidas for his un-Spartan daring.

Between Brasidas being wounded and his reappearance at Megara (4.70-73), the Spartans have been significantly harmed in the war. Even if they had had intentions to liberate Greek cities from Athens, that cause has been eclipsed by their desire to end the war and secure the return of their men. And when the Athenians also attack and hold Cythera, the Spartans are distraught and Thucydides offers a striking passage adumbrating the problems they now face (55. Cf. 41). Thus Brasidas' ascent occurs when Sparta is becoming increasingly disinterested in the overall war – he uses his place in Sparta to pursue the official, yet seemingly abandoned, Spartan war effort of liberating cities from Athens. Yet unlike Nicias, Brasidas does not openly claim that he seeks his own private honor or profit. At Megara, Brasidas arrives by "chance" (70.1) since his original purpose was to move with his army toward Thrace.[200] While the Megarians refuse him admittance to the city, he is able to gain their confidence by positioning his force before the Athenians, prepared to engage in battle; he is successful here merely by a show of force – the Athenians decide not to engage him and thus the Megarians consider the Athenians defeated by not fighting. Both factions within Megara await the outcome of the battle (71.2), but the pro-Athenian faction within the city can do nothing after this victory (73.4). Brasidas' willingness to place himself in battle rather than avoiding risk gains Megara over to Sparta and its allies. Brasidas believed that through his willingness to fight the Athenians, they would "justly" win the "honor" for the battle (73.2).

Continuing his expedition toward Thrace (due to Thracian cities now in revolt from Athens) Brasidas encounters a difficulty – the Thessalians refuse his army movement across their countryside since Thessaly was sympathetic to the Athenians. In response, Brasidas proclaims he is a "friend" (*philos*) of Thessaly, only at war with the Athenians (78.4). With this statement

[200] Connor (1984) p. 129 n48 points out Thucydides' repeated references to "chance" (*tyche*) throughout his account of Brasidas (4.70.1, 70.2, 73.3, 86.6, 104.5, 111.2, 112.2, 113.2).

Brasidas is allowed to move through Thracian territory. And while this statement also introduces Brasidas' view of the expedition's purpose, Thucydides notes that the support Brasidas received was due to the present difficulties of the Spartans. This led them to send out forces to harass the Athenians abroad with the hopes of drawing them away from their attacks on the Laconia region of the Peloponnesus. And it is immediately after noting this that Thucydides presents the revealing account of the Spartans' relation with the Helots, followed by Brasidas' continuation of his campaign to Thrace now with seven hundred Helots as a part of this overall force.

The Spartans agree to send an army with Brasidas since this "pretext" (*prophasis*) would allow Helots to be sent out of Sparta – the Spartans believed they were in significant danger after the capture of Pylos since the Helots may attempt a revolt (80.2). Fearing revolution, the Spartans punish a select number of Helots to maintain obedience over the whole population – they were selected according to those who distinguished themselves fighting for Sparta in its wars; in selecting themselves, Thucydides presents the Helots as believing themselves "most worthy" of distinction (80.3). And the Spartans kill them for precisely this reason, punishing them for *the* virtue demanded from full Spartan citizens. Indeed the killing of the Helots, who significantly aided Sparta, undermines the principle of justice that animates the entire regime – dedication of the individual to the city, to the common good of Sparta. Protecting the regime while sharing in none of its offices nor its honors, the Helots always present a faction within Sparta that an enemy can exploit. Nonetheless, the cause of the Spartans' execution of the Helots is also traceable to the distinction they made between those who were their kin and those who were not (3.92.1; cf. 92.4). That the Spartans required a pretext for sending out the Helots signals their inability to admit that the best of the Helots pose a threat to Sparta. Instead, the pretext allows both a defense against the threat, which they only partially admit to themselves, and

allows the Spartans to cover over that admission, an admission which would cause them shame (Cf. 1.84). But Brasidas does not hesitate to use the Helots as a portion of his force; he is eager to continue with Sparta's prosecution of the war. Able to use them as his army, the fear of a Helot revolt in Sparta appears to be alleviated more effectively by Brasidas allowing the Helots to serve the city than to suspect them of undermining it (even though Spartan fear is justified – 1.101.2-102.1). And after Brasidas' death and the continual service of the Helots in the war, the Spartans themselves recognize Brasidas' Helots' service to the city by granting them their liberty (5.34.1). Thucydides relates this in the context of the loss of liberty (albeit temporarily) of those who were captured at Pylos – the Spartans feared that the men who surrendered at Pylos would believe they had suffered a "dishonor" (*atimia*) and thus may attempt to instigate a revolution. The Spartans appear to have recognized, at least by this action, that only punishment of the Helots, without reward, was a policy fraught with risks. This liberation is at least more in keeping with their own principles than the policy of killing those who had nobly dedicated themselves to Sparta.

The problem of the Helots allows or compels Thucydides to contrast the necessity Sparta faces at home with the wishes of its commander most successful at combating the Athenians (4.81.1-3). Brasidas eagerly desires to go on campaigns and was successful at gaining allies from previously Athenian cities, while the Spartans stayed at home and trained for war. But as we have seen the war of most concern to the Spartans was suppressing the Helot population and this kept the regime attentive to domestic politics without almost any consideration of foreign wars and campaigns – it was only the undeniable inevitability of Athenian encroachment that stirred Sparta to engage in war. However the regime dedicated to training for war cannot suppress those who seek honors from war, as evinced by the Helots themselves. Brasidas' eagerness for war

thus appears to share the desire for private honor that Nicias admitted to. With Brasidas refraining from any such claim however, and campaigning vigorously in the attempt to instigate or promote revolts among Athens' subject cities, Brasidas acts on the official cause of Sparta's initiation of the war and presents himself as fighting for the good of the city and on its behalf.

Brasidas and the Problem of Spartan Virtue

In the foregoing we have noticed the focus of the Spartans on the city, as one of the causes of their hesitation to involve themselves in the larger war. Thucydides draws the most striking contrast when he offers one of his notable statements of praise for Brasidas. The Spartans "eagerly" (*prothumos*) sent the Helots out on campaign to aid in securing their safety at home. While the Spartans are aware that the Athenians would have to reestablish their colonies and influence abroad after cities began to revolt, they would therefore lack the ability to harass the Peloponnesus, as they did with the greatest effect at Pylos. Therefore it is clear that Brasidas is sent out by the Spartans for this purpose since they hoped to use those cities that Brasidas gained in later negotiations with the Athenians (81.2). While Sparta thus allowed his campaign to continue with the aim of ending the war, Brasidas was animated by his own desire and his dedication to Sparta's interests abroad encouraged others and was "of the greatest worth" to the Spartans (81.1). With this statement, Thucydides suggests that the proclaimed war cause of liberation did in fact benefit Sparta despite Sparta's failure to execute it. And the cause of this failure is placed in stark relief to the actions of Sparta against the Helots, since Thucydides now states that Brasidas proved himself to be "just and measured" (*dikaion kai metrion*) in his conduct and thereby successful in convincing Athens' subject cities to revolt. In proving himself such, those cities had a "secure hope" that the other Spartans were like Brasidas.[201] Indeed, "after

[201] As we have observed with Nicias, Thucydides would not characterize hopes as "secure." He thereby hints that the expectation of Sparta's new allies would be disappointed.

the Sicilian war" the "virtue and judgment" (*arete kai xynesis*) of Brasidas was known to those who witnessed it (while others heard of it) and was especially responsible for attracting the allies of Athens to the Spartans (82.2). Since "the Sicilian war" must refer to the Athenians' defeat in Sicily, and thus in Thucydides' view their loss in the overall war, the attraction to Sparta occurred both during Brasidas' campaign of liberation *and* after the death of Brasidas and the fall of Athens. That Thucydides was unable to complete his account or chose to end his account of the Peloponnesian War abruptly in Book 8 becomes less significant (despite continuing scholarly dispute) – Thucydides implies that other Spartans similar to Brasidas continued to bring over former allies of Athens. These others, especially Lysander (as presented by Xenophon), continued Brasidas' campaign and thus continued expanding Sparta's influence, or more clearly, Spartan imperialism.[202] It was only due to Spartans of this kind, those able to carry out campaigns that brought cities over to Sparta, which allowed Sparta to dismantle the Athenian empire and rise to their own dominance over Greece. Sparta itself could only win battles, not wars, because their own conduct proves at odds with a statesman such as Brasidas and required cultivating virtues not at home in Sparta. Imperialism could only arise with a fundamental change in the regime because it could only be carried out by fundamentally un-Spartan individuals.[203]

Yet it would be an error to overlook Brasidas' Spartan qualities or virtues – Brasidas will reveal his view of Spartan liberation in his speech at Acanthus. Arriving with Chalcidians who had a faction inside Acanthus ready to join Brasidas, he delivers his first quoted speech attempting to persuade those in the city who are hostile to him to hear his proposals.[204] The

[202] Consider Proietti (1987).
[203] *Ibid*. pp. 109-111.
[204] See 4.11 which may be counted as a reported speech of Brasidas. In any event, I view that exhortation of his men as significant to Thucydides' presentation of Brasidas' character.

"cause" of Sparta is liberating Greece from the Athenians. He argues that the Acanthians may harm Sparta's campaign of liberation if they refuse to admit him. Indeed, the only arguments against liberation are that the proposals are unjust or that Brasidas lacks the power necessary to protect those cities that revolt from Athens (85.6). Brasidas further argues both that the Athenians failed to engage him at Nisaea and that he is bound by oaths to liberate cities such as Acanthus, not to enslave them to Sparta (86.1-2). Sparta will only gain in honor and reputation if they act in a manner that will ensure them gratitude rather than blame. However, if the Acanthians refuse Brasidas' offer, he will be "compelled" (*ananke*) to force their liberation. Such liberation, Brasidas argues, is to the benefit of Sparta since allowing the Acanthians to remain subjugated means revenue to Athens that will harm Sparta in the war *and* set a precedent that will lead other cities also to refuse Brasidas' offer of liberation (87.3). With these remarks, we are reminded of the Spartan practice of uniting justice with the good of Sparta. In this instance, Brasidas further justifies compelling Acanthus to revolt from Athens because it serves the "common good" of Greece – as he admits, without this common good, he would not be justified in compelling the Acanthians (87.4).

Viewing Thucydides' comments introducing and concluding this speech we note that he mentions the Acanthians' fear for their harvest of grapes. Brasidas' appeals both to oaths and to the justice of Spartan liberation are not as compelling to the Acanthians as the fear of acting against Brasidas' wishes. But for Brasidas, his willingness to compel the autonomy of Acanthus appears to reveal the seriousness with which he views Sparta's professed cause; however, the seductive arguments of Brasidas (promising autonomy, support, and continuing to live as they have – 86.4-6) are troubling. We are now aware that the Spartans do not support the cause of liberation that Brasidas is undertaking and had only sent him out with the Helots to harass the

Athenians and stabilize a potentially volatile domestic situation, in contrast to his opening claim to the Acanthians (85.1). Further, Brasidas' appeal to the Acanthians includes his claim that he was victorious at Nisaea despite fighting against a numerically superior Athenian force. But this claim is false (85.7. Cf. 73.3). These lies are surely intended to gain the confidence of the Acanthians that their revolt would be protected by the Spartans. Therefore it is all the more striking that Brasidas vacillates between repeated uses of the first person throughout this speech (85.3, 6-7, 86.1-3) as well as appeals to "we Spartans" (85.4, 86.5, 87.4).

Thucydides' presentation continues to distinguish the city and the man by hinting at the tension between the two. After Brasidas is able to convince Amphipolis to leave their alliance with Athens, Thucydides echoes in another passage qualities of Brasidas he mentioned previously. Brasidas acted with "measure" (*metrios*) in his actions and repeatedly declared that his aim was the liberation of Greece (108.2); further, both the terms granted to Amphipolis and the "gentleness" (*praotes*) of Brasidas encouraged other cities to revolt. But Thucydides notes a problem: Athens' power was indeed greater than those cities wishing to revolt were willing to believe. Trusting in hope to fulfill their desires, human beings ignore "sovereign reason" (*autokratia logismos*).[205] Is Brasidas himself flawed in this manner? Did he hope that somehow the Spartans would aid him in the war and thus that his promise of liberation would be fulfilled? While Brasidas is in part responsible for their revolt, the question arises as to whether he could ultimately protect them. Those cities would require the protection of Sparta. Thucydides reminds us here that Brasidas' previous promises were "seductive, though untrue" (108.5) confirming that Brasidas had lied about his forces at Nisaea. And as with his threats to destroy the Acanthians'

[205] The term *autokratia* means "ruling for oneself, absolute, autocratic." The Crawley translation is the one quoted here. Thucydides' use of this adjective to modify *logismos* seems to imply that since desires are strongest in us, hope guides our desires but only reason may determine what is in fact possible and therefore the most prudent course of action.

crops, Brasidas appears to have at least partially compelled some of the Amphipolitans to revolt by keeping some citizens' relatives as prisoners (106.1).

Thucydides leads us to wonder what dangers Brasidas has drawn Athens' subject cities into, while also allowing us to notice the attractiveness that his policies had for those he sought to liberate. For Brasidas appears to believe in Sparta's professed war cause of liberating Greece from Athens, appealing to the worthiness of Sparta at Acanthus and to friendship at Thessaly. Immediately after Amphipolis, Brasidas arrives in Torone with an offer of similar terms (114.1-2.). Proclaiming that he does not blame those cities for their friendship with Athens, he nevertheless expects them to join Sparta. Brasidas expects that by acting justly towards the Toronaeans he would prove Sparta to be a better ally than Athens; for Brasidas was acting, as he believed, for the "good and liberty" of Torone (114.3).

But Brasidas is unable to wholly accept the view he has stated. He expects the Toronaeans no longer to ally or submit to Athens after their revolt, and will hold them "responsible" (*aitia*), threatening punishment should they "wrong" the Spartans. While Diodotus and Hermocrates do not blame the Mytilenians and Athenians, respectively, Brasidas does not accept the necessity for Torone to pursue its interests, including its own safety or preservation, should they find themselves unprotected by Sparta (3.42.1, 4.61.5. Cf. 4.114.5). To expect compliance with Sparta going forward, Brasidas implies that Torone live as an autonomous city apart from the Athenian empire – Brasidas implies that such autonomy (which is nonetheless alliance with Sparta) is better for the Toronaeans. However Brasidas does not act merely because autonomy furthers Torone's interests; rather, Brasidas reveals what we previously suspected. As he now adds, Sparta acts more "justly" than Athens and therefore the Toronaeans will prefer Sparta to Athens (114.4). Sparta is a just city while the Athens by implication is unjust. This is

the reason Brasidas believes in the Sparta war cause of liberation of Greek cities from Athens. Yet only Brasidas is able to forward this cause – Brasidas' actions do not reveal the tension that the Spartans reveal in failing to support those cities attempting to revolt. The Spartans reveal what the Athenian thesis openly argues – all cities are compelled to act in accord with their interests, as they understand those interests. This does not negate the fact that the Spartans believe they are justified when punishing the Plataeans or withdrawing from the larger war; they are not hypocritical precisely because they are able to justify their foreign policy *to themselves*. But Brasidas is a more difficult case. Brasidas does attempt (and succeed) in aiding those cities that revolt, under the banner of liberation and without any clearly calculated benefit to himself or to Sparta. This cause does win honor for Brasidas and reminds us of the support for Sparta at their declaration of the war – most cities inclined to their professed cause for this reason (2.8.4). Yet only Brasidas pursues this objective, taking the Spartan war cause more seriously than the Spartans themselves. Only Brasidas fulfills the promise of what other cities viewed as Spartan justice in the face of Athenian injustice. And that the Spartans were unaware of their broader interests (and thus the policy decisions necessary to secure those interests) is indicated in the manner in which Thucydides further reveals the tension between Brasidas and the authorities at home.

Brasidas' gentleness thus finds its source in his genuine belief in the aim of liberation. Brasidas' gentleness is due to his initial lack of blame for those compelled to join the Athenian empire. Yet Brasidas does not follow the full implications of his stated claim; he cannot *wholly* exculpate those that do not sacrifice anything for the sake of justice – he still believes that sacrificing one's own good is required for deserving the rewards and honors of living justly or

virtuously, i.e. living a Spartan way of life.[206] That this gentleness is noted in the context of Sparta's lack of concern with those Brasidas is inciting to revolt is telling. Sparta distinguishes between Spartan and foreigner, as Thucydides' presentation of Brasidas and Alcidas together makes clear. This interpretation is further strengthened by Thucydides stating that, despite the zeal for revolution that Brasidas initiates, the Spartans themselves were unwilling to comply with Brasidas' request for further forces to support these revolutions. The Spartans did not support Brasidas' actions partially due to "envy" (*phthonos*) of their first men, and also because they wished to recover their men from Pylos and end the war (4.108.7). The envy is based on noble and shameful actions on behalf of the city; Brasidas is obtaining honor for himself, including the fear he causes Athens. The Spartans at home are unable to distinguish themselves apart from the honors obtainable within the regime. This envy is therefore an implicit admission by the first men in Sparta that honor resulting from their offices in Sparta is not enough. The praise and blame which inculcates obedience to the city leads naturally to the desire for honor on a grander scale by those who lead Sparta to victory in war. Most Spartans could never distinguish themselves since the kingship is a hereditary office and even this office finds itself divided and under the control of other Spartan authority at home, the Ephors.[207] Brasidas' own actions therefore appear as a striving to nobly serve his city, while also indicating the limitations to which such service was restricted by Sparta itself.[208]

Despite the tension between Brasidas and Sparta, he does not refrain from what has now become clearly *his* campaign. Startling is the fact that not only did the Athenians desire a truce to

[206] Burns (2011) p. 520.
[207] 1.86-87 (Archidamus versus Sthenelaidas), 1.131-134 (Pausanias versus Ephors), 4.132 (Spartans send young men to rule the cities Brasidas had liberated), 5.63 (counselors sent by the Ephors to oversee Agis).
[208] Brasidas' story thus sheds light on the problems raised in Book 5. Once the war party in Sparta takes control, they lack a Brasidas to prosecute the war; they return to relying on their king Agis and his ability to command, which we have seen as deficient. And this reliance on their king is a reliance on their laws governing battles; it is connected to their education and training and the terms used by Thucydides remind us of the portrait of Sparta delivered by Archidamus (5.69.2. Cf. 1.84.2.4).

stop Brasidas' successful advances against their cities and end the revolts, but also a general peace (117). Thus the relation of Brasidas to Sparta becomes more clear – it was due to Brasidas' "good fortune" that the Spartans are now able to make peace with the Athenians for the sake of retrieving their men. Moreover, this Spartan decision results from their belief either that Chalcidice (Brasidas' current target) could not be taken or that further victories would do nothing to return their men. Believing their entire city is at risk after the Athenians capture their men at Pylos and hold Cythera, the Spartans seek to end hostilities. Brasidas is allowed to continue his campaigns in the north because he is able to initiate revolts and gain cities over to Sparta. But these cities are not liberated (as Brasidas believes) for the sake of autonomy; the Spartans at home were only concerned with gaining the cities for later negotiations when attempting to end the war (117.2). The entire period of Brasidas' ascendancy and success cannot be understood apart from Sparta's decline and weakness. The most successful Spartan in Thucydides' account is only able to serve his city in the war when his service could result in the peace treaty that Sparta sought, or even an end to the Peloponnesian War.[209]

This good fortune for Sparta is entirely due to the victories of Brasidas. And these events are indeed due to chance – Brasidas possesses virtues that, while perhaps what a Spartan seeks to be, are not inculcated at Sparta.[210] It is these virtues that produce greater success for the city than those of Spartans such as Alcidas or Agis. Brasidas' daring and vigor in the war are at odds with the rest of the city. While Brasidas' concern with virtue began with his Spartan education, Brasidas has considered the question of virtue in a manner that even the best Spartan has not.[211]

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[209] Strauss (1964) p. 222.
[210] See note 6 above.
[211] Archidamus argued that it might be unlawful for Sparta to declare war when Athens was offering arbitration of their dispute, thereby implying that the cause of Sparta is not identical with the demands of justice. But Archidamus is still unwilling to doubt that Spartan virtue, the result of shame-induced obedience to the laws of the city, is best and thus that the Spartan educated in these laws is the best citizen and man.

Alcidas merely adheres to Sparta's habitual hostility to enemies and goodwill to friends and Thucydides' presentation of Brasidas' early career alongside the harshness and violence of Alcidas only casts his gentleness and measured conduct in stark relief.

Most revealing of Brasidas' awareness is his refusal to blame those compelled to join Athens. Perhaps having reflected on his own virtue, he exculpates those compelled to ally with Athens, but demands virtue of those cities now revolting to whom he offers assistance. Indeed, Brasidas himself seeks autonomy from his city, perhaps coming to notice the shortcomings of Spartan virtue. Blinded to any view of virtue or justice apart from dedication to Sparta, the city cultivated blind obedience to the common good. But obedience to the common good can only be good for the individual if the city itself is just, noble, and good. Brasidas' desire for success and honor away from Sparta appears as the realization of the limitation of Spartan virtues. If Sparta is not simply praiseworthy, then the possibility of noble and honorable actions apart from those dictated by Sparta presents a possibility for Brasidas of fulfilling his longing. Surely his experience with Alcidas would call into question the Spartan view of justice, especially in light of their proclaimed cause of liberating those subject to Athens.

With Brasidas successful in aiding Torone to revolt and causing the Athenians to flee, Sparta and Athens now agree to a truce. Yet after the treaty is concluded Scione revolts from Athens and joins Brasidas (120.1). Their decision to revolt is especially due to Brasidas' speech (121.1), which Thucydides reports. Thucydides' remark that Brasidas spoke in similar terms in the speeches at Acanthus and Torone hints at the need to consider their relation, all three bearing clear similarities. But what has changed? While we may have believed for a time, along with Brasidas, that the Spartans were in support of his campaign, their truce with Athens closes this possibility. Thus we may understand the strong terms of Brasidas' speech at Scione to be an

attempt to convince not only the Scionaeans of Sparta's cause, but also to convince Brasidas himself; for he must have had doubts about Sparta's support for the larger war. Nevertheless Brasidas greatly objects to the failure of Scione to be included in the truce between Sparta and Athens. Brasidas was incorrect though to claim that the Spartans would be the "most trusted and truest friends" (120.3) of Scione – the Spartans had already refused to comply with Brasidas' request for reinforcements (108.7) and the revolts from Athens, as Thucydides presents them, were the result of Brasidas' own "seductive but untrue" statements (108.5); therefore Brasidas' promises to the Scionaeans are known *by him* to be false. The Spartans were concerned with the return of their men and with concluding a general peace, a concern that Thucydides repeats (108.7, 117.2, 5.15.1; cf. 5.14.2). As for the violation of the truce (since Scione *did* revolt two days after its signing), Brasidas objects as well since he believed that the Athenians had themselves done injustice (123.1). The Spartans offer to place the matter in arbitration, as per the truce, but the Athenians refuse. Brasidas' opinion on arbitration is unclear, but he does immediately aid another city in revolting now – Mende was also preparing to revolt from Athens. Brasidas appears unconcerned with arbitration, along with his own possible injustice in not submitting to it, because in his view Athens has committed an injustice. Thus both the Athenian slaughter of the Scionaeans, led by Cleon, and the further revolts promoted by Brasidas, are in violation of the clause of the truce that submits disputes to arbitration to avoid open war (4.118.8).[212]

[212] Connor (1984) p. 137 notes this problem. It is also relevant for understanding Brasidas that his lack of concern with arbitration and the treaty as a whole sheds light on Thucydides first noting that Brasidas' actions were "just and measured" (81.2), while later indicating only that they were "measured" (108.2). From a legalistic point of view, Brasidas' actions are unjust, for he could have submitted the matter of Scione's revolt to arbitration. Perhaps aware that the Athenians were correct to note the violation of the treaty by a revolt occurring after it was signed (as Thucydides confirms was the case) Brasidas *himself* instead accuses the Athenians of an injustice, the specific charges though being unclear. It is important to note however that Mende daringly revolts *because* of Brasidas' refusal to abandon Scione (123.2), i.e. that the success of Sparta's professed aim in the war was better served by violating a treaty obligation and therefore committing, from Athens' point of view, an injustice.

Brasidas' refusal to wholly admit to his tension with Sparta is observable in his speech at Lyncus. Having to encourage his small force against a numerically superior hoard of barbarians, Thucydides has Brasidas offer his last explicit remarks on virtue.[213] Brasidas' speech reveals his view of the superiority of Sparta to others and extols the Spartan's "native courage" because the Spartans fight together in "order" (*kosmos*), while the barbarians consider each individual fleeing or attacking as noble. Thus, Brasidas argues, the barbarians do not allow each man to truly test his courage in battle. For Brasidas, Spartan courage is a virtue that is perhaps promoted by their battle order, but not wholly determined by it. The Spartan must chose to act courageously in battle for his city. This virtue is rare, as Brasidas admits, akin to the few ruling the many. As he argues, the few deserve to rule the many (126.2), as they do in Sparta, and these few who rule do so by having distinguished themselves on the battlefield.

This is a problem for Sparta however – it was due to the rigid battle order of the Spartans that the hereditary king Agis showed his inabilities to command, leading Sparta to innovate regarding the laws for the sake of improving on this order. Indeed, while Brasidas praises Spartan order, he immediately departs from that order in this very battle (128.1). Brasidas is the rarest of the few, having distinguished himself during his liberation campaign, and yet hindered from leading the Spartans in the war. If the few deserve to rule the many by distinguishing themselves in battle, the Spartans would not have encountered problems with all of their kings or commanders – Archidamus and Agis lack daring and are slow, while Pausanias and Pleistoanax sought private motives. Only in the case of Brasidas is the Spartan claim of justice or moderation combined with the daring required for victory. While the Spartans first praise Brasidas after he distinguishes himself, they become envious once he conducts the war beyond their control and in contrast to their unstated aims. Not surprisingly, Thucydides in this context tells us that the

[213] Burns (2011) p. 517.

Spartans sent "certain young men" to Amphipolis and Torone to inspect what was happening and to rule over those cities for the Spartans; they did not want to leave this to those already there, i.e. to Brasidas (132.3).[214] The Spartans even breach a law (*paranomos*) in sending these young men – it seems they are willing to use any means to combat the ascendancy of Brasidas, i.e. one of the necessities of the war that Sparta is unable to deal with. The breach of one of Sparta's laws presages the creation of the new law in Book 5. The contrast is striking since in both instances Sparta is unable to deal with daring and timid statesmen.

After the fall of Torone, in which Cleon enslaves the women and children and the Athenians tear down the city, Brasidas receives information that Cleon is now proceeding to Amphipolis. Thucydides presents both Brasidas' intention in his speech and his strategy for the battle before the speech itself. Brasidas did not want to attack the Athenians with the Spartans' customary battle order because the Athenians there were "pure" (*katharos*) and their allies had the strongest of their men with them – the "worth" of the Athenians was greater than the Spartans despite their numbers being more or less equal; therefore Brasidas determines that he must employ "art" (*techne*) in combating them. His own forces were armed with equipment that they were forced (*ananke*) to use, i.e. not the best of the Spartans' arms. Thucydides' presentation of Brasidas' thoughts before the speech thus betray Brasidas' foremost concerns – the Spartans were no longer, in his view, the best men, as worthy of victory as the Athenians (5.8.2). Nor would Brasidas be able to employ the best arms for the battle. Coming to view the Spartans as inferior, Brasidas focuses on both the material and moral preparations for the battle.

Brasidas' speech, after realizing the weakness of the Spartans, appears as the speech of a man preparing for his own death. In exhorting both his men and fellow commander Clearidas,

[214] Thucydides uses *entygchano* (fall in with, meet with) a verb that relates to "fortune" (*tyche*) when referring to those already at these cities. This is a reminder of the relation of Brasidas and Sparta appearing to be one of chance or fortune. See note 8 above.

Brasidas urges them to sacrifice themselves for the sake of Sparta. Even if they should escape the battle without being captured or dying, they will live a worse life than they would as allies of Sparta and as part of a liberated Greece (5.9.7-9). Lack of daring is not an excuse. Since Brasidas can no longer believe that Sparta's aim is to succeed in initiating the revolts of Athens' subject cities from their empire, nor that Sparta will support those liberated cities after their revolt, he appears to seek "success and honor" for himself (5.16). For since he came to recognize that success in the war is or never was Sparta's aim, he may still die an honorable death. That he is successful on behalf of Sparta may only be the case if Sparta's peace with Athens can be understood as a success. But this success would not be the success for which Brasidas fought – Sparta was never able to carry out its professed aim because Sparta only ever truly hoped to liberate itself from Athens.

Brasidas' virtue proves to be at odds with Sparta while still sharing something of Sparta. While Brasidas comes to see the difficulties within the Spartan view that the interests of Sparta justify an action against others, he is unable to admit that cities are ultimately compelled by what they believe to be good for them. Not their view of their good, but virtuous actions should dictate one's success or failure. Honorable actions rely, as they did for the Melians and Nicias, on the rewards for those who are able to set aside their own good, since sacrifices are required for virtuous action. Thus Thucydides allows us to see Brasidas both sacrificing his life at Amphipolis to prove he is such a man and also sacrificing to the goddess Athena as gratitude for what he believes is her overseeing protection and as guarantor of his successes (4.116.2). Yet since the rewards of virtue, most notably honor, rest on the belief that one's good is not compelling, the expectation or hope for reward reveals a fundamental tension in the view of

Brasidas and thus of the moral man. Thucydides thereby hints at the limits of the belief in moral virtue itself.

CONCLUSION

In studying Thucydides with a focus on Sparta, we notice more detail and subtlety in his account, both of which recommend Sparta and reveal what is most problematic about it. The Spartans expect for all cities, as they expect from themselves, that virtue be chosen over and above any necessities, and moreover, that necessity is merely an argument of the weak in the face of the demands of virtue. The Spartans do not share the Athenian view. While the Athenian thesis reveals that all cities will expand should they have the power to do so, we now also notice that only the Athenians are so bold as to openly state this view (and even they do not always state it so forcefully – cf. Euphemus). All other cities during the Peloponnesian War appeal to justice; all cities argue with other cities in moral terms of right and wrong, justice and injustice. And these cities, especially Sparta, do so not merely to disguise the pursuit of their own interests or their own weaknesses, but because they themselves *believe* that justice should have an effect on political conduct. And this belief is part and parcel of their own belief that they act justly toward others and thus seem to presume that these actions will be reciprocated. When viewing the actions of the Spartans, we come away with the impression that they are indeed conflating their advantage or good with justice. However, the Spartans did not believe the Plataeans were justified in their attack on Thebes and the slaughter of their men; the Plataeans may have been compelled by the Athenians to submit to their empire, but this does not mean the Spartans believed this to be so. One could never imagine the Athenians calling in special judges; and when the Athenians put the Mytilene revolt before the demos, they vote to kill them as punishment for their transgression acting as the Spartans would act due to the influence of Cleon and his call for revenge. It is Diodotus who convinces the Athenians to reconsider and thereby

act in their true interests; but even here, he is only able to do so by way of an appeal to their concern with justice.[1]

The Spartans cannot admit to themselves that justice may be dispensed with; if the Spartans admit to acting out of fear and thus to be excused in defense of their city against Athens, they would also be admitting to the weakness of justice and to its only secondary place in political calculations. The Spartans do not believe that one could secure their interests or good by acting apart from the dictates of virtue and the demands that it makes. The goodness of virtue proceeds from the virtuous life itself – to be law-abiding, courageous, and pious in defense of Sparta is a better way of life than that of the Athenians (and the laws of other cities that are not Sparta).[2] Nevertheless, the Spartans disguise their crimes, their injustices, not merely from others but most especially from themselves. In striking contrast, the Athenians do not even attempt to restrain themselves due to a concern with justice since for them justice has no place in the sober calculations of cities; cities and men should look to their own self-interest, their own true good, since to do otherwise is to forgo one's own good based on mere hopes and other considerations that one cannot know. Yet the Athenian envoys at Sparta, even in their frank statement, justify their actions by arguing that they restrain themselves and are not as harsh as their tremendous strength would allow, not due to strictures of piety or a concern with future retribution, but only because they desire honor. They expect praise for their gentler rule because they forgo an ever-increasing strength.

[1] For the "anger" (*orge*) of the Athenians due to perceived injustice, consider 3.36.2, 38.1, 5.42.2, 46.5, 8.1.1. Cf. 3.42.1, 43.5, 44.4.

[2] Thus we understand the Spartan demand that other cities under their influence are not simply allowed to live as they like; they must model themselves after the Spartan regime (at least to the extent that they are ruled by oligarchic regimes, i.e. the few ruling over the many).

While the Athenians' source of restraint is due to this desire, the Spartans' source of restraint is fear – the Spartans fear the gods and the punishments that may follow should they be unjust, while the Athenians excuse or justify the exercise of their strength because they nobly place strictures on the use of their strength. The Athenians believe that they do not need the gods because the gods would understand and exculpate them from their striving at least in the case of guarding one's interest. But Sparta's concern with justice does in fact reveal a concern with their own good. Justice promises to be good for the Spartans, because the gods will protect and reward Sparta for its just actions. This explains why the Spartans are so cautious and hesitant once they come to view their own injustice in declaring war because it meant breaching their solemnly sworn treaty with Athens; they came to fear that their defeat at Pylos may be the gods punishing them for this injustice (4.20.2, 7.18.2). We also understand why the Spartans are suspicious of other cities and doubtful of the justice of others. Even when officially allied with Athens, the Spartans grew doubtful of the Athenians aiding them in suppressing the Helot revolt, resulting in the Athenians' expulsion from Sparta. Rather than a belief in the justice of men, Spartan justice places its hopes (and fears) in divine justice and thus piety especially animates their decisions during the war (1.102). But their concern with piety nevertheless reveals an abiding concern with their own interests – justice promises to be good for them; if their customary sacrifices are favorable, the gods approve of their actions and will aid in ensuring a good outcome. Both cities therefore unite their interests with moral considerations.

Political life, as Thucydides presents it, is therefore fundamentally guided by morality. Politics is at its root guided by our views of justice and injustice, even though these concerns may distort our view of advantageous policy and clear-sighted interest. Thucydides urges his reader to view war and thus human life with caution, to become aware of this source of political

errors through a sober investigation of the fears and hopes that renders us most prone to them. Thucydides presents the Spartans' piety as a hindrance to their foreign affairs with other cities: they fail to aid allies, arrive late to important engagements, and are concerned above all with their regime, hindering actions abroad that would further their interests toward victory in the war. It would therefore be easy to dismiss these beliefs as at odds with political expediency (to say nothing of self-preserving sobriety). However the Spartan regime, despite some faction during the war, never experiences any of the domestic discord present at Athens (and Corcyra). Their city is stable due to their long-standing regime, a regime that functions according to laws that attempt to inculcate the strictest obedience and to suppress the strongest passions of human nature. Thucydides thus presents us with the problem of reconciling strictures required for the stability of the city and the needs of a city at war. The Spartans fail to recognize their interests abroad because their adherence to what they believe is justice at home. That this appears as obvious hypocrisy to the Athenians does not establish a duplicitous character to the Spartans' claims or actions. While the Athenian thesis holds that such beliefs can be done away with, Thucydides teaches us through his portrait of Sparta that the Athenians are mistaken to believe that moral concerns can be divorced from politics – these moral concerns will always animate a city's view of its relation to other cities. That these other cities, as Sparta did, will act out of fear, interest, and what preserves them does not negate the fact that they are only partial aware or altogether blind to this motivation. Thucydides' statement that Sparta went to war with Athens due to fear (1.23.5-6) does not lead us to conclude that the Spartans *believed* they went to war out of fear. They believed they went to war to stop Athenian injustice; they hid the true cause of the war from themselves because for the Spartans an admission of fear was impossible. Rather, Spartan piety is one of the causes of their caution and fearfulness (and hence moderation)

through an education in laws considered immoderate, shameful, and impious for a Spartan to doubt. Therefore any fear that a Spartan admitted to himself was due to doubt about adherence to the laws of Sparta or potential injustices that offend the gods.

And it is precisely Athenian impiety that allows for their extreme and un-Spartan daring. But they do not know that the gods will exculpate them; they merely believe it (5.105.2). The weakness of this belief, and therefore the strength of Thucydides' case for the Spartan view, is indicated by the return of piety in Athens late in the war. The hopes and fears that accompany piety did not leave Athens and fundamentally affected domestic stability. Athens lost the war at least in part due to the recall of Alcibiades and this recall originated with the accusation of impiety issuing from the mutilation of the Hermes statues. Thucydides thus leads the reader to raise the question of how to address the views of each city for an understanding of politics. The issue of piety is particularly notable if for no other reason than the striking effects it has on both cities as they conduct the war. The truth in the piety of the Spartans is that Athens cannot expand without considerations of limits due to the effects this expansion has on domestic politics. Athens' continued expansion culminates in the Sicilian expedition, an expedition that is driven by the desire for glory and private profit, by its unprecedented daring and exercise of strength, and most notably, by hope (6.24.1-4, 6.31.2-6). The Athenians are therefore blind to the great risk involved in such an undertaking and only on the eve of the expedition come to realize the gravity of what they have decided upon (31.1). Thus, not surprisingly, it is at this precise moment that the Athenians return to their traditional pious practices and prayers (32.1-2). Therefore to alleviate the expedition's possible injustice they accuse Alcibiades of impiety, demand his recall, thus removing him from command of the expedition. The recall of Alcibiades was in fact orchestrated by his political enemies who sought to eliminate his predominance in

Athens. Guided by their own ambitions rather than what benefited Athens, they are able to sway the demos to this decision despite the obvious abilities of Alcibiades that brought about his selection in the first place. Therefore we notice that both the statesmen and the demos within Athens are driven by private interests, interests that ultimately led to regime change and near civil war as well as affecting Athens' foreign policy decisions. And Thucydides leaves little doubt as to his view of the loss of piety and moderation in domestic politics – Athens during the plague, Corcyra's civil war, and Athens late in the war are all instances where he reveals the cost for a city when departing from moderate political courses at home, those that divert the citizens from a virtue rooted in law-abidingness, political moderation among various interests, and piety.

In considering piety, one must raise the question of our ability to discern Thucydides' view. One possibility is from his account of "natural" phenomenon; but a natural account appears insufficient in eliminating the possibility that these events are due to divine rule over the cosmos (as the Spartans and others believed) rather than due to natural necessity that is intelligible to human beings.[3] Here we notice that Thucydides guides the reader from preeminently political questions and problems to a consideration of how the solutions to these problems involve philosophic questions of the utmost importance. Sparta presents a challenge to Athens on the possibility of both understanding nature and overcoming the chance events that befall human beings.

While we notice that accounts of phenomenon such as eclipses, earthquakes, and plagues are a part of this challenge, the differing views of justice (and the possible influence of the gods) attending the Spartans and Athenians are even more striking. For the Spartans, only just action can aid in promising a favorable outcome. Further, they never claim that the gods act as human beings act because they do not share this belief. Neither the gods nor human beings are

[3] Palmer (1982) p. 123. Cf. Orwin (1994) pp. 202-3.

compelled by their interests to act in a particular manner; one *chooses* to act virtuously. Admittedly, for the majority of Spartans virtuous actions proceed from following the divinely sanctioned laws of Sparta. But such actions require adhering to the expectations of the gods, in the attempts to sway them to view Sparta's cause and Sparta's actions favorably. And even for the Athenians, their thesis does not establish the compulsory character of all human actions – their longing for honor is an act of generosity (on their view) since they are not as harsh toward subject cities as they might be. Thus the Athenians are not able to consistently maintain their own view that necessity compels human beings to certain actions. If they understood the Spartan view, they would recognize what Thucydides teaches his readers: what *is* compelling is one's *view* of what virtuous actions require of us; that our *belief* of what is ultimately good for us, the best way of life, compels human beings to pursue it.[4] Thucydides therefore offers to his readers two competing views of justice; yet both of these views cannot escape the fact that what is in the interest of a particular city, and more generally our concern with what is good for us, is what compels certain actions. For even the Spartans seek to act justly so that the gods will aid their efforts and ensure them success. Their concern with justice is ultimately a concern with their own interests and therefore supports the Athenian thesis, as the Athenians state it, that all cities act with a view to their interests.

This view appears to be rendered problematic by the case of Melos. Despite the manifest difference in strength between the two cities, the Melians refuse to surrender to the Athenians on the terms that they will become a tributary ally of Athens, i.e. on what the Athenians call "measured" terms (measured considering Athens' overwhelming strength to harm Melos – 5.111.4). The Melians therefore seem to side with justice in spite of the fact that their interest, preservation of their city, is clearly threatened by not acquiescing to the Athenians' demand – the

[4] Consider Xenophon, *Oeconomicus* 20.29.

Melians seem to be a city that acts without *any* consideration of their own good. But this difficulty is removed when we consider what Thucydides teaches us through his presentation of Sparta. The interests of the city or human being are inseparable from their view of justice; the Melians believe as just men that they will have the favor of the gods on their side and thus even the seemingly impossible defense of their island appears possible. One could note that the Melians (after being pressed by the Athenians on the issue of divine justice) are forced to admit that they also expect support from the Spartans. But the basis of relying on this support is nevertheless the same: in both cases the Melians must rest their city's preservation, or as they view it, their city's continued autonomy, on hope. Thus the result is the same: that they can secure a victory based on their past justice is the source of their reliance on hope. And this hope reveals, not that they forego their concern with their own good, but that they believe the *means* to achieving it is inseparable from moral considerations. Being just men will secure their good; the gods with favor them as just men or the Spartans, out of shame and alliance, will support their kinsmen. The actions of the Melians do not reveal a tension between acting justly and securing their interests; it reveals that even for the Melians, their belief in justice and their seeking to act justly points to an abiding concern with securing what they believe is best for their city.

Moreover the importance of the Spartan view also including its dedication to preserving domestic stability and therefore the possibility of avoiding a war worse than war, civil war. The Spartan view is important because it compels us to weigh what harm is done to domestic politics through the frankly stated imperial (and self-interested) ambitions of the Athenians. The seeds of the changes that affect Sparta can only draw them away from their view of the war as Thucydides reveals it. And if the war forced their regime to change, then this change implies that they did not have the favor of the gods or that no such intervention occurs. And it is only in

combating Athens in such a large scale war that Sparta is compelled to abandon its isolationist position and therefore eventually to abandon practices that focused the city on domestic, rather than foreign, political concerns. The necessity of changing their laws casts doubt on the Spartan view. Yet whether Thucydides' account of the war is complete or was left unfinished, we may still doubt that he would have allowed us to view the final fall of Athens and the victory of Sparta, for neither would be the apparent resolution to the tension between domestic and foreign affairs that we seek. The fall of Athens would not be a celebration of the end of empire, nor the rise of Sparta a celebration of newfound liberation. Each change would only begin the growth of a Spartan empire that would itself eventually suffer defeat. That Thucydides leaves us with some impression of hope after Book 7 is undermined by the confusion of Book 8 and its characterization of politics as indeterminate and lacking any permanent resolution.

Xenophon's account of Lysander reveals that the temptation to empire afforded to Sparta after the fall of Athens allowed particular individuals to ascend to prominence, thus shaking one of the foundations of the Spartan regime.[5] As Machiavelli also argues, the isolation of Sparta and its strict laws (particularly regarding foreign influence within the regime) would not allow it to flourish as an empire.[6] Instead, the influences that Lycurgus' legislation was in part designed to thwart came to the fore with Sparta's newfound prominence. As with Athens, those weaker Greek cities that sought a new hegemon under the auspices of guaranteeing their freedom only came to have that freedom taken away through the establishment a new empire, a Spartan empire. And Thucydides quietly portends the beginnings of these changes – the desires of Pausanias *before* the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War already raise questions as to whether the Spartan regime could guard against ambitious men who did not find their satisfaction in the

[5] Proietti (1987) pp. 108-111.
[6] See Preface note 9.

rewards and honors offered by Sparta itself. Even Sparta's king Agis eventually acts alone in his attempts to secure Decelea near the end of the war, despite the unprecedented Spartan law established to control the independence of the king, a law that his own failures led the Spartan Ephors to create. But this law, as with all laws in Thucydides, is not an assurance for restraining private ambition.

With the inducements to private honor and rewards, the problem still remains that the strict adherence to law that did guard against them for a time had the consequence of hindering the cultivation of the virtues required to prosecute a large scale, long term foreign war. Agis and Gylippus are not suitable to the task of guiding Sparta during this period – both the Syracusans and the Persians are more able in this regard, especially the former who shared the characteristics not of Spartans, but of Athenians. With the singular individual Brasidas, the Spartans can only find themselves at odds, both because their regime, while dedicated to training for war, was not directed towards offensive wars and conquest, and therefore the glory that such conquest promises (a glory that nearly all Athenian speakers appeal to). Further, the troublesome envy that arose from military successes reminded the most prominent men in the city of the honors that they lacked and thus the limitations private ambition faced within Sparta. Once the Spartans ceased their Spartan practices, the foundations of the city decayed.

Brasidas' achievements that were so envied raise the question of the source of his success. Brasidas and those observing him during the war are aware that he is willing to sacrifice himself in his campaign against Athens. Brasidas is gentle and thus successful in causing Athens' subject cities to revolt. His moderation toward non-Spartans though is at odds with Spartan harshness. While his concern with justice is borne in part from his Spartan education, it appears to transform itself into a gentleness the Spartans were unable to practice. Brasidas truly

aims to be what the Spartans claim to be yet are incapable of. The Spartan principles of justice do not apply to those outside of Sparta despite the Spartan belief that they do (in contrast to the rigid adherence to these principles in their refusal to punish Pausanias). Thus they act with hesitation to punish one of their own at home (since to do so would be to admit that a Spartan can betray the city) and they appear to act hypocritically abroad (since they demand others to abandon completely their own good); they act inconsistently because they act from competing motives. This is captured in Thucydides' claim that the Spartans acted *mostly* for the sake of the Thebans in executing the Plataeans; they could not depart from their interests in this case (siding with Thebes), but they also believed that their interests coincided with the justice of the verdict they reached on the grievances between Plataea and Thebes. To mask that interest was compelling them, this compulsion was hidden from themselves behind a denunciation of the injustice of the Plataeans.

The Spartans' justice is service to Sparta only, but Brasidas seeks to be just beyond what we note as the limited and partial Spartan view. He has come to realize, although tentatively, that the good of Sparta is at odds with another understanding of justice and hence of their own claim to be seeking autonomy for those subject to Athens. And Brasidas' vigor in pursuing liberation evinces his striving for an honor and nobility not afforded by the praise and blame (and hence honor and nobility) allotted simply by adherence to Sparta's laws. It is Brasidas' hopes, on the one hand, and Spartan fears on the other, that most guide the conduct of each. If these hopes and fears prove to be inconsistent and reveal contradictions within their own understanding, Thucydides' presentation of political life is intended as a corrective to our mistaken views.

Thus the seductiveness of Brasidas to cities convinced to revolt from Athens is also instructive in understanding those cities. Believing that Brasidas and Sparta are indeed concerned

with the autonomy of others (and not only as the result of Sparta's calculated interests), the inclination toward Sparta early in the war suggests that most cities believed that justice led Sparta to declare war due to the unjust encroachments of Athens. Sparta's allies especially voted for war due to the charge of Athenian injustice (2.8.4-5). Unable to imagine that the Spartans could be overcome by fear, the other cities believed that the Spartans were genuinely animated by a desire to end the injustice of Athenian imperialism. Thucydides' view is thus remote from that of either Sparta or Athens, from the city as city. Indeed, for Thucydides cities will generally abide by the belief that interest is compelling in deciding foreign policy, yet considerations of interest are *not* wholly divorced from a consideration of justice. That most cities justify their actions even while calculating their own interests (aware of it or not) is the Spartan corrective to the flawed claim of the Athenian thesis that all cities weigh only their interests, not blinded by any passions issuing from a concern with justice – anger, revenge, dishonor, or shame. And the Athenian thesis itself betrays a concern to justify empire at least partially on moral terms. Athens' restraint is, in their view, noble and thus justifies what they are aware are infringements on the interests and autonomy of the cities they control.

If we seek a middle path or a compromised solution to the tension between the Spartan view and the Athenian view, Thucydides does not provide a ready answer. But perhaps this is because no such solution exists. If a solution exists, it appears to reside in those individuals who do not figure prominently in the war. Diodotus and Antiphon were both speakers able to guide the city to sobriety and caution; Pisistratus and his sons were able to maintain a law-abiding regime (as tyrants) that cultivated virtue and piety among the citizens and refrained from the dangerous temptations of empire; and Demosthenes strikes us as both public-spirited and able, leading Athens at war as a man such as Nicias could not. Demosthenes had that rare ability to

learn from nature and perhaps also or especially human nature and thus avoid the pitfalls of other men. But Demosthenes, the Pisistratids, and Antiphon do not escape the fortunes of war. It is in the example of Thucydides himself where we locate an understanding of politics beyond the view of any single character, beyond those directly involved in political life. Thucydides allows his readers to observe the impossible resolution of the partial or flawed views of both Sparta and Athens, and thus to gain a political education. This education is deepened through our awareness of the less resplendent, but politically fundamental, Spartan qualities; their law-bred moderation and piety are virtues most at odds with Athens and most at odds with imperial desires and policies. Sparta is *the* portrait of a regime least susceptible to faction, infighting, and ultimately civil war. Yet we cannot ignore that Thucydides' case for Sparta is tempered by the changes that begin to take hold as the city was confronted with the necessities of war in the challenge of attempting to defeat the greatest of empires. Sparta could not retain its regime in the form that cultivated the strengths Thucydides presents. Therefore to say that Sparta won the war and Athens lost is both the truth and almost entirely misleading.

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