A Drive to Dominate: The Rhetoric of Power and Justice in the First Book of Thucydides' History of the Peloponnesian War

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The Rhetoric of Power and Justice in the First Book of Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*

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Von der jämmerlichen Schönfärberei der Griechen in's Ideal, die der „klassisch gebildete" Jüngling als Lohn für seine Gymnasial-Dressur in's Leben davonträgt, kurirt nichts so gründlich als Thukydides.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Götzen-Dämmerung*.

Introduction

The antithesis between an exalted ideal of conduct and the pragmatic necessities of power – a tension that is felt wherever human beings coalesce politically – runs like a golden thread through the *Histories* of Thucydides. Many of its passages (for example, the Mytilenian debate or the Melian dialogue) attest to the recurring dialectic between moral considerations and personal or state interests.[1] It is therefore not entirely unexpected that modern receptions of the work have continually stressed its connection to political realism, as has happened in the realm of philosophy and in international relations theory, in both of which Thucydides features prominently.[2]

This contrast between an idealized representation and the reality of 'brute facts' is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in the dialectic between the speeches that Thucydides has inserted for his characters and his own narrative. Earlier scholarship on the *Histories*, influenced by nineteenth century historicism, had tended to equate the content of the speeches with Thucydides' own views – for instance, Pericles' Funeral Oration with an unequivocal endorsement of the Athenian polity.[3] This sometimes led to the question whether Thucydides was not more an Athenian partisan than an objective historian when it came to general statements in the *Histories*.[4] Conversely, with regard to the factual narrative, it was often assumed that Thucydides recorded events more or less '*wie sie eigentlich gewesen*', and that his true value as a 'scientific' historian lay in the complete and accurate chronicling of events, coupled with a law-like analysis of cause and effect.[5]

More recently, however, insightful readers of Thucydides have stressed the importance of the literary element that is present in the composition, in particular regarding the speeches. It is now generally accepted that both the speeches (λόγοι) αnd deeds (ἔργα) of the war are part of a literary whole, shaping and informing each other.[6] This view has important hermeneutical

[1] Thuc. *Hist*. 3.36-49; 5.84-116.

[2] Thomas Hobbes, in the preface to his own translation of the *Histories*, remarks that "Thucydides is one, who, though he never digress to read a lecture, moral or political, upon his own text, nor enter into men's hearts further than the acts themselves evidently guide him, is yet accounted the most politic historiographer that ever writ." Nietzsche states in *Götzen-Dämmerung*: "Meine Erholung, meine Vorliebe, meine Kur von allem Platonismus war zu jeder Zeit Thukydides. Thukydides und, vielleicht, der Principe Machiavell's sind mir selber am meisten Verwandt durch den unbedingten Willen, sich nichts vorzumachen und die Vernunft in der Realität zu sehn." More recently, Thucydides has been claimed to be the 'forefather' of Realism as an international relations theory – as becomes evident in, among other things, the telling title of Allison 2018 (*Destined for War: Can America and China Escape Thucydides' Trap?*).

[3] Stahl 1973, 60: "It seems scarcely exaggerated to say that there was a time when interpreters felt that the course of events as told by Thucydides contains not more than the "naked facts," while only the speeches, more or less mouthpieces of the author, can supposedly tell us the meaning of history, which would otherwise remain mute."

[4] Jaffe 2017, 393-394.

[5] E.g. Connor 1984, 16.

[6] De Romilly 1967, 180-239; Immerwahr 1973, Hammond 1973; Scardino 2007, 383-700; Strauss 1974, 163-174; West 1973, 6; Westlake 1973. Pires 2006, 837 astutely captures the essence of the paradigm shift: "The modern

consequences. If the speeches do indeed relate more than just Thucydides' own opinions, and if their interaction with the ἔργα has been deliberately crafted by the author, then there might be a deeper meaning embedded in the speeches and their contexts which reveals something about Thucydides' analysis of the situations he describes.

It is the purpose of my thesis to analyse the first book through such a lens. The question that will guide my research is the following: what does the interaction between speeches and actions in book 1 of Thucydides' *Histories* reveal about the author's analysis of political behaviour? Apart from considerations of time and space, the reason for limiting myself to the first book is twofold. First, the events described in book 1 can be regarded as a thematic, chronological, and narratological unity, making it a convenient unit of analysis. Thematically speaking, book 1 is concerned with the causes of the war, both immediate and remote. It is therefore the programmatic part of the *Histories* in which themes that recur throughout the work are introduced and elaborated for the first time. This becomes evident by the compositional fact alone that no less than eight paired speeches are inserted in close proximity to each other – the largest amount in any book, excepting book 6.[7] Furthermore, chronologically, all events connected with those speeches are contained to the immediate prehistory of the war. Finally, in narratological terms, the events that are set into motion by each of the speeches follow within the selfsame book, making it a convenient part of the work to study the relationship between speeches and events.

The second reason is that scholars studying λόγοι and ἔργα have paid relatively little attention to book 1 in a systematic fashion. There are studies dealing with, for instance, the contrast between Periclean rhetoric in book 2 and Athenian conduct throughout the rest of the Peloponnesian War.[8] Book 6, which contains an account of the infamous Sicilian Expedition, has also received abundant attention.[9] Book 1, however, does not seem to be the object of much devoted study in this regard. Cursory remarks about some of the speeches in book 1 are often made in analyses dealing with other parts of the *Histories* or in more general theorizing about the relationship between λόγοι and ἔργα – but only rarely are these pursued in detail, and rarer still are comprehensive discussions of the speeches in coherence with each other.[10] Therefore, something might be gained by looking at the first book for the first book's sake.

The thematic focus of my analysis will be Thucydides' reflections on power and justice, and the respective weight attached to each in his retelling of the Peloponnesian War. My contention is that the antilogies of speeches in the first book express systematically the various ways in which power plays a more central role than justice in human affairs, and that this dynamic

Thucydides of positivist heritage "*à la Ranke*", now obsolete, capsizes, the post-modern Thucydides of literary criticism "*à la Henry James*" emerging in his place."

[7] West 1973, 6.

[8] Such as in Balot 2017, 323-331.

[9] Such as in Stahl 1973.

[10] For example, the analysis of *logoi* and *erga* in Stahl 1973, 64-69 mentions in one sentence that the Segestan call for help which precedes the Sicilian Expedition is "a classic case of escalation, not dissimilar to that over Epidamnus in Book One," but gives no further details. Scardino 2007, which deals with Thucydidean speeches extensively and compares them to the speeches in Herodotus, is similarly preoccupied with books 6 and 7. Connor 1984, 20-54, which deals with book 1 as a whole, refers to the most important speeches and does connect them to narrative events, but is necessarily limited in the extensiveness of his remarks by the encyclopedic aim of the chapter. Finally, Allison 2013, 257-270, which is dedicated to the compositional structure of book 1, mentions only those snippets of the speeches as are necessary to connect to a later part of the book, focusing mainly on the first Corinthian speech.

affects the motivations and decisions of the actors in the Peloponnesian War. It will be seen that considerations of power often trump those of justice in their rhetorical appeal; that one people's character can be more (or less) conducive to the acquisition of power than another's; and that pointed appeals to emotion can overpower reasoned calculation when deliberating about state policy. Thus, the influence of power affects the rhetorical strategies of the participants, creating a fascinating dialectic between what is said and what turns out to be the reality of their actions.

To this end, I will proceed as follows. First, I will draw attention to some methodological problems in reading and interpreting the *Histories*, touching mainly upon Thucydides' conception of historiography and its relation to a philosophical analysis of politics. I will also discuss the *Methodenkapitel* (1.22), where Thucydides justifies his insertion of composed speeches. After those preliminary remarks, I will analyse three pairs of speeches in book 1. The first pair concerns the Corcyraean debate at Athens, where the Corcyraeans (1.32-1.36) and the Corinthians (1.37-1.43) each try to persuade the Athenians to align themselves with them. The second pair concerns the first conference at Sparta, where the Corinthians urge the Spartans to go to war against Athens (1.68-1.71) and the Athenians respond with a speech that justifies their own empire (1.73-1.78). Finally, I will discuss the Spartans' own deliberation whether they should go to war, in which king Archidamus speaks in favour of restraint and caution (1.80-1.85), whereas the ephor Sthenelaidas urges immediate action (1.86). I will offer a close reading of the speeches and analyse their contents in the broader context – and although it will be impossible to analyse each of them exhaustively, I hope to have made a sufficiently representative selection of passages to claim some validity for my conclusions.

Thucydides' method: history, poetry, and philosophy in the speeches

We must start with an elementary question: what are the *Histories* of Thucydides about? The answer is both manifestly simple and painstakingly complicated. At one level, the work's subject could not be clearer: Thucydides tells us in the proem that he intends to deal with "the war of the Peloponnesians and the Athenians" (τὸν πόλεμον τῶν Πελοποννησίων καὶ Ἀθηναίων).[11] One therefore expects to find an account of the battles and campaigns fought in that war, and – to the extent that Thucydides deals with this subject as a historian – some account of how and why those events took place and why their results turned out as they did.

All this Thucydides does indeed relate. But, as any more than cursory reader of the *Histories* cannot fail to notice, Thucydides also claims a much wider scope for his work. Not only does he describe this particular war, but he also recounts what he believes to have been "the greatest motion to have happened to the Hellenes and to some part of the barbarians and, so to speak, to the greatest part of mankind" (κίνησις μεγίστη τοῖς Ἕλλησιν καὶ μέρει τινὶ τῶν βαρβάρων, ὡς δὲ εἰπεῖν, καὶ ἐπὶ πλεῖστον ἀνθρώπων).[12] After immediately digressing from his subject and venturing into Greece's most archaic history for a full twenty chapters, he declares that his description of the war is to serve as "something helpful in judging" (ὠφέλιμα κρίνειν) human affairs more generally, as the past tends to resemble the future.[13] Thucydides therefore feels

[11] Thucydides 1.1.1. See also the illuminating analysis of this choice of words in Allison 2013, 257-261.
[12] Thucydides 1.1.2. On the importance of an opposition between 'motion' (κίνησις) and 'rest' (ἡσυχία) in Thucydides, see further below.
[13] Thucydides 1.22.4.

justified in stating that he has written the *Histories* as "a gift for all time" (κτῆμα ἐς αἰεί), claiming an almost universal validity for what he has to say to – and about – mankind.

Scholarship has long struggled with how to interpret historiographical writing in light of these claims. Is the historian's task not simply to give an account of 'the facts'? Does a historian aspiring to universal insight not venture into a different domain – into poetry or philosophy? That all depends on how one conceives of 'history' and the methods by which a historian intends to write it. In the case of Thucydides, passages like those cited above are indications that the Aristotelian scheme which separates history from poetry on account of the one being particular and the other universal might be misleading.[14] The distinction between 'philosophical' and 'historical' ways of looking at the world could just be an imposition of later date, projected back upon the ancient mind.[15] If, then, the unity of history, philosophy, and poetry cannot be excluded *a priori*, one is compelled to ask two preliminary questions of method. While neither can be answered decisively or definitively, one's proclivities in answering them will to a large extent determine one's interpretation of Thucydides.

First, regarding the text's relationship to philosophy: does Thucydides espouse a political teaching of his own? Among those who take Thucydides to hold certain opinions are Strauss, who turns him into a kind of 'Platonist for the pre-philosophic city';[16] Orwin, who argues on the contrary that Thucydides problematizes the Socratic account of virtue by emphasizing an almost inescapable 'necessity' (ἀνάγκη) in political action;[17] Jaffe, who maintains that Thucydides above all favours regimes that ensure stability and security in a world at war;[18] and Balot, who stresses the tragic character of Thucydides' world view, in which moral ideals are rarely lived up to in practice.[19] While these scholars differ on the details of what they believe Thucydides' views to have been, the common ground they share is that, according to them, 1.) Thucydides did have an underlying world view that has come to permeate his work, and 2.) this world view has something to do with the ambiguous relationship between moral virtue and political power.

Those who wish to nuance the ascription of such views – for it is hard to deny altogether that Thucydides seeks to impart *some* wisdom beyond 'the facts' – will mostly centre on the historian's reticence, maintaining that the reader must ultimately come to his own conclusions. This seems to be the focus of scholars such as Jaeger and Ober, who both fail to find a Thucydidean programme containing clear precepts.[20] Yet even they appear to believe that there is some standard of excellence implicit in the work – for example, the prudent leadership of

[14] Aristotle, *Poetics*. 1451a36-b11; Strauss 1973, 142-145. See also Ober 2006, 134: "Thucydides quite deliberately confronted contemporary intellectuals from across a wide range of what we now think of as literary genres – and as a result there is no single established or emergent field of literary endeavour into which his work can be reasonably pigeon-holed."

[15] If this is the case even with regard to Aristotle, then it must hold *a fortiori* for distinctly 'modern' historiographical methods, such as historical positivism.

[16] Strauss 1974, especially 139-145 and 236-241.

[17] Orwin 2017.

[18] Jaffe 2017.

[19] Balot 2017.

[20] See, for instance, Jaeger 1936, 489: "Es ist die Eigenart des thukydideischen Denkens über dem Staat im Gegensatz zu der politisch-religiösen Gedankenwelt Solons wie zu der sophistischen oder platonischen Staatsphilosophie, daß es in ihm keine allgemeinen Lehren, kein *fabula docet* gibt."

Pericles as compared to his demagogue successors.[21] The use of such a standard indicates that Thucydides points his readers towards some forms of political behaviour while steering them away from others – i.e. that he *did* have a message that he wished to convey. This also corresponds to the programmatic sentence in 1.22.4, where he states that providing political insight for the future is one of the work's main objectives. It is therefore not an unwarranted assumption that Thucydides had in mind some didactic aim beyond just imparting 'the facts'. This is the first assumption from which I shall proceed.

Second, regarding the text's relationship to poetry, how much liberty did Thucydides allow himself in composing his text? We must here distinguish the 'deeds' (ἔργα) of the war from its 'speeches' (λόγοι).[22] Both are discussed by Thucydides in the (in)famous *Methodenkapitel* 1.22. With regard to the deeds, there can be no doubt that Thucydides first and foremost strove for accuracy.[23] Yet even a historian who wishes to portray events accurately must employ his own judgment when deciding upon crucial aspects of his work: which events to emphasize or to downplay; what order of exposition to employ; at what time to give an explicit judgment and when to remain silent. In so doing, the historian does not just reproduce the facts, but also creates a narrative around them.[24] Scholars have pointed out that the work gains in depth when one ponders such compositional choices and tries to distill what Thucydides most of all wished to convey to his readers.[25]

When it comes to the speeches, all this becomes even less clear. Whereas accuracy takes prime importance in portraying 'the facts', the speeches aim at both accuracy and 'appropriateness', since Thucydides was forced to compose them himself. His considerations in doing so are varied enough to merit a citation in full.[26]

> καὶ ὅσα μὲν λόγῳ εἶπον ἕκαστοι ἢ μέλλοντες πολεμήσειν ἢ ἐν αὐτῷ ἤδη ὄντες, χαλεπὸν τὴν ἀκρίβειαν αὐτὴν τῶν λεχθέντων διαμνημονεῦσαι ἦν ἐμοί τε ὧν αὐτὸς ἤκουσα καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοθέν ποθεν ἐμοὶ ἀπαγγέλλουσιν· ὡς δ᾽ ἂν ἐδόκουν ἐμοὶ ἕκαστοι περὶ τῶν αἰεὶ παρόντων τὰ δέοντα μάλιστ᾽ εἰπεῖν ἐχομένῳ ὅτι ἐγγύτατα τῆς ξυμπάσης γνώμης τῶν ἀληθῶς λεχθέντων, οὕτως εἴρηται.

[21] Interestingly, both Jaeger and Ober converge on the specific example of Pericles as the 'model leader'. Referring to Thucydides 2.65, Jaeger 1936, 506-513 says: "In welchem Maße der Ausgang des Krieges für Thukydides von der politischen Führung abhängt, hinter der die militärische bei ihm stark zurücktritt, zeigt jene berühmte Stelle des zweiten Buchs, wo er nach der Rede, mit der Perikles das durch Krieg und Pest entmutigte Volk aufrichtet und zu weiterem Durchhalten stärkt, diesen großen Führer der Ereignissen vorgreifend allen späteren athenischen Politikern gegenüberstellt. (…) Das Bild des Perikles, das Thukydides hier durch den Vergleich mit den späteren Politikern in ein so klares Licht rückt, ist mehr als das Porträt eines bewunderten Mannes. Alle Verglichenen werden an derselben Aufgabe gemessen." Compare this to what Ober 2006, 157 concludes about Thucydides' didactic aim: "And that, I would say, is the ultimate purpose of the text. It is meant to produce leaders with Periclean abilities."

[22] Morrison 2006, 252; Orwin 2017, 362; Strauss 1974,163-165; Westlake 1973, 90.

[23] Thucydides 1.22.2 details the meticulousness of the historian's research, which, in his own view, warrants him to say that he has chronicled the events as accurately as possible.

[24] Stahl 1973, 61: "We have learned that the mere narration of any set of historical facts already implies a subjective element (because presentation includes judgment, evaluation, selection, arrangement, in short: interpretation)." Pelling 2009, 183-187 makes the same point with regard to what is in the speeches. See also White 1987, 1-58.

[25] E.g. Stahl 1973, 62.

[26] Pelling 2009, 177 astutely remarks about this passage: "No sentence in the Greek language can have been taken quite so variously as that on the speeches here." The translation and interpretation given here are therefore just meant to be taken as *my* reading of this contentious chapter, without claiming that it is the *only possible* variant.

> And with respect to what each of them said in a speech, either on the verge of waging war or already being in it, it was difficult to recall the accurate version of the things that were said – difficult for me to recall those that I heard myself, and difficult for those who reported to me what they had heard from some other quarter. Therefore, in the manner as it appeared to me that each of them would have said the things that were most called for regarding the situations that were occurring at each moment, all the while adhering as closely as possible to the general sense of the things that were truly said – such is the manner in which they have been expressed.[27]

Thucydides here shows a concern with both an accurate representation of a speech (ἀκρίβεια) and "the things that were called for" (τὰ δέοντα) on the occasion of its delivery. Depending on the relative weight assigned to each element, one's reading of the speeches becomes either that of a historic reconstruction or that of a literary insertion. Scholars have accordingly divided the hermeneutics of the speeches into 'accuratist' and 'free composition' readings and tended to explain the occurrence of them in light of their own paradigm.[28] Forsdyke, for instance, emphasizes Thucydides' remarks on the problems of memory, explaining the speeches primarily as reconstructions of the actual λεχθέντα.[29] Scholars like Strauss, on the other hand, who favour a more universalizing reading of Thucydides, explain the speeches as literary devices which are meant to help the narrator 'show, not tell' the war's opposing points of view, allowing for a freer range of subjects and diction.[30]

As for me, in keeping with my previous assumption about the didactic purpose of Thucydides' text, I am inclined to favour – within bounds – a 'free composition' reading of the speeches. My reasons are twofold. First, I believe that there is structural evidence for a literary purpose in the frequent occurrence of opposed speeches ('antilogies'), which suggests a dramatic form of exposition analogous to that of the tragedians.[31] Even if each antilogy rested on historically uttered words and sentiments, the choice to include them with this frequency suggests an illustrative purpose on the historian's part. Second, in some instances, the speeches are verbally echoed in the ensuing narrative to evoke irony or some other feeling in the reader.[32] Such

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[27] Thucydides 1.22.1.

[28] Pelling 2009; Forsdyke 2017, 26-27.

[29] Forsdyke 2017, 26: "Thucydides admits the impossibility of knowing the precise words of the speeches, including those that he himself heard. As a consequence, he was forced to compose the speeches according to what seemed to him to be necessary for the business of persuasion – that is to say, arguments needed to convince hearers to adopt the speaker's suggestions."

[30] Strauss 1974, 166: "For what distinguishes Thucydides' speech from the speeches of his characters? The speeches are partial, in a double sense. They deal with a particular situation or difficulty, and they are spoken from the point of view of one or the other side of the warring cities or contending parties. Thucydides' narrative corrects this partiality: Thucydides' speech is impartial in the double sense. It is not partisan and it is comprehensive since it deals, to say the least, with the whole war. By integrating the political speeches into the true and comprehensive speech, he makes visible the fundamental difference between the political speech and the true speech."

[31] Joho 2017 analyzes the narrative techniques employed by Thucydides in connection to the epic and tragic genres, arguing that "to some extent, we may conclude that Thucydides has sacrificed consistency of principle to literary artistry and depth of interpretation" (603).

[32] Stahl 1973, 65-69 illustrates this with the poignant example of the Sicilian debacle. In Nicias' speeches dissuading the Sicilian Expedition in book 6, he warns about the possibility of a Sicilian coalition combining against Athens, a lack of supplies, and a shortage of cavalry. Alcibiades argues the exact opposite viewpoint. In the ensuing narrative, Thucydides confirms all three of Nicias' worries, indicating that of the two leaders, Nicias

explicit 'refutations' of what was said by what was subsequently done, indicate that the former has been written with a view to the latter. To me, all this suggests that the speeches are meant as more than just verbatim records, which is the second assumption from which I shall proceed.

Having made explicit the hermeneutic assumptions upon which my reading of Thucydides is based, I shall now turn to the analysis of the speeches proper – starting with the Corcyraean debate. For each of the speeches, I will select and interpret passages that are relevant for the role of power in Thucydides' narrative, reflecting on the dialectic between speeches and events.

The Corcyraean debate: the appeal of justice and the calculus of interest

Having described Greece's most ancient history in a section commonly known as the 'Archaeology' (1.2-23), Thucydides jumps *in medias res* to relate the unfolding conflict between Corcyra and Corinth. This brief war, together with the crises around Potidaea and Thebes, formed one of the alleged causes which led to the outbreak of the war – the undisclosed, 'truest' cause (according to Thucydides) being Athens' rise to greatness and the fear this evoked in Sparta. Before going to the narrative proper, Thucydides presents the distinction between these two types of causes with great emphasis.

> τὴν μὲν γὰρ ἀληθεστάτην πρόφασιν, ἀφανεστάτην δὲ λόγῳ τοὺς Ἀθηναίους ἡγοῦμαι μεγάλους γεγενημένους καὶ φόβον παρέχοντας τοῖς Λακεδαιμονίοις ἀναγκάσαι ἐς τὸ πολεμεῖν· αἱ δ' ἐς το φανερὸν λεγόμεναι αἰτίαι αἵδ' ἦσαν ἑκατέρων, ἀφ' ὧν λύσαντες τὰς σπονδὰς ἐς τὸν πόλεμον κατέστησαν.
>
> For the truest cause – which is, however, the most obscure in speech – I believe to have been that the Athenians' having become great and having imbued fear in the Lacedaemonians forced them to go to war. But the openly spoken of complaints made by each, because of which they dissolved the treaty and commenced the war, were the following.[33]

A contrast between manifest and latent causes, the latter of which are seen as more fundamental, is important for Thucydides, and besides providing the compositional structure of the first book it also frequently recurs in the speeches, as we shall soon see.[34]

The situation was as follows. The city of Epidamnus, a colony of Corcyra in which there were also Corinthian settlers, fell prey to civil strife, as a result of which the people expelled the city's oligarchs. The exiles joined 'the barbarians' around the city to lay siege to their former

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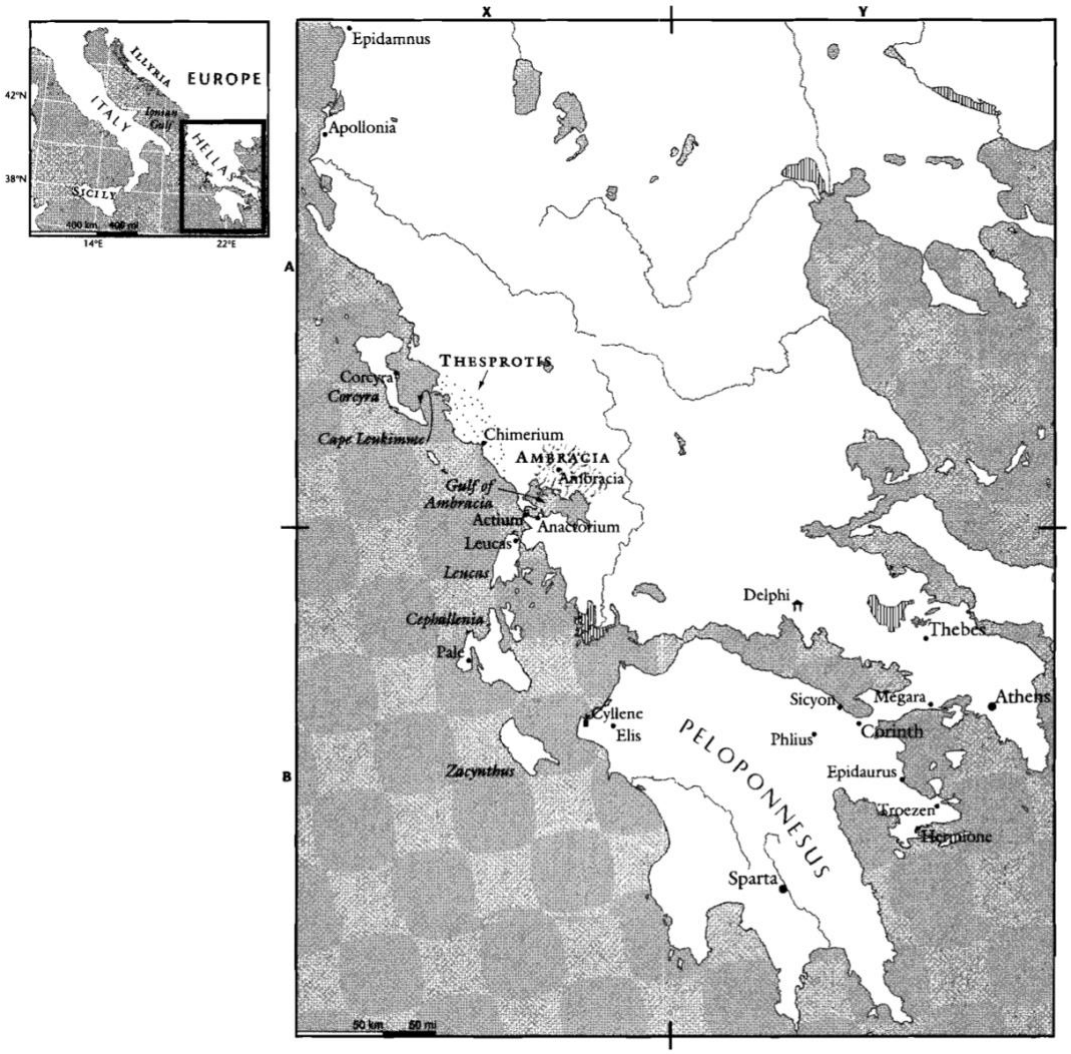
had the better political foresight. The verbal echoes in the narrative noted by Stahl – sometimes including a repetition of the exact words used in the speeches – strongly hint at a literary unity between both.

[33] Thuc. 1.23.6. Thucydides here uses two different words to denote the different types of causes: πρόφασις and αἰτία. The term πρόφασις here denotes the most fundamental reason for going to war, while αἰτίαι are the lesser reasons and grounds for complaint to which the parties appeal as their *casus belli*. The translation of these terms can cause problems, since the normal, lexical use of the words is different – πρόφασις indicating "a motive or cause alleged, whether truly or falsely," and αἰτία "an imputation of guilt or blame" (LSJ, pp. 1539 and 44 respecitvely). Thucydides, however, seems to be employing πρόφασις in a whole variety of ways, including the neutral, medical use of "explanation." For an enlightening discussion of the meaning of these words in Herodotus, Demosthenes, Thucydides, and Polybius, see Pearson 1952.

[34] See Connor 1984, 32-33 for how Thucydides' distinction between manifest and latent causes structures the rest of the events in book 1. Cf. also Allison 2013, 261-270.

home, causing the Epidamnian people to appeal to Corcyra for help. As Corcyra refused to intervene, however, the Epidamnians turned to Corinth, which was all too happy to indulge their request – being resentful of Corcyra, which had itself been a colony of Corinth but had now become estranged from its metropolis. The Corinthians therefore sent out a volunteer force to help the Epidamnian people, which prompted the Corcyraeans to take up the cause of the exiled oligarchs and demand the withdrawal of all Corinthian troops and settlers. When this request was refused, the Corcyraeans themselves besieged the city, which provoked the Corinthians to send out a relief force. Corcyra then suggested to solve the dispute by arbitration, but the Corinthians demanded that the Corcyraeans first withdraw their besieging force – which was met by the equal and opposite demand of the Corcyraeans that the Corinthians withdraw *their* original troops and settlers. Finding themselves in a diplomatic stalemate, it came to a sea battle at Leukimme – which the Corcyraeans won, leading to the surrender of Epidamnus to Corcyra. Corinth, enraged, prepared a much larger force to avenge its loss, sparing no expenses to equip a massive fleet.[35]



Map 1: The Corinthian expedition to Corcyra.

[35] Thuc. 1.24-31

It is at this point that both parties turn to the Athenians, hoping to stack the odds in their favour. Corcyra did this mainly out of fear: "The Corcyraeans, having learned of their [the Corinthians'] preparations, started to become afraid" (πυνθανόμενοι δὲ οἱ Κερκυραῖοι τὴν παρασκευὴν αὐτῶν ἐφοβοῦντο). They saw that they were isolated, and wanted to see whether they could obtain any help from the Athenians for the sake of their survival – any straw they could grasp at. The Corinthians, by contrast, were motivated by a preventive motive: being fairly confident in their upcoming victory, they wanted to anticipate any possible nuisances, "lest, in addition to the Corcyraean fleet, the newly joined Athenian fleet should present itself as an obstacle to conducting the war as they wished" (ὅπως μὴ σφίσι πρὸς τῷ Κερκυραίων ναυτικῷ τὸ Ἀττικὸν προσγενόμενον ἐμπόδιον γένηται θέσθαι τὸν πόλεμον ᾗ ἥλθον).[36] Both vantage points, resulting from an unequal position in the balance of power, become apparent in their respective speeches to the Athenian assembly – the Corcyraeans humbly approaching the Athenians, but ingeniously turning around the calculus of interest, while the Corinthians take a more moralistic approach, covertly (and sometimes overtly) threatening their listeners.

The Corcyraeans speak first. They begin with the word δίκαιον ("right," to which ἐστίν is to be supplied in the imagination), suggesting that they will centre their speech around what is just and fair. These expectations, however, are immediately subverted. Explaining and justifying their own motives for coming to Athens, the envoys say:

> δίκαιον, ὦ Ἀθηναῖοι, τοὺς μήτε εὐεργεσίας μεγάλης μήτε ξυμμαχίας προυφειλομένης ἥκοντας παρὰ τοὺς πέλας ἐπικούριας, ὥσπερ καὶ ἡμεῖς νῦν, δεησόμενους ἀναδιδάξαι πρῶτον, μάλιστα μὲν ὡς καὶ ξύμφορα δέονται, εἰ δε μή, ὅτι γε οὐκ ἐπιζήμια, ἔπειτα δὲ ὡς καὶ τὴν χάριν βέβαιον ἕξουσιν.
>
> It is right, Athenians, for those who, while there is neither a great work of well-doing nor an alliance to be repaid, have nevertheless come to others for help, as we are doing now, that they should first show in their request that they are above all else asking for things that are beneficial – and if not, that they are at least not detrimental – and furthermore, that they will also remain firm in their gratitude.[37]

By acknowledging that they cannot appeal to any moral debt left out to be repaid, the Corcyraeans – in their very first sentence – turn the issue away from merit and towards utility. What they expect themselves to prove is that what they are about to propose is in the Athenian interest or at least not opposed to it, and that Corcyra will be indebted to Athens as a result – an obligation in which they will not waver. The envoys are preparing the ground for their most important argument, as we shall later see.

But how is this sudden shift in policy to be explained? The listener is likely to be sceptical of the motives behind such a sudden appeal to help. Hence, the envoys feel compelled to disarm the suspicion by blaming themselves.

> τετύχηκε δὲ τὸ αὐτὸ ἐπιτήδευμα πρός τε ὑμᾶς ἐς τὴν χρείαν ἡμῖν ἄλογον καὶ ἐς τὰ ἡμέτερα αὐτῶν ἐν τῷ πάροντι ἀξύμφορον.

[36] Thuc. 1.31.2-3.
[37] Thuc. 1.32.1.

> It has so turned out that our policy towards you has been unreasonable, and inconvenient with respect to our own affairs at the present time.[38]

The unreasonableness of their practice, they explain, lies in their not having associated with any allies. This turns out to have been a grave error – an error on which they have now been corrected.

> ἡ δοκοῦσα ἡμῶν πρότερον σωφροσύνη (…) νῦν ἀβουλία καὶ ἀσθένεια φαινομένη.
>
> That which we before thought prudence (…) has now shown itself to be poor counsel and weakness.[39]

Having assured the Athenians of their good faith and the sincerity of their search for an alliance, the envoys begin to put forth their substantive arguments. Beginning in a general way, they first promise the Athenians a "splendid coincidence" (καλὴ ξυντυχία) of interests. They list three advantages that will arise from helping Corcyra to defend itself:

> πρῶτον μὲν ὅτι ἀδικουμένοις καὶ οὐχ ἑτέρους βλάπτουσι τὴν ἐπικουρίαν ποιήσεσθε, ἔπειτα περὶ τῶν μεγίστων κινδυνεύοντας δεξάμενοι ὡς ἄν μάλιστα μετ᾽ αἰειμνήστου μαρτυρίου τὴν χάριν καταθήσεσθε, ναυτικόν τε κεκτήμεθα πλὴν τοῦ παρ᾽ ὑμῖν πλεῖστον.
>
> First, that you give help to those who are wronged and not to those who harm others; second, that you, by receiving those who are at risk concerning their greatest values, above all establish your goodwill with a proof that shall be ever remembered; and finally, that we possess the largest fleet except for you.[40]

Only the first argument is of a moral nature: the Corcyraeans assert that they are the ones who are wronged, the Corinthians the wrongdoers. The two remaining arguments are closely linked and can, in fact, be regarded as part of a single proposition: "If you help us now, we, with our enormous fleet, will surely help you in the future." It is interesting to note how the Corcyraeans turn the tables on the Athenians by making *them* into the beneficiaries of the deal: the alliance is presented as an unexpected benefit for Athens, for which they have to do little in order to gain a large fleet for their confederacy.

> καὶ σκέψαστε τίς εὐπραξία σπανιώτερα ἢ τίς τοῖς πολεμίοις λυπηρότερα, εἰ ἦν ὑμεῖς ἂν πρὸ πολλῶν χρημάτων καὶ χάριτος ἐτιμήσασθε δύναμιν ὑμῖν προσγένεσθαι, αὕτη πάρεστιν αὐτεπάγγελτος, ἄνευ κινδύνων καὶ δαπάνης διδοῦσα ἑαυτὴν καὶ προσέτι φέρουσα ἐς μὲν τοὺς πολλοὺς ἀρετήν, οἷς δὲ ἐπαμυνεῖτε χάριν, ὑμῖν δ᾽ αὐτοῖς ἰσχύν.

[38] Thuc. 1.32.3. Hornblower 1997, 76-77 translates ἄλογον here as 'inconsistent', basing himself on Classen's view in his commentary ad. loc. that "ἄλογον einen Wiederspruch in sich enthält." It seems to me, however, that a broader notion of unreasonabless is also suitable here, since the Corcyraeans are trying to establish that they ought to have acted differently and were previously unenlightened about their real interests.
[39] Thuc. 1.32.4. See also 1.32.5, where the Corcyraeans explain the error of their ways as not arising from any sinister intention, but from a mistake in judgment (δοξῆς δὲ μᾶλλον ἁμαρτίᾳ).
[40] Thuc. 1.33.1.

> And consider what good business could be rarer or more painful to your enemies than if that power, the acquiring of which you would have valued above much money and goodwill – that it would be possible that that power gave itself to you spontaneously, without danger and expense, and would furthermore bring you a reputation for virtue among the many, gratitude with those you protect, and strength for yourselves.[41]

All this begs the question why the Athenians would need such a large fleet in the first place: do they have something to fear? The envoys promptly address this lingering thought with what they next assert about the inevitability of a looming war.

> τὸν δὲ πόλεμον δί ὅνπερ χρήσιμοι ἄν εἶμεν, εἴ τις ὑμῶν μὴ οἴεται ἔσεσθαι, γνώμης ἁμαρτάνει καὶ οὐκ αἰσθάνεται τοὺς Λακεδαιμονίους φόβῳ τῷ ὑμετέρῳ πολεμησείοντας καὶ τοὺς Κορινθίους, δυνάμενους παρ᾽ αὐτοῖς, καὶ ὑμῖν ἐχθροὺς ὄντας καὶ προκαταλαμβάνοντας ἡμᾶς νῦν ἐς τὴν ὑμετέραν ἐπιχείρησιν, ἵνα μὴ τῷ κοινῷ ἔχθει κατ᾽ αὐτοὺς μετ᾽ ἀλλήλων στῶμεν μηδὲ δυοῖν φθάσαι ἁμάρτωσιν, ἢ κακῶσαι ἡμᾶς ἢ σφᾶς αὐτοὺς βεβαιώσασθαι.
>
> And the war throughout which we could be useful – if any among you thinks that it will not occur, he errs in his judgment and does not perceive that the Lacedaemonians will go to war out of their fear for you and that the Corinthians, being influential among them, are hostile to you and will seize us now with a view to attacking you, lest we stand united against them in common hatred and lest they fail to do two things: either bring us to ruin or strengthen themselves.[42]

Not without reason does Gomme refer to this part of the argument as "the essential point."[43] By tying the affairs around Epidamnus and Corcyra in with the Peloponnesian League and asserting that a war between it and Athens is inevitable, the Corcyraeans aim to evoke a sense of urgency in the Athenians that will lead them to pre-empt (προκαταλαμβάνειν) that which would otherwise occur regardless. Hence, despite some legalistic arguments about the Thirty Years' Peace treaty and about who is to blame for the escalation, the Corcyraeans at the end of their speech return to the question of naval interest. Indeed, they explicitly distinguish themselves as a nautical rather than a continental ally (ναυτικὴ καὶ οὐκ ἠπειρώτις ξυμμαχία), promising Athens additional strength where it brings most benefit.[44] Finally, after reminding the Athenians of Corcyra's convenient location on the way to Sicily – possibly a foreshadowing by Thucydides of the events in book six – the Corcyraeans close with the following crucial observation:

> τρία μὲν ὄντα λόγου ἄξια τοῖς Ἕλλησι ναυτικά, τὸ παρ᾽ ὑμῖν καὶ τὸ ἡμέτερον καὶ τὸ Κορινθίων· τούτων δ᾽ εἰ περιόψεσθε τὰ δύο ἐς ταὐτὸν

[41] Thuc. 1.33.3. Gomme 1945, 168 adds: "Note the purely moral connotation of ἀρετή, because Athens will be helping the victims of oppression." Although by far the least important point in the speech, it might serve to justify the course of action just enough for the Athenians to rationalize their decision with a good conscience.
[42] Thuc. 1.33.3.
[43] Gomme 1945, 168.
[44] Thuc. 1.35.5.

> ἐλθεῖν καὶ Κορίνθιοι ἡμᾶς προκαταλήψονται, Κερκυραίοις τε καὶ Πελοποννησίοις ἅμα ναυμαχήσετε· δεξάμενοι δὲ ἡμᾶς ἔξετε πρὸς αὐτοὺς πλείοσι ναυσί ταῖς ἡμετέραις ἀγωνίζεσθαι.
>
> There being but three fleets that are worth speaking of among the Hellenes, yours and ours and that of the Corinthians, if you will allow two of them to be merged into the same one and the Corinthians to seize us before you do, you will fight both the Corcyraeans and the Peloponnesians at sea – but by receiving us you will be able to confront them with more ships, namely ours.[45]

In contrast to the Corcyraean emphasis on the benefits they can bring, the Corinthians apply a different rhetorical strategy. They argue mainly from a moralistic point of view along two axes: the right of a metropolis to punish its rebellious colonies, and the repayment of past services shown by Corinth. This moralistic point of view pervades the speech not only in its content, but also in its choice of words – for example, in the usage of verbs such as "committing injustice" (ἀδικεῖν) and "mistreating" (ὑβρίζεσθαι). The Corinthian rhetorical strategy can therefore be regarded as the mirror image of that of the Corcyraeans. Thucydides goes to great lengths to highlight the oppositeness of their pleas in his composition – even making the Corinthians begin theirs with "necessary" (ἀναγκαῖον) as a mirror image of the Corcyraean "right" (δίκαιον).

Proceeding to the Corinthian speech proper, then, we observe that first in the order of business is a rebuttal of what the Corcyraeans had said in their *captatio benevolentiae*, in order to cast doubt upon the sincerity of their motives. This the Corinthians already do in explicitly moral terms, accusing them of harbouring the intention of committing injustice as they please.

> φασὶ δὲ ξυμμαχίαν διὰ τὸ σῶφρον οὐδενός πω δέξεσθαι· τὸ δ' ἐπὶ κακουργίᾳ καὶ οὐκ ἀρετῇ ἐπετήδευσαν ξύμμαχόν τε οὐδένα βουλόμενοι πρὸς τὰδικήματα οὔτε μάρτυρα ἔχειν οὔτε παρακαλοῦντες αἰσχύνεσθαι. (…) κἀν τούτῳ τὸ εὐπρεπὲς ἄσπονδον οὐχ ἵνα μὴ ξυναδικήσωσιν ἑτέροις προβέβληνται, ἀλλ' ὅπως κατὰ μόνας ἀδικῶσι, καὶ ὅπως ἐν ᾧ μὲν ἂν κρατῶσι βιάζονται, οὗ δ' ἂν λάθωσι, πλέον ἔχωσιν, ἢν δὲ πού τι προσλάβωσιν, ἀναισχυντῶσι.
>
> They say that they have never accepted an alliance out of wise moderation: but they did this with a view to doing evil, not out of virtue, and because they wanted neither a witness of their injustices nor to feel shame by calling upon them. (…) And their fair-sounding isolation from alliances was not to avoid their presenting themselves to those who commit injustice, but to commit injustice by themselves – and that they might overpower where they are stronger, take more where they are not seen, and remain unashamed when they have seized something.[46]

[45] Thuc. 1.36.3.

[46] Thuc. 1.37.2 and 1.37.4. The translation of τὸ σῶφρον as "a wise moderation" is taken from Hornblower 1997, 80; that of τὸ εὐπρεπὲς ἄσπονδον derived from Classen's commentary ad loc., who renders it as ''die schönklingende Bündnislösigkeit.''

The envoys then proceed to their first substantive argument, which is presented as a rebuttal of what the Corcyraeans had previously asserted about their metropolis doing them wrong. The Corinthians declare a general principle according to which a colony is obliged to show respect to its metropolis, giving themselves a reason to accuse the Corcyraeans of acting hubristically.

> ἡμεῖς δὲ οὐδ' αὐτοί φαμεν ἐπὶ τῷ ὑπὸ τούτων ὑβρίζεσθαι κατοικίσαι, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ τῷ ἡγεμόνες τε εἶναι καὶ τὰ εἰκότα θαυμάζεσθαι.
>
> But we ourselves say that we did not found this colony to be hubristically mistreated by them, but to be their overlords and to be admired by them according to what is fair.[47]

Not surprisingly, then, they conclude that the Epidamnian affair is reflective of a rebellious colony that does not know its place and acts against the moral demands of relations between cities. This allows the Corinthians to characterize Corcyra's actions as brazenly unjust and violent.

> καλὸν δ' ἦν, εἰ καὶ ἡμαρτάνομεν, τοῖσδε μὲν εἶξαι τῇ ἡμετέρᾳ ὀργῇ. ἡμῖν δὲ αἰσχρὸν βιάσασθαι τὴν τούτων μετριότητα· ὕβρει δὲ καὶ ἐξουσίᾳ πλούτου πολλὰ ἐς ἡμᾶς ἄλλα τε ἡμαρτήκασι καὶ Ἐπίδαμνον ἡμετέραν οὖσαν κακουμένην μὲν οὐ προσεποιοῦντο, ἐλθόντων δὲ ἡμῶν ἐπὶ τιμωρίᾳ ἑλόντες βίᾳ ἔχουσι.
>
> It would be a fine thing, even if we were in the wrong, for them to give way to our anger, while it would be shameful for us to violate their moderation: but out of hubris and abundance of wealth they have sinned against us in many other things, too, and also in the fact that they never claimed Epidamnus, which was ours, while it was being wronged, but when we arrived for vengeance they seized it by force and still hold it.[48]

The second principle claimed by the Corinthians is that Athens has been shown great favours in the past and should now return like for like – in particular with regard to rebel colonies. The Corinthians recall how they helped the Athenians put down revolts in Samos and Aegina, and now call on them to return the benefaction (εὐεργεσία), posing on them the moral demands of reciprocity.

> νεῶν γὰρ μακρῶν σπανίσαντές ποτε πρὸς τὸν Αἰγινητῶν ὑπὲρ τὰ Μηδικὰ μόλεμον παρὰ Κορινθίων εἴκοσι ναῦς ἐλάβετε· καὶ ἡ εὐεργεσία αὕτη τε καὶ ἡ ἐς Σαμίους τὸ δι' ἡμᾶς Πελοποννησίους αὐτοῖς μὴ βοηθῆσαι, παρέσχεν ὑμῖν Αἰγινητῶν μὲν ἐπικράτησιν, Σαμίων δὲ κόλασιν, πάρεσχεν ὑμῖν Αἰγινητῶν μὲν ἐπικράτησιν, Σαμίων δὲ κόλασιν, καὶ ἐν καιροῖς τοιούτοις ἐγένετο, οἷς μάλιστα ἄνθρωποι ἐπ' ἐχθροὺς τοὺς σφετέρους ἰόντες τῶν πάντων ἀπειρίοπτοί εἰσι παρὰ τὸ νικᾶν.
>
> For when you were lacking in big ships for a war against the Aeginetans before the Medic Wars, you took one hundred ships from the Corinthians: and this good service, this one and the one against the

[47] Thuc. 1.38.2.
[48] Thuc. 1.38.5.

> Samians, in which because of us the Peloponnesians did not help them, provided you with the conquest of the Aeginetans and the punishment of the Samians – and this happened at such decisive moments in which men, going forth against their enemies, are heedless of everything but achieving victory.[49]

It is not presented entirely in moral terms, however. Almost as an *obiter dictum* the Corinthians remark that, by allowing her colony to essentially break free, Athens endangers its own empire, because other colonies could subsequently conceive of doing the same. The general principle, at first presented as a moral truth, is thereby also transformed into an appeal to Athenian self-interest.

> εἰ γὰρ τοὺς κακόν τι δρῶντας δεχόμενοι τιμωρήσετε, φανεῖται καὶ ἅ τῶν ὑμετέρων οὐκ ἐλάσσω ἡμῖν πρόσεισι, καὶ τὸν νόμον ἐφ ὑμῖν αὐτοῖς μᾶλλον ἢ ἐφ' ἡμῖν θήσετε.
>
> For if you, by receiving those who commit a wrong, help them, it will appear that your subjects shall no less come over to us, and you will introduce the custom more against yourselves than against us.[50]

They do not press this point, however, instead returning to the issue of justice. Immediately after their veiled threat, the Corinthians appeal to the entitlements they can make according to the laws or customs of the Hellenes (δικαιώματα κατὰ τοὺς Ἑλλήνων νόμους).[51] Finally, towards the end of the speech, they restate their central demands on no less than two occasions.

> ἡμεῖς δὲ περιπεπτωκότες οἷς ἐν τῇ Λακεδαίμονι αὐτοὶ προείπομεν τοὺς σφετέρους ξυμμάχους αὐτόν τινα κολάζειν, νῦν παρ' ὑμῶν τὸ αὐτὸ ἀξιοῦμεν κομίζεσθαι, καὶ μὴ τῇ ἡμετέρᾳ ψήφῳ ὠφεληθέντας τῇ ὑμετέρᾳ ἡμᾶς βλάψαι. (…) καὶ τάδε ποιοῦντες τὰ προσήκοντά τε δράσετε καὶ τὰ ἄριστα βουλεύσεσθε ὑμῖν αὐτοῖς.
>
> And since we have ended up in a situation about which we ourselves had spoken before in Lacedaemon – namely that everyone keeps within bounds his own allies – we now deem it worthy that the same is heeded by you, and that you do not, having been helped by our vote, hurt us with yours. (…) And by doing these things you will both do what is fitting and best take counsel for yourselves.[52]

Which of these two rhetorical strategies was more successful: the Corcyraean or the Corinthian approach? Thucydides informs us in the subsequent chapter that the Corcyraean arguments ultimately carried the day. The Athenians decided not to conclude a full alliance in which they would regard the same people as enemies or friends (ξυμμαχία ὥστε τοὺς αὐτους ἐχθροὺς καὶ φίλους νομίζειν), but to nonetheless agree to the Corcyraeans' request for a defensive alliance in which they would help each other in case of attack (ἐπιμάχια τῇ ἀλλήλων βοηθεῖν).[53] The

[49] Thuc. 1.41.2. Cf. an earlier remark about the Samian incident in 1.40.5, where the Corinthians claim to have openly defended their principle in the face of their allies.
[50] Thuc. 1.40.6.
[51] Thuc. 1.41.1.
[52] Thuc. 1.43.1 and 1.43.4.
[53] Thuc. 1.44.1.

reason cited for this decision is that the Athenians ultimately judged it too risky in light of a coming Peloponnesian War to allow the Corcyraean navy to be either destroyed or annexed to a potential enemy.[54] Considerations of interest ultimately prevailed over the appeal to justice and morals. Nor did the Athenians turn out disappointed in the course of events: the combined Corcyraean-Athenian fleet successfully held off the Corinthians, securing for Athens a powerful naval asset in Corcyraean allegiance.[55] An important step had been taken towards winning a future Peloponnesian War – as it would have seemed at the time, at least.

However, Thucydides gives us one remarkable detail about the Athenians' decision-making process in taking this course: after having listened to the speeches, the vote was somehow postponed to a subsequent assembly. We are told that Corinth had gained the Athenians' initial sympathy, but that the second assembly ultimately decided in favour of Corcyra for the reasons explained above.[56] What are we to make of this? It could be that the Corinthians had simply won over the Athenians by virtue of them having been the last to speak – as often happens in deliberative rhetoric. However, recalling the distinction that Thucydides had made in 1.23 between the 'alleged' and the 'truest' causes of the war, this division between an initial sympathy for Corinth and a calculated choice in favour of Corcyra mirrors both types of causes in the reasoning process of a belligerent. Intuitively, Athens would have been attracted by an appeal to justice, but once riper deliberation regarding its empire had taken place, the interest-based decision ultimately won out. Thucydides might thereby be hinting at the inevitability of power politics, despite the intuitive appeal of moral theories.

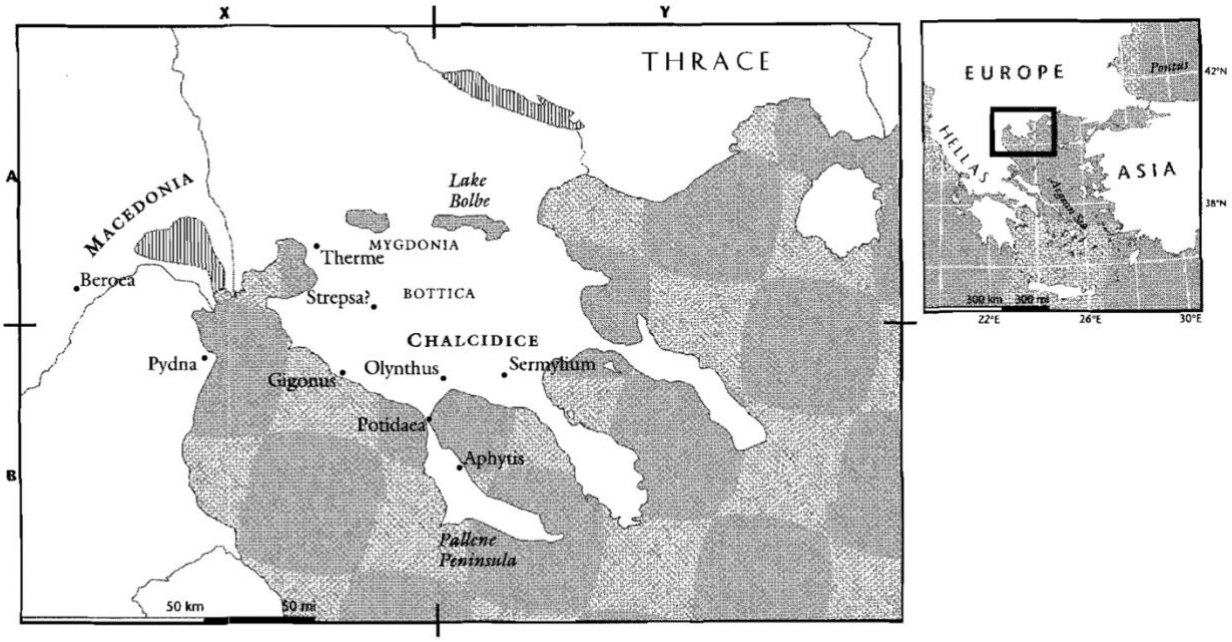
The conference at Sparta: national character and empire

Athens' defence of Corcyrean independence was only one of the alleged causes (αἰτίαι) leading to sour relations between the Delian and Peloponnesian Leagues. After this, Thucydides informs us, there "immediately" (εὐθύς) arose a new conflict or difference (διάφορα) which was to prove just as crucial to the outbreak of the war.[57] It was, in fact, a dispute similar to the previous one: the city of Potidaea, originally a Corinthian colony, but formally subjected to Athens, became the subject of controversy, because the Athenians feared that it might revolt with Corinthian help and take many of its strategically located tributaries in Thrace with them.[58]

Hence, the Potidaeans were ordered to take down their walls – something they refused to do, instead seeking help from the Peloponnesian League and resorting to open rebellion.[59] The Athenians, informed of the revolt and of Corinthian efforts to support it with volunteers and mercenaries, proceeded to send their own forces to Chalcidice and promptly invested the city with heavy siege works.[60] While this was in effect an open confrontation between Athenian and Corinthian troops, "the war had not yet broken out, but a truce yet remained: for the Corinthians

[54] Thuc. 1.44.2.
[55] Thuc. 1.45-1.55.
[56] Thuc. 1.44.1. Cf. Westlake 1973, 93-94.
[57] Thuc. 1.56.1.
[58] Thuc. 1.56.2.
[59] Thuc. 1.57.
[60] Thuc. 1.61-65.

had done this in a private capacity" (οὐ μέντοι ὅ γε πόλεμός πω ξυνερρώγει, ἀλλ' ἔτι ἀνοκωχὴ ἦν· ἰδίᾳ γὰρ ταῦτα οἱ Κορίνθιοι ἔπραξαν).[61] But peace now hung in the balance.



Map 2: Potidaea.

It was at this point that the Peloponnesian League convened in Sparta to discuss the situation. Thucydides seizes upon this significant moment of deliberation – with the Hellenic world on the brink of war – to explore both sides of the conflict psychologically. Connor has remarked that, while the first pair of speeches between Corcyra and Corinth served to illustrate the material aspects of the war (namely the strength of navies), this second antilogy casts light on "the less tangible considerations, the morale and determination of the belligerents.''[62] And just as previously it appeared that Athens had gained a material advantage by acquiring for itself the second-largest fleet in Hellas, so too do the Corinthians now argue that Athens has the psychological advantage of superior daring, in an attempt to bait the Spartans into taking action. This forms the core strategy of their speech – which is thereby at once a rhetorical *tour de force* and a historiographical contrast of national characters.[63]

The Corinthians were the last to speak, after many other Peloponnesian allies (including the recently wronged Megarians) had already brought forth their accusations.[64] Corinth serves as the climax of these complaints, only stepping forward "after having allowed the others to first enrage the Lacedaemonians" (τοὺς ἄλλους ἐάσαντες πρῶτον παροξῦναι τοὺς Λακεδαιμονίους).[65] After opening their speech by reminding the Spartans how often they had already warned them of the Athenian menace, they seize upon the latest events around Corcyra to once again press home the point and exhort the Spartans to finally do something. To create

[61] Thuc. 1.66.5.
[62] Connor 1984, 37.
[63] So, too, says Jaeger 1936, 494-495: '"Dieses Feindeslob vor Feinden, auch im Sinne der Rhetorik eine schriftstellerische Höchstleistung, erfüllt für den Geschichtschreiber außer seinem unmittelbaren agitatorischen Zweck noch einen höheren: es gibt eine einzigartige Analyse der psychologischen Grundlagen der Machtentwicklung Athens."
[64] Thuc. 1.67.
[65] Thuc. 1.67.5.

an additional sense of urgency, they ascribe to the Athenians aggressive intentions – which they claim are ultimately also directed against the Peloponnesians themselves.

> νῦν δέ τί δεῖ μακρηγορεῖν, ὧν τοὺς μὲν δεδουλωμένους ὁρᾶτε, τοῖς δ' ἐπιβουλεύοντας αὐτούς, καὶ οὐχ ἥκιστα τοῖς ὑμετέροις ξυμμάχοις, καὶ ἐκ πολλοῦ προπαρεσκευασμένους, εἴ ποτε πολεμήσονται; οὐ γὰρ ἂν Κέρκυράν τε ὑπολαβόντες βίᾳ ἡμῶν εἶχον καὶ Ποτείδαιαν ἐπολιόρκουν· ὧν τὸ μὲν ἐπικαιρότατον χωρίον πρὸς τὰ ἐπὶ Θρᾴκης ἀποχρῆσθαι, ἡ δὲ ναυτικὸν ἂν μέγιστον παρέσχε τοῖς Πελοποννησίοις.
>
> But what need is there now to speak at great length, if among them you see that they have already enslaved some and are planning to do so with others, and in particular your allies, and that they have long been prepared if they should ever fight a war? For otherwise they would not have taken Corcyra from us by force and besieged Potidaea – the latter of which could have been the most convenient place for actions against Thrace, while the former would have provided the Peloponnesians with an enormous navy.[66]

With their actions, the Athenians have not just harmed Corinth's interests, but Hellas as a whole (ἠδίκουν τὴν Ἑλλάδα).[67] In the face of such wanton aggression, indolence is not merely blameworthy, but positively harmful. Athens could only arrive at such heights of audacity because the Spartans let them. Hence, the Corinthians do not beat around the bush and bluntly tell their audience who they believe to be responsible: "Of these things, *you* are guilty" (τῶνδε ὑμεῖς αἴτιοι).[68] In fact, they go on to argue that the Spartans are even more guilty than the Athenians themselves by not intervening while they could have stopped them. This is particularly hypocritical, the Corinthians assert, in light of the Spartans' claim to be the custodians of Hellenic liberty.

> οὐ γὰρ ὁ δουλωσάμενος, ἀλλ' ὁ δυνάμενος μὲν παῦσαι, περιορῶν δὲ ἀληθέστερον αὐτὸ δρᾷ, εἴπερ καὶ τὴν ἀξίωσιν τῆς ἀρετῆς ὡς ἐλευθερῶν τὴν Ἑλλάδα φέρεται.
>
> For not the man who has enslaved another, but the one who could have stopped him and instead looked on has in truth done the enslaving – if indeed he carries the reputation for virtue as being the one who liberates Hellas.[69]

The Corinthians also assert that the Spartans are the *only* ones guilty of such inactivity. They seem to have been surprised by this, given the Lacedaemonian reputation for bellicose achievements which had been handed down from the time of the Persian Wars.

> ἡσυχάζετε γὰρ μόνοι Ἑλλήνων, ὦ Λακεδαιμόνιοι, οὐ τῇ δυνάμει τινά, ἀλλὰ τῇ μελλήσει ἀμυνόμενοι καὶ μόνοι οὐκ ἀρχομένην τὴν αὔξησιν

[66] Thuc. 1.68.3-4.
[67] Thuc. 1.68.3.
[68] Thuc. 1.69.1.
[69] Thuc. 1.69.1.

> τῶν ἐχθρῶν, διπλασιουμένην δὲ καταλύοντες. καίτοι ἐλέγεσθε ἀσφαλεῖς εἶναι, ὧν ἄρα ὁ λόγος τοῦ ἔργου ἐκράτει.
>
> For you are the only ones among the Hellenes to remain at rest, Lacedaemonians, warding off something not with your power, but with your intentions that are not carried into effect, and being the only ones to destroy the power of their enemies not when it is just emerging, but after it has already doubled. And yet you were reputed to be trustworthy – in which, apparently, the story was more powerful than the deed.[70]

How, then, is their negligence in the face of such manifest danger to be explained? This is where the Corinthians introduce their comparative character sketch. They begin by asserting the absolute difference between the two peoples – turning them, as it were, into each other's exact mirror images.

> περὶ ὧν οὐκ αἰσθάνεσθαι ἡμῖν γε δοκεῖτε οὐδ' ἐκλογίσασθαι πώποτε πρὸς οἵους ὑμῖν Ἀθηναίους ὄντας καὶ ὅσον ὑμῶν καὶ ὡς πᾶν διαφέροντας ὁ ἀγὼν ἔσται.
>
> Regarding these things, you do not seem to us to have ever perceived or considered against what kind of people it is that your struggle will take place, namely the Athenians, and to what degree and how absolutely different they are from you.[71]

The Corinthians then proceed to list – exhaustively – the behavioural manifestations of this character difference. The Spartans, they claim, are always one step behind the Athenians, because the former remain at rest while the latter are always on the move. Hence, whereas the Athenians acquire and expand and venture, the Spartans simply maintain and hold on to what they already have and are averse to commence new enterprises. The result is an almost metaphysical opposition of dynamism and stability – a confrontation, as it were, between Heraclitus and Parmenides on a geopolitical scale.

> οἱ μέν γε νεωτεροποιοὶ καὶ ἐπινοῆσαι ὀξεῖς καὶ ἐπιτελέσαι ἔργῳ ἃ ἂν γνῶσιν· ὑμεῖς δὲ τὰ ὑπάρχοντά τε σῴζειν καὶ ἐπιγνῶναι μηδὲν καὶ ἔργῳ οὐδὲ τἀναγκαῖα ἐξικέσθαι. αὖθις δὲ οἱ μὲν καὶ παρὰ δύναμιν τολμηταὶ καὶ παρὰ γνώσιν κινδυνευταὶ καὶ ἐπὶ τοῖς δεινοῖς εὐέλπιδες· τὸ δὲ ὑμέτερον τῆς τε δυνάμεως ἐνδεᾶ πρᾶξαι τῆς τε γνώσης μηδὲ τοῖς βεβαίοις πιστεῦσαι τῶν τε δεινῶν μηδέποτε οἴεσθαι ἀπολυθήσεσθαι. καὶ μὴν καὶ ἄοκνοι πρὸς ὑμᾶς μελλητὰς καὶ ἀποδημηταὶ πρὸς ἐνδημοτάτους· οἴονται γάρ οἱ μὲν τῇ ἀπουσίᾳ ἄν τι κτᾶσθαι, ὑμεῖς δὲ τῷ ἐπελθεῖν καὶ τὰ ἑτοῖμα ἂν βλάψαι. (…) ὥστε εἴ τις αὐτοὺς ξυνελὼν φαίη πεφύκεναι ἐπὶ τῷ μήτε αὐτοὺς ἔχειν ἡσυχίαν μήτε τοὺς ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους ἐᾶν ὀρθῶς ἂν εἴποι.
>
> They, at any rate, are revolutionaries and keen to contrive things and to execute by deeds what they have thought of; you, on the other hand, to safeguard what already exists and to decide nothing and to accomplish

[70] Thuc. 1.69.4-5.
[71] Thuc. 1.70.1.

> by deeds not even what is necessary. Moreover, they are daring beyond their power and venturesome beyond their knowledge and maintain good hopes in dreadful circumstances; but yours is it to act short of your power and knowledge, and not to be confident even in stable circumstances and to believe that you will never be released from what is dreadful. Indeed, they are a tireless people compared to you loiterers, and far-travellers compared to you home-dwellers: for they believe to gain something by their departure, while you believe that by going out you will even damage what is ready at hand. (…) So that if someone were to say, in summary, that they exist for the sake of not having any rest themselves and not allowing it to others, he would speak rightly.[72]

The terms employed by the Corinthians – and, by extension, Thucydides – to characterise each of the cities, rest (ἡσυχία) and motion (κίνησις), are highly significant. In the proem, we were already informed that the Peloponnesian War was to be "the greatest motion" (κίνησις μεγίστη) to have occurred among the Greeks or elsewhere.[73] Subsequently, in the Archaeology, Thucydides marked off the important stages in the development of archaic Greece by acknowledging moments of rest in between chaotic motions – such as the establishment of permanent cities after a long period of piracy and migration.[74] It seems that rest and motion are fundamental categories of thought for Thucydides, structuring his view of history as a whole.[75]

It is also significant that the theme of rest versus motion is associated in various ways with the possession of a navy.[76] The Athenians are represented as those who are always abroad (ἀποδημηταί) and who make their profit by means of their absence (ἀπουσίᾳ), whereas Sparta, a primarily land-based power, tends to stay at home and consqequently prefers the security of its established customs. These associations tie in the psychological aspects of the war with what had previously been said about the material assets – forming, as it were, one holistic reflection on the opposition between seafaring Athenians and continental Peloponnesians.

After the Corinthians have finished their impassioned speech, Thucydides relates the Athenian response to the accusations levelled against them. The transition is noteworthy. Coincidentally, there just "happened to be" (ἔτυχε) an Athenian delegation present when the previous accusatory speeches – of which, it must be remembered, the Corinthian envoys only gave the last – were delivered.[77] Stepping forward, the Athenians intended "not to hold a defence against

[72] Thuc. 1.70.2-4; 1.70.9.
[73] Thuc. 1.1.
[74] Thuc. 1.8. See also
[75] Connor 1984, 20-22; Orwin 2017, 367-368; Strauss 1974, 154-163.
[76] Saxonhouse 2017, 344-346.
[77] Thuc. 1.72.1. The insertion of this speech is a good illustration of the previously discussed ambiguity between 'accuratist' and 'free composition' readings of Thucydides. It seems extraordinarily convenient for the Athenian envoys "on other business" (περὶ ἄλλων) to have been present at the exact meeting of the Peloponnesian allies where their empire would have been accused – in addition to being given the opportunity to speak at length in their own defence. Hornblower 1997, 117 seems convinced of the historicity of this account, arguing that "there is no overwhelming evidence to doubt" the Athenians' presence at the event. On the other hand, Gomme 1945, 233 is more careful, concluding that "presumably Thucydides will have heard of the Corinthian speech, as of the others in this debate, from one of the Athenian delegates, who, even if they had not actually listened to them, knew their content." Regardless, Gomme there also acutely remarks on the synchronicity of history and poetry in Thucydidean speeches: "Both those who believe that there is some historical content in Thucydides' speeches and those who believe that he made them all up in his own head, are convinced that his intention in writing this is to show one aspect of the forces at work in provoking the war and in the fighting itself."

the accusations brought forward by the cities" (τῶν μὲν ἐγκλημάτων πέρι μηδὲν ἀπολογησόμενους ὧν αἱ πόλεις ἐνεκάλουν), but rather to argue that the situation was "on the whole" (περὶ τοῦ πάντος) more nuanced.[78] In other words: the issue was one of perspective. The Athenians would now enlighten the cities on why their empire was not evil in the grand scheme of things. Ultimately, they did this "believing that by their words they could turn them more towards rest than to waging war" (νομίζοντες μᾶλλον ἂν αὐτοὺς ἐκ τῶν λόγων πρὸς τὸ ἡσυχάζειν τραπέσθαι ἢ πρὸς τὸ πολεμεῖν). Their aim was exactly opposed to that of the Corinthians: whereas the latter had wished to spur the Spartans to immediate action, the Athenians now desired to lull them into passivity.

The envoys begin by presenting their speech as one of friendly advice rather than agonistic rebuttal. They also endeavour to show that they acquired their power justly and fairly.

> αἰσθόμενοι δὲ καταβοὴν οὐκ ὀλίγην οὖσαν ἡμῶν παρήλθομεν οὐ τοῖς ἐγκλήμασι τῶν πόλεων ἀντεροῦντες (οὐ γὰρ παρὰ δικασταῖς ὑμῖν οὔτε ἡμῶν οὔτε τούτων οἱ λόγοι ἂν γίγνοιντο), ἀλλ' ὅπως μὴ ῥᾳδίως περὶ μεγάλων πραγμάτων τοῖς ξυμμάχοις πειθόμενοι χεῖρον βουλεύσησθε, καὶ ἅμα βουλόμενοι περὶ τοῦ παντὸς λόγου τοῦ ἐς ἡμᾶς καθεστῶτος δηλῶσαι ὡς οὔτε ἀπεικότως ἔχομεν ἃ κακτήμεθα ἥ τε πόλις ἡμῶν ἀξία λόγου ἐστίν.
>
> But hearing your outcry, which is not small, we have come forward not to answer the charges made by the cities – for neither our nor their speeches would be delivered before you as judges – but to prevent you from taking a wrong decision in important matters by the persuasion of your allies, and at the same time desirous to show regarding the whole opinion that has been formed against us that we do not possess unfairly that which we have acquired, and that our city deserves to be taken into account.[79]

Subsequently, they list a long catalogue of exploits and benefits provided during the Persian Wars. In effect, this serves as their justificatory historical ideology: because Athens sacrificed much and showed great skill against the Mede, it deserves the respect of all other Hellenic cities.[80] The basis of their empire, they accordingly conclude, is one of voluntary acquiescence to Athenian leadership rather than violent submission by force of arms.

> καὶ γὰρ αὐτὴν τήνδε ἐλάβομεν οὐ βιασάμενοι ἀλλ' ὑμῶν μὲν οὐκ ἐθελησάντων παραμεῖναι πρὸς τὰ ὑπόλοιπα τοῦ βαρβάρου, ἡμῖν δὲ προσελθόντων τῶν ξυμμάχων καὶ αὐτῶν δεηθέντων ἡγεμόνας κατασῆναι.
>
> For we have not taken up this [empire] having used force. Rather, when you did not wish to stay for what remained to be done against the barbarian, the allies, coming forward and requesting it themselves, made us their leaders.[81]

[78] Thuc. 1.72.1.
[79] Thuc. 1.73.1.
[80] Thuc. 1.73.2-1.74.
[81] Thuc. 1.75.2.

So far, all this sounds rather noble and altruistic. However, the Athenian envoys do not dissimulate the fact that Athens looks out primarily for its own interests. With surprising candour, they admit that they now require the empire for their own security, and that they consequently have no intention of giving it up, because they fear the consequences that would arise from such a scenario.

> ἐξ αὐτοῦ δὲ τοῦ ἔργου κατηναγκάσθημεν τὸ πρῶτον προαγαγεῖν αὐτὴν ἐς τόδε, μάλιστα μὲν ὑπὸ δέους ἔπειτα δὲ καὶ τιμῆς, ὕστερον καὶ ὠφελίας, καὶ οὐκ ἀσφαλὲς ἔτι ἐδόκει εἶναι τοῖς πολλοῖς ἀπηχθημένους καί τινων καὶ ἤδη ἀποστάντων κατεστραμμένων ὑμῶν τε ἡμῖν οὐκέτι ὁμοίως φίλων, ἀλλ' ὑπόπτων καί διαφόρων ὄντων ἀνέντας κινδυνεύειν (καὶ γὰρ ἂν αἱ ἀποστάσεις πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἐγίγνοντο)· πᾶσι δὲ ἀνεπίφθονον τὰ ξυμφέροντα τῶν μεγίστων πέρι κινδύνων εὖ τίθεσθαι.
>
> And we were at first necessitated by the work itself to propel the empire to this point: primarily out of fear, additionally because of honour, finally also for the sake of gain – and then it no longer seemed safe to take the risk of letting it go, being hated by many and having already brought back some who had revolted, and you no longer being friendly to us but looking on us with suspicion and being at odds with us (for even the uprisings would have been to your benefit). And it is without reproach for all men to secure for themselves what is beneficial in the most important things.[82]

We see here that, in the Athenians' perception, there exists an immanent necessity (ἀνάγκη) for hegemonic states to gain, consolidate and where possible expand their power. It even appears not to have been a choice to become the hegemonic state in the first place – it simply followed "from the work itself" (ἐξ αὐτοῦ τοῦ ἔργου), i.e. from the regular conduct of great power politics. An empire or rulership (ἀρχή) also turns out to be a double-edged sword: it is, on the one hand, advantageous as well as honourable for the ruling state, but on the other hand it is also a perilous position to be in, since it creates the need to remain superior to allies who may have come to resent or hate their overlords. Hence, the Athenian empire, despite its (possibly justified) claims to a just foundation, ultimately remains a self-serving enterprise.[83]

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[82] Thuc. 1.75.3-5. Classen in his commentary ad loc. further specifies the three primary motivations as ''das dreifache Motiv 1) der Furcht vor den Barbaren, 2) der Ehre, die wir als die Hegemonen genossen, 3) des eigenen Interesses, da wir im Besitz der Herrschaft auch die Mittel zur Entwicklung unserer Macht und unsers innern Lebens hatten.''

[83] Jaeger 1936, 496 incisively characterises of this dynamic: "Nachdem es dann durch den Willen des Bundesgenossen zur Hegemonie gelangt war, mußte es aus Furcht vor dem dadurch erweckten Neide Spartas, das sich jetzt aus seiner ererbten Führerstellung verdrängt sah, die einmal errungene Macht dauernd verstärken und sich vor dem Abfall der Bundesgenossen durch eine immer straffere zentralistische Führung schützen, die die ursprünglich freien Bundesstaaten allmählich zu Unternanen Athens herabdrückte. Zu dem Motiv der Furcht kamen als mitwirkende Nebenmotive Ehrgeiz und Eigennutz." Saxonhouse 2017, 346-350 calls this a 'power trap' and ties it to the previously discussed Athenian characteristic of restlessness – for the expansion of power, by definition, requires movement. This 'necessity' of a 'power trap' is characteristic of the Realist tradition of political thought with which Thucydides has often been associated, and similar expressions of it can be found in Hobbes (who had translated Thucydides) and especially Machiavelli, who phrases it in almost the exact same terms in *Discorsi* 1.6: "Ma sendo tutte le cose degli uomini in moto, e non potendo stare salde, conviene che le salghino o che le scendino; e a molte cose che la ragione non t'induce, t'induce la necessità."

Despite this, the envoys, in their attempt to soothe the Peloponnesian anxieties, insist on the standard of justice applied by their empire. Whereas other empires have acted brutally and unashamedly despotic, the Athenian empire is characterized by the rule of law and equal treatment of confederates, the Athenian envoys argue. Therefore, while doing nothing out of the ordinary by normal standards, they nevertheless rule extraordinarily justly.

> οὕτως οὐδ' ἡμεῖς θαυμαστὸν οὐδὲν πεποιήκαμεν οὐδ' ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀνθρωπείου τρόπου, εἰ ἀρχήν τε διδομένην ἐδεξάμεθα καὶ ταύτην μὴ ἀνεῖμεν, ὑπὸ τῶν μεγίστων νικηθέντες, τιμῆς καὶ δέους καὶ ὠφελίας, οὐδ' αὖ πρῶτοι τοῦ τοιούτου ὑπάρξαντες, ἀλλ' αἰεὶ καθεστῶτος τὸν ἥσσω ὑπὸ τοῦ δυνατωτέρου κατείργεσθαι, ἄξιοί τε ἅμα νομίζοντες εἶναι καὶ ὑμῖν δοκοῦντες, μέχρι οὗ τὰ ξυμφέροντα λογιζόμενοι τῷ δικαίῳ λόγῳ νῦν χρῆσθε· ὃν οὐδείς πω παρατυχὸν ἰσχύι τι κτήσασθαι προθεὶς τοῦ μὴ πλέον ἔχειν ἀπετράπετο, ἐπαινεῖσθαί τε ἄξιοι, οἵτινες χρησάμενοι τῇ ἀνθρωπείᾳ φύσει ὥστε ἑτέρων ἄρχειν δικαιότεροι ἢ κατὰ τὴν ὑπάρχουσαν δύναμιν γεγένηνται.
>
> Thus, we have done nothing marvellous or divergent from the human way of doing things if we, being given an empire, have accepted it and do not let it go – overcome as we are by the greatest motives, honour and fear and benefit. Nor, again, are we the first ones to start such a thing, but it has always been established that the weaker is kept down by him who is more powerful. And at the same time we thought we were worthy of this; and this also appeared to you, until, having calculated the benefits, you now use the reasoning of justice – which no one who had it in his power to gain something by force has ever so preferred to possessing more that he desisted from this. And they are worthy of being praised, who, furnished with the human nature to dominate others, have turned out to be more just than corresponds to the power that they have at their disposal.[84]

The contradiction is obvious. While doing nothing out of the ordinary by following human nature's universal selfishness, the Athenians nevertheless claim to be acting altruistically through their wise and moderate rule. Thucydides here plays with the hypocrisy of self-righteous empires, as he does elsewhere in the work.[85] Fair speeches and specious justifications cannot ultimately hide the reality that Athens is an empire, and that empires exist to rule over others.[86] It cannot come as a surprise, then, that the plea is ultimately unsuccessful and, if anything, only bolsters the perception of the Athenians as aggressive expansionists. The

[84] Thuc. 1.76.2-3. Gomme 1945, 236 notes about this paragraph: "The first frank expression of selfish imperialism, the natural right of the stronger to act as he would, in the *History*" – evidently thinking of the Melian Dialogue in 5.84-116 as a later instance of the same. I believe, however, that the present paragraph is not the first, but the second expression of the self-serving nature of imperialism – as I explained above with regard to 1.75.3-5. Hornblower 1997, 122 translates χρησάμενοι τῇ ἀνθρωπείᾳ φύσει as "in accordance with human nature" – an interesting phrase in light of Thucydides' remark in 1.22.4 about the constancy of "that which is human" (τὸ ἀνθρώπειον).

[85] An example of this is the way in which the magniloquent praise of Athens in Pericles' Funeral Oration (2.35-46) holds up to later Athenian conduct, especially in book 6. See also Balot 2017, 323-331

[86] The Corinthians, harbouring their characteristic grudge against Athenian power, will in a later speech (1.122) characterise the empire as that of a "tyrant city" (τύραννον πόλιν).

Spartans – consulting by themselves (κατὰ σφᾶς αὐτοὺς) after dismissing the allies – ultimately come to believe that Athens is guilty of committing injustice (ἀδικεῖν), and that war has now become inevitable.

> καὶ τῶν μὲν πλειόνων ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ αἱ γνῶμαι ἔφερον, ἀδικεῖν τε τοὺς Ἀθηναίους ἤδη καὶ πολεμητέα εἶναι ἐν τάχει.
>
> And the opinions of the majority regarding this point inclined to the fact that the Athenians were already committing injustice and that war had to be waged soon.[87]

The Spartan deliberation: prudence and honour

Book one's final antilogy deals with Sparta's decision to go to war, taken among the Spartans themselves. The events described here take place immediately after Sparta's consultation with the allies. As in most political assemblies that decide on questions of peace and war, there are 'hawks' and 'doves' present among the Spartans – the former being more eager to commence hostilities than the latter. Thucydides, characteristically, juxtaposes these positions by providing one exemplary speech representing each camp.

First to speak is Archidamus, the Spartan king. He is the 'dove' of the assembly, holding an impassioned – but simultaneously restrained – plea for a more careful approach, which would take full advantage of the elements of time and diplomatic preparation. Thucydides himself introduces Archidamus as "a man reputed to be both sagacious and temperate" (ἀνὴρ καὶ ξυνετὸς δοκῶν εἶναι καὶ σώφρων). In good rhetorical fashion, to establish his credibility, he confirms this reputation at the beginning of his speech by focusing attention on his long life experience, especially concerning the matters which they are now discussing.

> καὶ αὐτὸς πολλῶν ἤδη πολέμων ἔμπειρός εἰμι, ὦ Λακεδαιμόνιοι, καὶ ὑμῶν τοὺς ἐν τῇ αὐτῇ ἡλικίᾳ ὁρῶ, ὥστε μήτε ἀπειρίᾳ ἐπιθυμῆσαί τινα τοῦ ἔργου, ὅπερ ἂν οἱ πολλοὶ πάθοιεν, μήτε ἀγαθὸν καὶ ἀσφαλὲς νομίσαντα.
>
> I myself am already experienced in many wars, Lacedaemonians, and I see among you those of the same age, so that no one will desire it out of inexperience with the matter – by which many people are affected – nor because they believe it to be good and safe.[88]

Archidamus' words to describe the bellicose passions that pervade the assembly are loaded. War can be something which people irrationally desire (ἐπιθυμεῖν), as they can be emotionally affected (πάσχειν) and hence become blind to riper wisdom. By this one observation, Archidamus immediately establishes himself as the partisan of wisdom and moderation, implicitly branding his opponents as the opposite. The claim to superior wisdom or insight also arises from Archidamus' next claim, namely that his opponents are not aware of and consequently underestimate the magnitude and nature of the war upon which they are about to

[87] Thuc. 1.79.2.
[88] Thuc. 1.80.1.

embark. He skillfully enumerates all the strengths of the Athenians in an enormous *polysyndeton*, creating the spectre of a foe unlike any the Peloponnesians have faced before.

> εὕροιτε δ' ἂν τόνδε περὶ οὗ νῦν βουλεύεσθε οὐκ ἂν ἐλάχιστον γενόμενον, εἰ σωφρόνως τις αὐτὸν ἐκλογίζοιτο. πρὸς μὲν γὰρ τοὺς Πελοποννησίους καὶ τοὺς ἀστυγείτονας παροῖμος ἡμῶν ἡ ἀλκή (…) πρὸς δὲ ἄνδρας οἳ γῆν τε ἑκὰς ἔχουσι καὶ προσέτι θαλάσσης ἐμπειρότατοί εἰσι καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ἅπασιν ἄριστα ἐξήρτυνται, πλούτῳ τε ἰδίῳ καὶ δημοσίῳ καὶ ναυσὶ καὶ ἵπποις καὶ ὅπλοις καὶ ὄχλῳ ὅσος οὐκ ἐν ἄλλῳ ἑνί γε χωρίῳ Ἑλληνικᾷ ἐστιν, ἔτι δὲ καὶ ξυμμάχους πολλοὺς φόρου ὑποτελεῖς ἔχουσι, πῶς χρὴ πρὸς τούτους ῥᾳδίως πόλεμον ἄρασθαι καὶ τίνι πιστεύσαντας ἀπαρασκεύους ἐπειχθῆναι;
>
> One would find this [war] about which you are now debating to be not the smallest to have ever happened, if one were to consider it wisely. For against the Peloponnesians and the inhabitants of nearby cities our strength is much alike (…) but against men who possess far off lands, and who are moreover extremely skilled at sea, and who have optimally equipped themselves for all other things, with wealth (both public and private) and ships and horses and spears and a multitude as great as there is not in any one Hellenic region, and who in addition have many allies subjected to them for tribute – how are we to conveniently wage war against them, and relying on which means are we to hasten ourselves, unprepared as we are?[89]

In all domains of national strength, Archidamus argues, Athens is as of yet superior. He explicitly addresses the issues of ships, money, hoplites, and population size, foreseeing that Athens will be able to rely on its navy and overseas empire to supply it with what it needs.[90] Archidamus is certainly right in everything he says here. We must recall Thucydides' own judgment concerning these matters. First, Thucydides had stated in his proem that the Peloponnesian War was to be the greatest war yet known to mankind.[91] Because the historian confirmed this in his own name, we can take it that Archidamus was not acting melodramatically, but had accurately assessed the significance of what was about to happen. Hence, the reader, who perceives the events with dramatic irony, can verify that his caution was called for. Second, by arguing that Athens' main strength lay at sea and that it would be able to negate Sparta's hypothetical progress on land, Archidamus reached the same conclusion that Pericles would later arrive at when he outlined his strategy for winning the Peloponnesian War.[92] This, too, turns out to have been a well-grounded assessment of the situation. Archidamus, it can be concluded, knew his enemy, and was therefore in a sound position to give advice about what was necessary to confront him.[93]

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[89] Thuc. 1.80.3.
[90] Thuc. 1.80.4-1.81.6.
[91] Thuc. 1.1.1-1.1.2. Cf. Connor 1984, 20-32; Forsdyke 2017, 21-22; Strauss 1974, 154-155.
[92] Thuc. 1.142-1.144; 2.62
[93] This is also the conclusion reached by Balot 2017, 331-336. *Sed contra* Strauss 1974, 149-150, who argues: "Even if Thucydides would have agreed with Archidamus in every other point, he disagreed with his appraisal of the situation. According to Thucydides, the Spartans who were so averse in taking risks and slow to go to war were compelled by the Athenians to go to war against the Athenians. Thucydides agrees then in effect with the harsh

What, then, were Archidamus' own ideas about the conduct of the war? To put it briefly, he believed that Sparta was not yet ready for an all-out conflict against an ostensibly superior (naval) superpower. He consequently urged caution and preparation on all fronts, both militarily and diplomatically.

> οὐ μὴν οὐδὲ ἀναισθήτως αὐτοὺς κελεύω τούς τε ξυμμάχους ἡμῶν ἐᾶν βλάπτειν καὶ ἐπιβουλεύοντας μὴ καταφωρᾶν, ἀλλὰ ὅπλα μὲν μήπω κινεῖν, πέμπειν δὲ καὶ αἰτιᾶσθαι μήτε πόλεμον ἄγαν δηλοῦντας μήθ' ὡς ἐπιτρέψομεν, κἀν τούτῳ καὶ τὰ ἡμέτερα αὐτῶν ἐξαρτύεσθαι, ξυμμάχων τε προσαγωγῇ καὶ Ἑλλήνων καὶ βαρβάρων, εἴ ποθέν τινα ἢ ναυτικοῦ ἢ χρημάτων δύναμιν προσληψόμεθα (ἀνεπίφθονον δέ, ὅσοι ὥσπερ καὶ ἡμεῖς ὑπ' Ἀθηναίων ἐπιβουλευόμεθα, μὴ Ἕλληνας μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ βαρβάρους προσλαβόντας διασωθῆναι), καὶ τὰ αὐτοῦ ἅμα ἐκποριζώμεθα.
>
> Nor do I urge you to indifferently allow them to hurt both ourselves and our allies, or to not catch them while they are forming plans, but only not to take up arms just yet, and rather to send envoys and pose demands, not indicating too much either war or that we will yield; and in the meantime to equip the things that are our own, and also by gathering allies, both among the Hellenes and among the barbarians, if we can obtain from some place the power of a fleet or money – and it is without reproach if such as ourselves, who are targeted by plots of the Athenians, are to be saved by taking, in addition to only the Hellenes, also the barbarians – and to the same time also to provide for ourselves our own things.[94]

However, in addition to knowing his enemy, Archidamus also knew well the strengths and weaknesses of his own city. The Spartan national character was very sensitive when it came to issues of honour, especially honour in war. (The Corinthians knew this too, which explains their rhetorical strategy in the previously described speech.) Archidamus therefore had to preemptively dismantle any accusations of cowardice (ἀνανδρία) by explaining why it would not be dishonourable to act on the basis of prior calculation. He did this by providing two arguments: one pertaining to the Peloponnesian League as a whole, which might have been considered numerous enough to take on the enemy, and one argument pertaining to the Spartans themselves, who had just been reproached by the Corinthians for their slowness and inertia in the face of Athenian danger.

> καὶ ἀνανδρία μηδενὶ πολλοὺς μιᾷ πόλει μὴ ταχὺ ἐπελθεῖν δοκείτω εἶναι. εἰσὶ γὰρ καὶ ἐκείνοις οὐκ ἐλάσσους χρήματα φέροντες ξύμμαχοι, καὶ ἔστιν ὁ πόλεμος οὐχ ὅπλων τὸ πλέον, ἀλλὰ δαπάνης, δι' ἣν τὰ ὅπλα ὠφελεῖ, ἄλλως τε καὶ ἠπειρώταις πρὸς θαλασσίους. (…) καὶ τὸ βραδὺ καὶ μέλλον, ὃ μέμφονται μάλιστα ἡμῶν, μὴ αἰσχύνεσθε· σπεύδοντές τε

and unpleasant Spartan ephor who opposed Archidamus' peacable counsel in the Spartan assembly." However, in light of the dramatic irony aimed at by Thucydides in presenting the build-up to the war (perceptively alluded to by Connor 1984, 47-51), I find this unconvincing. Even though there may have been a necessity for Sparta to confront Athens *eventually*, Archidamus must surely have been right in his assessment that Sparta would be unable to conclude the war with a quick victory – as history indeed shows.

[94] Thuc. 1.82.1.

> γὰρ σχολαίτερον ἂν παύσαισθε διὰ τὸ ἀπαράσκευοι ἐγχειρεῖν, καὶ ἅμα ἐλευθέραν καὶ εὐδοξοτάτην πόλιν διὰ παντὸς νεμόμεθα. καὶ δύναται μάλιστα σωφροσύνη ἔμφρων τοῦτ' εἶναι· μόνοι γὰρ δι' αὐτὸ εὐπραγίαις τε οὐκ ἐξυβρίζομεν καὶ ξυμφοραῖς ἧσσον ἑτέρων εἴκομεν, τῶν τε ξὺν ἐπαίνῳ ἐξοτρυνόντων ἡμᾶς ἐπὶ τὰ δεινὰ παρὰ τὸ δοκοῦν ἡμῖν οὐκ ἐπαιρόμεθα ἡδονῇ, καὶ ἤν τις ἄρα ξὺν κατηγορίᾳ παροξύνῃ, οὐδὲν μᾶλλον ἀχθεσθέντες ἀνεπείσθημεν. πολεμικοί τε καὶ εὔβουλοι διὰ τὸ εὔκοσμον γιγνόμεθα.
>
> And let no man be under the impression that not to go forward quickly with many cities against one is cowardice: for they have more allies who bring in money, and war is for the most part not an affair of weapons, but of expenditures, because of which those weapons are of service – especially for continental peoples against seafaring ones. (…) And do not be ashamed of the slowness and procrastination for which we are most censured: for by hastening yourselves, you would only finish more tardily because of your having engaged unprepared. And at the same time, we are continually considered to be a free and most reputable city. And this could rather be a sound prudence: for through it, we alone do not act too hubristically in success and give way before adversity much less than others. Nor are we, when some are urging us on with praise, stirred up out of pleasure to do things that are more dangerous than seems fit for us – and if someone were to stimulate us with reproach, we would be no more vexed into persuasion. Our orderliness makes us warlike as well as prudent.[95]

Hence, Archidamus' final advice is to engage in diplomatic overtures to gain time – and perhaps even prevent the war altogether.[96] If the crisis around Potidaea could be resolved by arbitration, he thought, the coming catastrophe might be averted. Archidamus' closing argument is actually a moral one: one ought to negotiate with those who are willing to negotiate, lest the existing tensions escalate into something worse.

But the 'hawks' would have none of it. Sthenelaidas, one of the ephors, gives a very concise – one would be inclined to say 'Laconic' – speech, in which he urges his compatriots to go to war immediately. First, referring back to the lengthy speech of the Athenians, he bluntly dismisses it as a work of sophistry that is too intricate for a Spartan man of simple tastes.

> τοὺς μὲν λόγους τοὺς πολλοὺς τῶν Ἀθηναίων οὐ γιγνώσκω· ἐπαινέσαντες γὰρ πολλὰ ἑαυτοῦς οὐδαμοῦ ἀντεῖπον ὡς οὐκ ἀδικοῦσι τοὺς ἡμετέρους ξυμμάχους καὶ τὴν Πελοπόννησον.
>
> The many words of the Athenians I do not understand: for, though they have praised themselves regarding many things, they have nowhere replied that they are not committing injustice against our allies and against the Peloponnesus.[97]

[95] Thuc. 1.83.1-2, 1.84.1-3.
[96] Thuc. 1.85.2.
[97] Thuc. 1.86.1.

Sthenelaidas continues his argument by stating that any appeasement or delay would only constitute a dereliction of duty, because allies in need would be left abandoned. Here, in a direct response to Archidamus, he, too, claims that it is wisdom (σωφροσύνη) to follow his proposed course of action.

> ἡμεῖς δὲ ὁμοῖοι καὶ τότε καὶ νῦν ἐσμεν, καὶ τοὺς ξυμμάχους, ἢν σωφρονῶμεν, οὐ περιοψόμεθα ἀδικουμένους οὐδὲ μελλήσομεν τιμωρεῖν (οἱ δ' οὐκέτι μέλλουσι κακῶς πάσχειν).
>
> But we remain the same then and now, and will not, if we are wise, look on while our allies are wronged, nor shall we then delay avenging them – for they, too, shall not delay the suffering of their wrong.[98]

Is this an altruistic concern with the well-being of the allies? Sthenelaidas reveals that it is not by referring to the added value of the allies for Sparta and the danger of 'handing them over' to Athens.[99] In such circumstances, using the more peaceful means of dispute resolution would be fruitless, since only direct action by force could now be of any use. The typical Spartan disdain for 'mere λόγοι' is very palpable in this passage.

> ἄλλοις μὲν γὰρ χρήματά ἐστι πολλὰ καὶ νῆες καί ἵπποι, ἡμῖν δὲ ξύμμαχοι ἀγαθοί, οὓς οὐ παραδοτέα τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις ἐστίν, οὐδε δίκαις καὶ λόγοις διακριτέα μὴ λόγῳ καὶ αὐτοὺς βλαπτόμενους, ἀλλὰ τιμωρητέα ἐν τάχει καὶ παντὶ σθένει.
>
> For others have much money and ships and horses: we, on the other hand, have good allies, which are not to be handed to the Athenians. Nor are these things to be decided by lawsuits and words, as we ourselves are hurt not only by words: rather, they are to be avenged in haste and with all our strength.[100]

Finally, countering Archidamus' lengthy considerations about the balance of power and his proposed strategy of calculated delay, Sthenelaidas plays into the Spartan sense of honour by arguing that long planning is disingenuous. Hence, he exhorts his hearers to act "worthily of Sparta" (ἀξίως τῆς Σπάρτης) and vote in favour of war. He adds to this the ultimate ground for conflict: to stop the expansion of Athenian power dead in its tracks. In this final passage, we see an almost perfect symbiosis of justice and self-interest to great rhetorical effect.

> καὶ ὡς ἡμᾶς πρέπει βουλεύεσθαι ἀδικουμένους μηδεὶς διδασκέτω, ἀλλὰ τοὺς μέλλοντας ἀδικεῖν μᾶλλον πρέπει πολὺν χρόνον βουλεύεσθαι. ψηφίζεσθε οὖν, ὦ Λακεδαιμόνιοι, ἀξιῶς τῆς Σπάρτης τὸν πόλεμον καὶ μήτε τοὺς Ἀθηναίους ἐᾶτε μείζους γίγνεσθαι μήτε τοὺς ξυμμάχους καταπροδιδῶμεν, ἀλλὰ ξὺν τοῖς θεοῖς ἐπίωμεν πρὸς τοὺς ἀδικοῦντας.
>
> And let no man espouse the teaching that it suits us to deliberate after we have been wronged – it is, rather, more fitting for those who are

[98] Thuc. 1.86.2.
[99] Cf. Gomme 1945, 251: "Sthenelaïdas' (sic) speech is excellently in character. He is not concerned with the wrongs of Athens' subject allies, and says nothing, in the Spartan assembly, about freeing Greece; only Peloponnesian interests concern Sparta."
[100] Thuc. 1.86.3.

> planning to wrong others to deliberate for a long time. Vote therefore, Lacedaemonians, in a way that is worthy of Sparta: in favour of the war, and do not allow the Athenians to grow any larger. And let us not surrender our allies to them, but let us rather, with the help of the gods, go forth against the wrongdoers.[101]

Yet even now, it remained unclear which direction the Spartan state would take: in the first vote, there was no decided majority either for or against the war. Here Sthenelaidas pulls his greatest rhetorical trick thus far. By phrasing the proposition in an evidently biased way and arranging the procedure so that each man's vote would be publicly visible, he in essence forced everyone with a sense of shame to vote in favour of the motion.

> ὁ δὲ (κρίνουσι γὰρ βοῇ καὶ οὐκ ψήφῳ) οὐκ ἔφη διαγιγνώσκειν τὴν βοὴν ὁποτέρα μείζων, ἀλλὰ βουλόμενος αὐτοὺς φανερῶς ἀποδεικνυμένους τὴν γνώμην ἐς το πολεμεῖν μᾶλλον ὁρμῆσαι ἔλεξεν· ,,ὅτῳ μὲν ὑμῶν, ὦ Λακεδαιμόνιοι, δοκοῦσι λελύσθαι αἱ σπονδαὶ καὶ οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι ἀδικεῖν, ἀναστήτω ἐς ἐκεῖνο τὸ χωρίον," δείξας τι χωρίον αὐτοῖς, ,,ὅτῳ δὲ μὴ δοκοῦσιν, ἐς τὰ ἐπί θάτερα." ἀναστάντες δὲ διέστησαν, καὶ πολλῷ πλείους ἐγένοντο οἷς ἐδόκουν αἱ σπονδαὶ λελύσθαι.
>
> But he – for they voted by shouting and not by casting stones – said that he could not determine which shout was louder, and desiring to propel them more towards war by openly exposing their votes, he said: "Who among you believes, Lacedaemonians, that the treaty has been dissolved and that the Athenians are committing injustice, go stand in that area," pointing them out some area, "and who does not believe it, go stand in the other." They stood up and positioned themselves, and there happened to be many more who believed that the treaty had been dissolved.[102]

Honour, the chief consideration in the Spartan mind (as had already been acknowledged by the Corinthians in their speech and by Archidamus in his *refutatio*), carried the day, and triumphed over considerate policy. The whole debate is framed by Thucydides to illustrate the impetuous rashness in a decision to suddenly go to war. Nor is this a unique event: the parallells with the rashness of the Sicilian Expedition in book 6 are obvious.[103] Here, then, as elsehwere, the protagonists fail to live up to their own ideals and self-image: Sparta, reputed for its wise moderation (σωφροσύνη), lets itself get carried away by bellicose rhetoric and pathetic appeal, removing the final obstacle to a general conflagration of the Hellenic world.[104] The Peloponnesian War had now become a certainty.

[101] Thuc. 1.86.4-5.
[102] Thuc. 1.87.2.
[103] Thuc. 6.9-26. See also Stahl 1973.
[104] To that effect also Connor 1984, 38-39: "Once again the reader views events ironically, knowing that the war will be far more difficult than the Spartans anticipate. This recognition derives from the form of the debate between Archidamus and Sthenelaidas and from the reader's knowledge of the length and difficulty of the war."

Conclusion: the inescapable reality of power politics

It has been my effort throughout this thesis to uncover Thucydides' analysis of politics by a close reading of the paired speeches in the first book. Starting from the methodological questions surrounding ancient historiography, I assumed that there were observations about human nature implicit in the text's dialectic of speech and action. From my reading of book 1, I gather that this hypothesis has been correct: we have seen several instances of political wisdom (and foolishness) emerge from the speeches leading up to the Peloponnesian War.

First, in the Corcyraean debate, Thucydides juxtaposed an appeal to moral principles and past debts to concrete promises of some future gain. The latter proved more potent, indicating that, in Thucydides' view, empires tend to pursue what they believe to be in their self-interest rather than what 'sounds nice'. In particular, the importance of the navy – upon which Thucydides had already repeatedly touched in the Archaeology and which would play an immense role in the books to come – turned out to be a decisive argument.

The self-serving nature of empire was confirmed by the Athenian speech at the conference in Sparta, during which the mask of benevolent hegemony was dropped and the raw power dynamic that propels expanding empires was revealed. Furthermore, at that conference, the contrast drawn by the Corinthians between Spartan indolence and Athenian restlessness proved to be a fascinating character sketch, in which it became clear that, for Thucydides, the necessities confronting an empire tend to always keep it in motion, because it is unsafe to remain at rest. This, again, the Athenians confirmed in their own speech, when they admitted that they were afraid to relinquish their empire because they now believed it to be unsafe. It is, then, a rather tragic view of rulership that Thucydides seems to express here: through the sheer flux of politics, a state can suddenly find itself at the helm of an order – and there seems to be no safe way out of that position, condemning the state in question to either continually strive for more power or be defeated at its own peril.

Finally, in the last antilogy, the issue of national character was once again taken up through Archidamus' and Sthenelaidas' vying for influence in the Spartan assembly. The first argued that there was nothing 'un-Spartan' about prudence (σωφροσύνη), whereas the later rebuffed such a policy as cowardice (ἀνανδρία). Having just been chastised by their Corinthian allies, the Spartans proved particularly susceptible to such a challenge to their honour, causing them to mistakenly judge Sthenelaidas to have proposed the better policy. Thucydides presents Archidamus as the only Spartan aware of the effectiveness of the 'Periclean' strategy of Athens – but, not unlike Cassandra, his provident advice went unheeded, evoking in the reader a tragic sense of irony at the Spartan underestimation of what it would take to win the war.

Thus, the Thucydidean account in book one reveals that the author has given profound thought to the causes and motivations behind the Peloponnesian War, and that he has taken great care to illustrate these in both the speeches and his narrative. There is a wealth of wisdom to be gained from meticulously analyzing them, and from reflecting on the constants in human nature that have been so sublimely portrayed in all their vivacity. For that reason alone, the *Histories* truly merit the qualification given to them by their author – that of a κτῆμα ἐς αἰεί.

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Images

Map 1. From: Thucydides, *The Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War*, ed. R.B. Strassler, maps by A. Gibson. New York: Free Press 1996 (reprinted 2008). Map on page 18.

Map 2. From: Thucydides, *The Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War*, ed. R.B. Strassler, maps by A. Gibson. New York: Free Press 1996 (reprinted 2008). Map on page 35.