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# Classical Theory in International Relations

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## 2 Pericles, realism and the normative conditions of deliberate action

S. Sara Monoson and Michael Loriaux

Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* has lost none of its power to fascinate. We are excited by the keen analysis, the apparent accessibility of the actors to rational interpretation, the ring of familiarity in the events the historian recounts. Above all, we are excited by Thucydides' claims to have written a work that will become 'a possession for all time', a work that we will 'judge useful' (I.22.4).<sup>1</sup> But useful how? As good counsel, a theory, an example to avoid (if so, how)? Having treated Thucydides as a forerunner of modern realism,<sup>2</sup> International Relations scholars today better appreciate the complexity of his text and often challenge the Realist reading.<sup>3</sup> Political Theorists have also turned to the text in growing numbers, interrogating its pessimism,<sup>4</sup> its pervasive humanity,<sup>5</sup> its subtle critique of

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all translations are from the revised Crawley edition: Robert B. Strassler, *The Landmark Thucydides, A Newly Revised Edition of the Crawley Translation with Maps, Annotations, Appendices and Encyclopedic Index* (New York: Free Press, 1996). An earlier version of this chapter, 'The Illusion of Power and the Disruption of Moral Norms: Thucydides' Critique of Periclean Policy', appeared in the *American Political Science Review* (June 1998). Extensive revisions explain the change in title.

<sup>2</sup> James E. Dougherty and Robert L. Pfaltzgraf, Jr., *Contending Theories of International Relations* (New York: Harper and Row, 3rd edn, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> Laurie M. Johnson Bagby, 'The Use and Abuse of Thucydides in International Relations' *International Organization* 48 (Winter, 1994), 131–153; Michael Doyle, 'Thucydides: A Realist?' in Richard Ned Lebow and Barry Strauss (eds.), *Hegemonic Rivalry: From Thucydides to the Nuclear Age* (Boulder CO: Westview, 1991). Steven Forde, 'International Realism and the Science of Politics: Thucydides, Machiavelli, and Neorealism' *International Studies Quarterly* 39 (1995), 141–161; Daniel Carst, 'Thucydides and Neorealism' *International Studies Quarterly* 33 (1989), 3–27; Richard Ned Lebow, 'Thucydides, Power Transition Theory, and the Causes of War' in *Hegemonic Rivalry*.

<sup>4</sup> Peter R. Pouncey, *The Necessities of War: A Study of Thucydides' Pessimism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980).

<sup>5</sup> Clifford Orwin, *The Humanity of Thucydides* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

democracy,<sup>6</sup> its account of the fragility of political unity<sup>7</sup> or its analysis of the tension between love of glory and commitment to the common good.<sup>8</sup>

The variety of reactions and interpretations elicited by the text confirms the observation of a leading classicist that Thucydides forever proves resistant to paraphrase and summation.<sup>9</sup> That resistance owes much to Thucydides' pervasive use of antithesis as a tool of analysis. Antithesis in the form of paired speeches (e.g. Cleon and Diodotus) and dramatic juxtapositions (e.g. the Periclean funeral oration and the plague narrative) is well known. But the presence of antithesis in the treatment of Pericles, a part of the text usually thought to exhibit a more straightforward teaching, has commanded less attention. Although Thucydides presents Pericles as singularly praiseworthy (e.g. II.65), we believe that the progress of his narrative, perhaps unbeknownst to the author, interrogates that glowing assessment. The fuller, more subtle treatment of Pericles as it emerges from the text as a whole, suggests tension between two antithetical yet complementary attitudes regarding the possibility of conducting ourselves wisely. The first is a relentless scepticism about humanity's capacity to assure its welfare by relying on a kind of strategic brilliance that is exercised in either ignorance or defiance of moral norms. The second is a conviction that moral norms must be buttressed by the effective application of coercive power. Thucydides' driving attention to both these views goes to the heart of much contemporary theorizing in International Relations regarding the appropriateness of moral or strategic action.

### Thucydides' use of antithesis

The view of the *History* as an 'objective' account of the war and its author as a 'scientific' historian has been dead in the literature for some

time. Scholars today focus more on the artistry of the work and the intensity of the experiences it elicits, and express little confidence that the author's 'teaching' can be found in some specific episode, such as the Melian conference, or in some isolated albeit strongly worded first-person commentary, such as the praise of Periclean leadership at II.65.<sup>10</sup> Scholars prefer to examine the text as a whole and specifically how the interrelations of different aspects of the text (speeches, narrative, various episodes, language patterns and literary devices) work to arouse the emotions and intellect of the reader.

As stated above, much of the power of Thucydides' style derives from his use of antithesis, that is, the contraposition of claim and counterclaim in close and rhetorically effective order. This 'most instinctive, necessary clothing of [Thucydides'] thought' extends from the paired speeches to the very structure of the work – the juxtaposition of phrase to phrase, chapter to chapter, book to book of starkly contrasting images, such that expectations nurtured at one point are dashed at another.<sup>11</sup> Thucydides dresses the images up rhetorically as matters of fact. But in the ensuing narrative he reveals them to be social and intellectual constructs, which the protagonists of the drama, through ambition, fear and conceit, proceed to dash or erode.

Awareness of the importance of antithesis helps us not only appreciate his style but understand his political philosophy. Antithesis, when wielded with the skill and relentlessness of Thucydides, nourishes scepticism, doubt regarding anything and everything that one may have previously accepted as knowledge, wisdom or truth.<sup>12</sup> In Thucydides' era, Athenian cultural life was marked by antidogmatic, sceptical and relentlessly critical practices. The corrosive power of such scepticism may be what moved some Athenians, as represented by Plato's Thrasymachus and Callicles, to doubt the possibility of moral conduct and succumb to a kind of 'realism', that is, to the idea that the prevailing notion of the Good must simply embody the interests of powerful people. This is

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g. Raymond Aron, 'Thucydides and the Historical Narrative' in Miriam Bernheim Conant (ed.), *Politics in History: Selected Essays of Raymond Aron* (New York: Free Press, 1978); W. Robert Connor, 'A Post-Modernist Thucydides?' *The Classical Journal* 72 (1977), 289–298; Virginia Hunter, *Thucydides: The Artful Reporter* (Toronto: Hackert, 1973); Orwin, *The Humanity of Thucydides*.

<sup>11</sup> John H. Finley, *Thucydides* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1942), p. 46; see also W. Robert Connor, 'Polarization in Thucydides' in *Hégémone Kralov*, p. 67.

<sup>12</sup> On his antithetical style, see Jacqueline de Romilly, *Les grands sophistes dans l'Athènes de Pericles* (Paris: Fallois, 1988), pp. 86–87, 97–99; Finley, *Thucydides*, p. 44; Simon Hornblower, *Thucydides* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), pp. 45–52, 60–62; and Connor, *Thucydides*, pp. 27–28.

<sup>6</sup> Cynthia Farrar, 'Gyges' Ring: Reflections on the Boundaries of Democratic Citizenship'. Paper delivered at the Colloque International: Démocratie Athénienne et Culture, sponsored by UNESCO and the Academy of Athens, 1993; Josiah Ober, 'Thucydides' Criticism of Democratic Knowledge' in Ralph Rosen and Joseph Farrell (eds.), *Nomoiaktik: Greek Studies in Honor of Martin Ostwald* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993); Arlene Saxtonhouse, *Athenian Democracy: Modern Mythmakers and Ancient Theorists* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> J. Peter Euben, *The Tragedy of Political Theory: The Road Not Taken* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).

<sup>8</sup> Michael Palmer, *Love of Glory and the Common Good: Aspects of the Political Thought of Thucydides* (Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1992).

<sup>9</sup> W. Robert Connor, *Thucydides* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 231.

the argument that Thucydides lends to the Athenian generals at Melos, which Realists receive as a kind of 'Realist manifesto'.

### Antithesis in Thucydides' treatment of Pericles

We reopen the file on Pericles because he comes across as the only actor of the *History* who is 'on top of things'. Thucydides' attitude toward Pericles seems to be one of 'reverent admiration'.<sup>13</sup> He is, after all, the only speaker of the *History* whose words are never disputed by those of an adversary. The text thus invites us to believe that good politics must be Periclean politics. Alert to Thucydides' use of the antithesis, however, we suspect that on closer reading the text may be inviting us to search for good politics in the critical examination of Pericles.

Thucydides' catalogue of Pericles' virtues is well known. Suffice it to recall that, according to Thucydides, 'for as long as [Pericles] was at the head of the state during the peace, he pursued a moderate and conservative policy; and in his time its greatness was at its height' (II.65.5). Among the virtues displayed by Pericles are his skills as a military leader (I.111.5, 114.5, 116.3, 117.2; II.31.12), his appreciation of and excellence in reasoned deliberation regarding political and strategic issues (II.40.2-3, 62.5), his integrity (II.13.1, 65.8), his grasp of human psychology (II.59.3ff) and his generally accurate estimate of Athenian military strengths and weaknesses (II.65.5). Moreover, he is a master of the art of persuasion. He draws on his oratorical skills to stoke Athenian patriotism and self-confidence (II.40.1-41.5) and to win approval of his ideas even as his popularity flags (II.59.2ff). In sum, his grasp of human psychology, his power to persuade and his military skill all contribute to his ascendance among the Athenians and his ability 'to lead them instead of being led by them' (II.65.8).

Nevertheless, we detect in the *History* as a whole a subtle interrogation of this glowing appraisal. While opposing the people on difficult occasions, Pericles unwaveringly supports their desire for empire; while extolling Athenian virtues, he undermines the norms of social cohesion; while advocating a prudent course of action, he engages Athens in an adventure that produces momentous turns of fortune.

Thucydides unquestionably attributes to Pericles a unique ability to persuade citizens to adopt a strategy that involves hardship and self-discipline, and to speak frankly to the Assembly to the point of

<sup>13</sup> F. M. Cornford, *Thucydides Mythistoricus* (London: Edward Arnold, 1907), p. 50.

contradicting the wishes (or whims) of the multitude. During the period of Pericles' prominence, 'what was nominally a democracy [became] in his hands government by the first citizen' (II.65.9). Each of Pericles' three speeches turns public opinion in a particular direction. And indeed Thucydides explicitly distinguishes Pericles from all subsequent leaders precisely on this point. But although Pericles is quite unlike the crop of leaders that succeed him, he does not differ from his successors as regards his attachment to empire. During his leadership, the Athenians boldly transfer the treasury of the Delian League from Delos to Athens and use it to finance the adornment of the city. The alliance becomes an *archê*, an empire. As crisis unfolds, Pericles positions himself as the leader most capable of protecting the empire. He calls for only temporary restraint in adding to it: '[Do not] combine schemes of fresh conquest with the conduct of the war' (I.144.1). He does not rule out enlarging it once the crisis has passed.

Thucydides seems to acknowledge this underlying continuity between Pericles and his successors by Pericles' and Cleon's shared application of the term *tyranny* to Athens' empire (II.63.2 and III.37.2).<sup>14</sup> The term 'tyranny' connotes much more than the extralegal seizure of power. It conveys the violent abuse of power and the disregard or outright rejection of customary Greek norms of conduct. Pericles uses the term to exhort Athenians to maintain their resolve. 'To take [the empire]', he says, 'perhaps was wrong, but to let it go is unsafe' (II.63.3). Cleon uses the term to convince the Athenians to punish rebellion severely, and he does not concede, as does Pericles, that taking the empire 'perhaps was wrong'. Cleon defends its justice and warns the Athenians that showing mercy 'will . . . pass sentence upon yourselves. For if they were right in rebelling, you must be wrong in ruling' (III.40.4).

Although Thucydides praises Pericles, the 'first citizen' (II.65.9), and disparages Cleon, the 'most violent man in Athens' (III.36.6), Thucydides' narrative highlights their shared attachment to empire. Both claim realistically to assess what that attachment requires in terms of policy and action. Both counsel steadfast resolve in carrying out policies once

<sup>14</sup> Pericles says: 'What you already hold is like a tyranny' (*hos tyrannida gar eide echete auten* [2.63.2]). Cleon says: 'You don't appreciate that what you hold, the empire, is a tyranny' (*ou skopountes hoti tyrannida echete ten archen* [3.37.2]). To preserve the important parallel with Pericles' language, we depart from Strassler's rendering of Cleon's use of 'tyrannida' as 'despotism'. For sustained analysis of these passages, see W. Robert Connor, 'Tyrannis Polis' in John D'Arms and John W. Eadie (eds.), *Ancient and Modern: Essays in Honor of Gerald F. Else* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1977). For other parallels between the speeches of Pericles and Cleon, see Connor, *Thucydides*, p. 79, n. 1.

they are adopted. Both urge assemblies not to reopen debate on policies simply because their execution proves difficult.<sup>15</sup> For Euben, 'given Thucydides' singularly explicit castigation of Cleon and his equally explicit praise of Pericles, it is disconcerting to find so many similarities between them'.<sup>16</sup>

In the turmoil following the debacle at Syracuse, Athens itself falls victim to the violence of tyranny. Athenian readers would have remembered how, towards the end of the war, the oligarchs behaved so brutally that they earned the epithet the 'thirty tyrants'.<sup>17</sup> But when this happens, the city is victimized not only by the actions of tyrannical leaders but also by the harsh moral character that the people of Athens themselves acquired through their dealings with their empire and now display in their dealings with one another. The disconcerting similarities between Pericles and Cleon nurture suspicion that Periclean policies, too, may bear some responsibility for the dissolution of Athenian political life in factionalism, mistrust and violence.

Indeed, though Pericles exhorted the Athenians to remain true to the 'old ways', to Athens' foundational norms, he may not have promoted normative cohesion among the Athenians as effectively as we are first led to think. On the contrary, he may have accelerated the disintegration of Athenian solidarity and contributed to defeat. The one issue on which the narrative is thoroughly consistent is the attribution of that defeat to 'intestine disorders' (II.65.12), factionalism and growing atomization. For Athenians, affective attachment to the *polis* – their sense of democratic citizenship – pivoted on a norm of reciprocity between individuals and the city. They imagined democratic citizenship to be characterized by mutual benefactions by citizens and *polis*. Civic devotion did not require adopting a slavish, self-sacrificing posture. Instead, a thriving democracy required the cultivation of practices that provided multiple opportunities both for citizens (regardless of social and economic standing) to perform benefactions for the *polis* and for the city to perform benefactions for the citizens. The Athenians extolled devotion to the common good, but they also represented private interests and

<sup>15</sup> This is the position of Cleon in the Mytilenean debate and of Pericles regarding the Megarian Decree and the strategy of collecting behind the walls.

<sup>16</sup> Euben, *Tragedy*, p. 178. See also Hornblower, *Thucydides*, pp. 122ff, and Edward Hussey, 'Thucydidean History and Democratic Theory' in P. A. Cartledge and F. D. Harvey (eds.), *CRIJX: Essays in Greek History* presented to G. E. M. de Ste. Croix on his 75th Birthday (London: Duckworth, 1985). Plato explicitly criticizes Pericles for pandering to the Athenians in this way. See *Gorgias*, 515e ff.

<sup>17</sup> Connor, *Thucydides*, pp. 179–180.

public interests as mutually obtainable. This is not to suggest that real citizens never encountered conflicts between private and public interests. Thucydides' *History*, as well as tragedy and many other literary sources, indicate that such conflict was frequent. Nevertheless, the ideal of citizenship as reciprocal exchange both defined a powerful political norm and acted as a force for social cohesion.<sup>18</sup>

Thucydides' Pericles claims to uphold this ideal. He says, 'I am of the opinion that national greatness is more for the advantage of private citizens than any individual well-being coupled with public humiliation' (II.60.2). In the funeral oration, Pericles praises this aspect of the Athenian way of life.<sup>19</sup> Yet, Pericles' policies require that the Athenians behave in ways that depart from this ideal. As he relates the effects of those policies, Thucydides invites us to observe how Pericles' policies produce a growing tension between the civic ideal and actual conduct, and to speculate how those policies threaten a normative understanding that had functioned powerfully to nurture Athenian solidarity.

Pericles' call to the citizens to collect behind the city walls is strategically brilliant but socially corrosive. The policy does not reward the Athenians for the suffering they must endure in the same way that the city traditionally rewards them for the more common sacrifice of the body in combat. In Athenian practice, dying honorably in battle – contributing one's body to the *polis* (II.43.1) – is rewarded by the *polis*. The soldier knows beforehand that, if he perishes, the *polis* will reward his 'contribution' to the collectivity by attaching honour to his memory, by burying him with pomp at public expense and by assuming certain responsibilities for his family, such as educating his orphaned children and supporting his elderly parents.<sup>20</sup> Pericles' policy, in contrast, does not require the city to express any explicit gratitude toward the

<sup>18</sup> The centrality of reciprocity in Athenian democratic ideology is increasingly noted in recent scholarship. See Cynthia Farrar, 'Gyges' Ring'; Leslie Kurke, *The Traffic in Praise: Pindar and the Poetry of Social Economy* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1991); Paul Millet, *Lending and Borrowing in Ancient Athens* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); S. Sara Monoson, 'Citizen as Erastes: Erotic Imagery and The Idea of Reciprocity in the Periclean Funeral Oration', *Political Theory* 22 (1994), 253–276; Josiah Ober, *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989); Richard Seaford, *Reciprocity and Ritual* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). See also S. Sara Monoson, *Plato's Democratic Erastementis* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), for sustained discussion of reciprocity in the Athenian democratic imaginary.

<sup>19</sup> Monoson, 'Citizen as Erastes'.

<sup>20</sup> The Athenian *polis* celebrated and displayed the generous way in which the city met these responsibilities toward orphans in the 'preperformance rituals' that opened the dramatic competitions on the occasion of the grandest civic festival of the year, the City Dionysia. See Simon Goldhill, 'The Great Dionysia and Civic Ideology' *Journal of Hellenic*

individuals who sacrifice their *property* rather than their bodies. Instead, Pericles exhorts citizens to subordinate their private interests to a future public good. 'Cease . . . to grieve for your private afflictions and address yourselves instead to the safety of the commonwealth', he urges (II.61.4). Pericles not only enjoins the citizens to make extraordinary sacrifices but also minimizes their importance: 'You may think it a great privation to lose the use of your land and houses [but] you should really regard them in the light of the gardens and other accessories that embellish a great fortune and as, in comparison, of little moment' (II.62.3).

In defence of his policies, Pericles makes no attempt at all to fit the citizens' acceptance of property loss into a model of reciprocal exchange. He may promise participation in the enduring glory and pleasures that attend citizenship in a dominant *polis*, but he does not stress any 'exchange'. Rather, he uses his rhetorical skills to shore up the citizens' resolution and their tolerance of 'private afflictions' (II.61.4), offering himself as an example. He is resolute, though he, too, has lost property. He admonishes the Athenians to be strong like him: 'I am the same man and do not alter; it is you who change . . . the apparent error of my policy lies in the infirmity of your resolution' (II.61.2). But he fails to appreciate that the Athenians have only himself, an extraordinary charismatic leader, to help them achieve such resolve.<sup>21</sup> Their daily activity – campaigning out, often in deplorable conditions, behind the walls – does not provide them with the customary symbolic reinforcements and explanations that would make self-sacrifice on this scale tolerable. Though Pericles succeeds in assuaging the anger and frustration of the Athenians, Thucydides reports that 'still, as private individuals they could not help smarting under their sufferings, the common people having been deprived of the little that they ever possessed, while the higher orders had lost fine properties with costly establishments and buildings in the country and, worst of all, [had] war instead of peace' (II.65.2). Only when Pericles helps them vent their anger by accepting a fine do they

*Studies* 107 (1987), 58–76; and J. Winkler, 'The Ephebes' Song: *Tragoidia* and *Polis*' *Representations* 11 (1985), 26–62.

<sup>21</sup> Perhaps the success of Pericles' policies was thereby predicated on the subversion of normal institutions of Athenian democracy. This is one way to read Thucydides' famous comment regarding Pericles' relation to democratic institutions: 'What was nominally a democracy became in his hands government by the first citizen' (II.65.9). Pericles' ability 'at once [to] restore them [the multitude] to confidence' (II.65.9) regarding a previously chosen policy was also a capacity to oppose the democratic impulse to rethink, reconsider, reflect and possibly decide anew. As Saxtonhouse argues in *Athenian Democracy*, steadfast devotion to a policy is a stance uncharacteristic of democratic assemblies – their distinguishing mark is the tentative, reversible status of all decisions.

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finally 'become less sensitive to their private and domestic afflictions' (II.65.4).

After Pericles' death the Athenians lose the ability to subordinate private concerns to the pursuit of victory. The new leaders do not supply the model and the rhetorical reinforcements to achieve this subordination. The Athenians lost the war because they 'allowed their private ambitions and private interests . . . to lead them into [unwise] projects' (II.65.7). Pericles' policy contributes to that development by departing from dominant normative understandings of citizen rights and obligations.

### Pericles and the power of chance: the plague

Pericles is an extraordinary leader acting in unusual circumstances. But aspects of Thucydides' narrative invite us to ask if the exceptional circumstances are not to an appreciable extent of Pericles' own making. This is not to diminish the effect of events more or less beyond Athenian control, particularly the eruption of conflict between Corinth and Corcyra. But we must recognize that Pericles' response to the events leading up to the war – abandonment of the countryside and engagement in a potentially protracted war of attrition – is an uncommon one.<sup>22</sup> Thus, when the high mortality suffered by the Athenians crowded behind the city walls during the plague – an unforeseen consequence of Pericles' uncommon policy – takes away the sole leader who might have held the *polis* together under exceptional circumstances, we are forced by Thucydides' narrative (if not by any explicit first-person authorial pronouncements) to question the wisdom of Pericles' strategically brilliant and apparently prudent course of action. Aspects of Thucydides' narrative style, moreover, lend rhetorical emphasis to those interrogations. Thucydides may not in his own voice 'blame' Pericles for the ensuing problems but the 'factual' narrative begs the reader to consider that terrible possibility.

Recall that Pericles recommends in his first speech that the Athenians fight a war of attrition, confident that, because of their strategic skill, exceptional wealth and naval supremacy, they will outlast the Peloponnesians. Pericles' recommendation that the Athenians forsake the countryside is a startling one. But he makes it sound reasonable and the Athenians support it. They are confident of victory and, the reader is invited to think, with good reason. For the modern reader, Pericles'

<sup>22</sup> During the Persian Wars, the Athenians were compelled to abandon the city by the press of combat. No such compulsion obtains at the time of Pericles' proposal.

policies embody a prudent realism: he diminishes the city's vulnerability to attack by land and invests in its advantage at sea. But in order to find Pericles' strategy credible one must discount the eruption of chance (*tyché*). Thucydides does not suggest that Pericles ignores *tyché*. He refers to it explicitly in his first speech (I.140.1). But Thucydides does suggest that Pericles may not appreciate its full import. Pericles sees chance as the source of possible sufferings that could threaten public resolve, but he is apparently unaware that it can be the source of deeper and more enduring effects.<sup>23</sup>

The plague provides the most devastating example of the eruption of *tyché* in the entire *History*. Thucydides emphasizes its importance by placing it, with almost no transition, after Pericles' funeral oration. The brutal juxtaposition swiftly contrasts the idealized image of Athenian life in Pericles' speech with the actual behaviour of the Athenians during the plague. Pericles portrays the Athenians as enjoying, among other things, 'ease in our private relations' (II.37.3); '[lawfulness], particularly such as regards the protection of the injured, whether actually on the statute book or belong[ing] to that code which, although unwritten, cannot be broken without acknowledged disgrace' (II.37.3); mutual trust among citizens; and confidence in their good judgment, public spiritedness and courage. Several times he praises the Athenians for their ability to endure ordeals with dignity: 'We are still willing to encounter danger; we have the double advantage of escaping the experience of hardships in anticipation and of facing them in the hour of need as fearlessly as those who are never free from them' (II.39.4). He boasts: 'I doubt if the world can produce a man, who where he has only himself to depend upon, is equal to so many emergencies and graced by so happy a versatility as the Athenian' (II.41.1).

When the plague hits, the Athenians initially struggle to nurse the sick and dying but often end up succumbing to the illness themselves (II.51.2). The majority soon collapses under the strain of the disease

<sup>23</sup> See Lowell Edmunds, *Chance and Intelligence in Thucydides* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1975); and Orwin, *Humanity*, p. 25, n. 28. Orwin's position is closer to the one we defend here. Cornford, in *Thucydides Mythistoricus*, pp. 82–109, discusses the contrast between chance (*tyché*) and foresight (*gnomé*) in the narration of the events at Pylos. We focus here on the plague because it receives such extensive treatment in the text and because it assumes such importance in Thucydides' narrative of the rapid decay of social norms. Connor, *Thucydides*, p. 51, provides other instances of Pericles' possible lack of foresight. George Cawkwell, *Thucydides and the Peloponnesian War* (New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 44–45, suggests that insofar as Pericles' policy succeeds, it does so only accidentally.

(II.52.2–4). The plague causes social customs (*nomoi*) to break down and give way to multiple forms of 'lawless extravagance' (*epi pleon anomias*) (II.53.1). In dramatic contrast to the orderly and elaborate public funeral at which Pericles delivered his speech, the Athenians now neglect to perform proper burial rites for their dead: 'The bodies of dying men lay one upon another. The sacred places in which they had quartered themselves were full of corpses of persons that had died there, just as they were' (II.52.3). The Athenians panic, giving the lie to Pericles' boast about their steadfastness in an emergency. They lose confidence in their judgment and act not as self-reliant and responsible citizens but, Pericles chides them, under the influence of slavish thoughts (II.61.3). The rebuke is ironic, for Pericles earlier used the threat of enslavement to justify resistance to Sparta and the adoption of his extraordinary strategy (I.141.1). Athens, in other words, took up that resistance but then failed to elude the servile condition that resistance was supposed to prevent. Fear and the absence of manly virtue drive the Athenians slave-like to pursue immediate personal pleasures for as long as their health permits in utter disregard for the law and social norms. 'Perseverance in what men called honor was popular with none. . . . Fear of gods or law of man there was none to restrain them' (II.53.3). Far removed from the idealized Athens of the funeral oration, we now see the despair of a people besieged, casting aside its recollection of virtue and obligation. 'The plague offers the most violent challenge to the Periclean attempt to exert some kind of rational control over the historical process.'<sup>24</sup>

Pericles' strategy of abandoning the countryside intensifies the trials of the plague. 'An aggravation of the existing calamity', Thucydides notes, 'was the influx from the country into the city, and this was especially felt by the new arrivals. As there were no houses to receive them, they had to be lodged at the hot season of the year in stifling cabins, where the mortality raged without restraint' (II.52.1–2). Plague struck just as the Spartans invaded. Athenians, gathered behind the walls, struggled to accept that their fields, livestock, orchards and homes were, at that very moment, being ravaged by an enemy no less invisible than the plague. To underscore Athens' misfortune, Thucydides matter of factly reports that the plague never entered the Peloponnesus (II.54.5). Even though 'it was actually asserted that the departure of the

<sup>24</sup> Adam Parry, 'The Language of Thucydides' Description of the Plague' *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, 16 (1969), 106–118. Citation at p. 116.

Peponnesians [who enjoy the luxury of mobility] was hastened by the fear of the [plague]', Thucydides writes, 'in this invasion they remained longer than in any other, and ravaged the whole country, for they were about forty days in Attica' (II.57.1-2). One wonders if Pericles' strategy is not flawed. His embarrassment is obvious in the more defensive tone and rhetoric of the third speech. As spokesman for civic values in the funeral oration, he speaks of 'we' and 'us', but in his third and final speech he belabours the contrast between 'me' and 'you'. References to 'us' disappear.<sup>25</sup>

Thucydides never suggests that Pericles himself is not equal to the emergency. In his third speech, 'He succeeded in convincing them; they not only gave up all idea of sending to Sparta but also applied themselves with increased energy to the war' (II.65.2). But while describing the positive effects of his third speech, Thucydides almost casually informs us that Pericles, too, has perished. 'He outlived [the war's] commencement two years and six months' (II.65.6). Pericles might have helped the Athenians negotiate unforeseen misfortune, but chance disrupts the anticipated course of events. Pericles is dead. Thucydides might have included some narrative account of the year that separates Pericles' third speech from his death. He might have included some description of the circumstances of that death, and, in so doing, eased the reader into the knowledge of Pericles' loss. Instead, Thucydides leaves the reader asking: 'Wait a minute, did Pericles just die?' Thucydides makes us experience vicariously the shock and confusion that the Athenians felt. We live the power of chance not only intellectually but emotionally. Through the antithetical encounter of praise and disappointment, Thucydides' treatment of Pericles, the most gifted of Athenians, has nourished a corrosive scepticism regarding humanity's capacity to master its destiny through strategic brilliance.

### Humanity's dependence on norms of moral conduct

It would be hasty to conclude that the scepticism in Thucydides' treatment of Pericles expressed 'mere tragedy', mere pessimism regarding

<sup>25</sup> Connor, *Thucydides*, p. 65. Alcibiades will later exhort the Spartans to occupy the Attic hinterland permanently. The vulnerability of the countryside is, he explains, Athens' greatest vulnerability and the surest means of compelling the Athenians to sue for peace. Subsequent events will prove Alcibiades correct.

humankind's power to master its destiny.<sup>26</sup> Thucydides does not doubt the power of human intelligence but rather the ability of that intelligence to chart a prudent course of action while disregarding norms of moral conduct. The reader appreciates how Pericles' overweening confidence, both in his own talent and in the wealth of his city, breeds in him and his compatriots the illusion that power has made them immune from the sanctions of moral norms, which, in Pericles own words, 'although unwritten, cannot be broken without acknowledged disgrace' (II.37.3). Impressed by Pericles' judgment and capacity for leadership yet suspicious of his abundant self-confidence, Thucydides invites us to observe how prudent action relies on the guidance and restraint provided by moral norms.

The most important discussion of conditions under which deliberate and prudent conduct is possible is found in the passage on the Corcyraean civil war, or *stasis* (III.70-83). Thucydides describes how factional conflict besets Corcyra as a result of war. The opposing factions, each emboldened by the prospect of reinforcement by an invading power, become increasingly 'harsh' toward one another until normal political interaction is no longer possible. Violence ensues, and 'the Corcyraeans engaged in butchering those of their fellow-citizens whom they regarded as enemies' (III.81.4). Under such conditions, Thucydides explains, it became increasingly difficult, and finally impossible, for both 'states and individuals' (*poleis and idioitai*; III.82.2) to conduct themselves prudently, moderately and deliberately. Instead, *stasis* drove them to extremes, to behave with 'reckless abandon' (*tolma gar alogistos*; III.82.4) and 'frantically' (*empletos*; III.82.4). Thucydides characterizes the situation as one in which actors are unable to practise any measure of 'hesitation' (*melleis promethes*; III.82.4), 'moderation' (*to sophron*; III.82.4) and 'practical intelligence' (*to pros hapanta xunetori*; III.82.4).<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> See Euben, *Tragedy*, p. 194, n. 52, for an accounting of the camps (pessimist versus modernist) into which fall many interpreters of Thucydides' treatment of Pericles.

<sup>27</sup> We depart from Strasser's translation of *xunetori*, 'ability to see all sides of a question', by proposing 'practical intelligence', which conveys the notion of commonly understood virtue. See I.79.2, where the term is used to describe the Spartan leader Archidamus, who uses the term himself (I.84.3) to designate a characteristic virtue of the Spartans and a reason for their stability and success in war. It appears again (II.15.1) in reference to Theseus, the mythic founder of Athens as a unified polis. Thucydides applies the term, always positively, to a handful of revered historical Greek figures, including Themistocles (I.74.1 and I.138.2-3) and the Peisistratids (VI.54.5). He also applies it to actors of his history who cut a good and often brilliant figure, such as Brasidas (IV.81.2) and Hermocrates (VI.72.2), as well as in discussing the oligarchs of 411 (VIII.58.4) and by implication Pericles (II.34.6, 8). See A. W. Gomme, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides*, revised by A. Andrewes and K. J. Dover, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1945-81), II.49.377.



For Thucydides, war encourages actors to expect help from foreign sympathizers, freeing them from the need to treat their adversaries with consideration (III.82.2). As it disrupts normal human commerce, war spawns desperation because it 'takes away the easy supply of daily wants'; 'plunges' cities and individuals into dire necessity,<sup>28</sup> and ushers in a situation in which words have no stable meaning (III.82.4). Sincere good naturedness (*to euethe*s) is laughed out of court (III.83.1), and there is no trust (III.83.2).<sup>29</sup> War disrupts the norms on which we rely for some measure of predictability and civility in daily life, which are the conditions of rational, deliberate, prudent action.

Thucydides' precise words at III.82.1 help us appreciate the subtlety of his insight. He pauses in his narration to note that revolution at Corcyra, being one of the first revolutions to occur, made a strong impression. 'Later on, one may say, the whole Hellenic world (*pan to Hellenikon*) was convulsed (*ekinethe*).'<sup>30</sup> What kind of convulsion did the whole Hellenic world suffer and with what consequences? The verb *ekinethe* (a form of *kineo*, the root of 'kinetic') suggests movement and instability. The image is one of chaos, flux, a destructive kind of motion. Thucydides introduces the term as a noun, *kinesis*, in the first lines of the *History* (I.1.2), and reintroduces the word into the narrative repeatedly, in some form or other, like a Wagnerian leitmotif.<sup>30</sup>

By the time of the Corcyraean *stasis*, *kinesis* has placed in motion not only men and navies, but the discursive environment of norms and laws that make deliberate action possible. People and cities are losing their reserve, the power to check their motion. They are acting on impulse and fear. The things that war is now setting in motion, or stirring up, are not only men, money, resources and ships but also the very customary understandings of what constitute 'normal' human values and relationships. War is causing 'the distortion of morality and values'.<sup>31</sup> The breakdown of the norms that undergird social relations, captured in Thucydides' observation that even words lose their ordinary meanings, is leading to chaos, violence and the pursuit of immediate wants

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Hobbes offers 'plunges' in translation of *piptein*. See David Grene (ed.), *The Peloponnesian War*, *Thucydides*, *The Complete Hobbes Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

<sup>29</sup> *To euethe*s combines 'eu' (good) and 'ethos' (custom or habit), and it thus designates etymologically the moral virtue of being good as a matter not of calculation but of habit.

<sup>30</sup> Connor, *Thucydides*, p. 21, n. 4, observes that *kinesis* 'is an unusual word at this point in the development of Greek, clear enough in general meaning but obscure and surprising in this [I.1.2] context'. The inference is, therefore, that it was not lightly or casually employed by the author.

<sup>31</sup> Hornblower, *Thucydides*, p. 156; see also Connor, *Thucydides*, p. 102, n. 57.

without regard to their moral value (*pleonexia*). When those norms are 'convulsed', as they are at Corcyra, one cannot expect reason to provide a useful guide to action. Reason requires that words convey meaning, that the norms to which we commonly refer in judging the actions, intentions, moral character and trustworthiness of others are still generally employed.

The Corcyraean *stasis* has the same effect as the Athenian plague on humankind's capacity to act reasonably. At Athens, when physicians found themselves unable to stem the tide of plague, reason (*logos*) 'was overpowered'.<sup>32</sup> The same condition obtains in Corcyra. For Thucydides, war is a 'violent teacher' (*biaios didaskalos*; III.82.2, translation modified) because it instructs by setting in motion that which in times of peace is *at rest*. Thucydides opposes this *kinesis* of social norms antithetically to *hesychia*, his term for peace. (*Hesychia* literally means quiet or tranquility; the more common term for peace is *eirene*.)<sup>33</sup> Thucydides employs the *kinesis/hesychia* antithesis to highlight the parallel between *stasis* at Corcyra and plague at Athens. In both instances he opposes an image of *kinesis* with an antithetical image of *hesychia*. In the case of the plague, the image of *hesychia* is developed in the funeral oration. In the case of the Corcyraean *stasis*, it is developed in the description of the Athenian purification of the island of Delos, with its long excerpt from Homer's *Hymn to Apollo* (III.104.1-6). In both instances, Thucydides' use of antithesis compels the reader to ponder the contrast.

### Pericles and the *kinesis* of customary norms

War and *stasis* destabilize norms and meanings and render reasonable, prudent conduct difficult if not impossible to achieve. But it would belie the complexity of Thucydides' text to call war and *stasis* the cause of that destabilization. Indeed, war and *stasis* themselves can, to a considerable extent, be seen as the consequence of a prior subversion of moral norms. Thucydides, at V.25.1, inverts the variables. The Peace of Nicias

<sup>32</sup> Connor, *Thucydides*, p. 100.

<sup>33</sup> Thucydides generally uses the term *eirene* to designate formal peace treaties between cities (as well as the absence of war that results) and *hesychia* to designate the absence of turmoil, both within the city and in relations among cities. At VI.38.3 he explicitly contrasts *hesychia* with *stasis* and the condition in which fellow countrymen behave toward one another as toward an enemy (*polemios*). Note that the application of *hesychia* is not limited to domestic peace (V.55.1-2). For *eirene*, see I.29.4 and V.13.2, 14.1, and 26.2; for *hesychia* see I.70.9, II.22.1, and V.22.2 and 53.

obtains, but Corinth and other Peloponnesian cities are trying mightily to 'disturb' the arrangement. The verb employed here is *diekinoun* (which appends the prefix *dia* [thoroughly] to *kinoo*, discussed above). The episode invites us to take a longer view, to ask if the peace that obtained before the outbreak of war was not similarly being 'disturbed'. We recall the broad indictment of Athens by the Corinthians (I.70.19). There we find the 'daring, dynamism, innovation, audacity, immoderation, presentism, and frenetic motion' characteristic of *stasis* being applied to the conduct of Athens in peacetime: 'They were born into the world to take no rest (*hesychian*) themselves and to give none to others' (I.70.9).<sup>34</sup>

The corrosive effect of 'frenetic motion' saps the capacity of the Athenians as well as other Greeks to act with prudence and deliberation. Early in the *History*, moral argument causes Athens to hesitate before entering into the fateful alliance with Corcyra (I.31–44). Moral scruples cause the Athenians to rethink their policy toward the rebellious Mytilenians. They still possess the power to pause, to listen to argument, to reconsider, to check their motion and moderate their conduct. Yet, the hold of norms has begun to weaken. As Euben points out, Diodotus, the advocate of restraint and decency, is compelled by the press of argument and the hubris of imperialism to 'defend the more moderate human policy in relentlessly realistic terms that anticipate the Athenian arguments at Melos'.<sup>35</sup> This argument is self-defeating in the long run. Diodotus' feigned realism saves the Mytilenians but legitimates the idea that imperialist rule is of necessity instrumental, a matter of expedience, beyond the application of moral argument, as oppressive as it is ineluctable, and in so doing subverts confidence in the legitimacy and value of moral discourse. Diodotus thus unwittingly invites those Athenians who may still be willing to subject action to rational examination to shed their regard for norms of decency in favour of a normatively disembodied strategic calculus. By the time of the Melian dialogue, 'a travesty of dialectic',<sup>36</sup> the process of decay is complete. 'Athens is left with self-interest alone, the desire for power without a culture to give it bounds and meaning.'

<sup>34</sup> Euben, *Tragedy*, p. 190.

<sup>35</sup> Euben, *Tragedy*, p. 180; See Bagby, 'Use and Abuse', Saxonhouse, *Athenian Democracy*.

<sup>36</sup> Hornblower, *Thucydides*, p. 62; See Connor's treatment of the Melian dialogue in *Thucydides*, pp. 147–155: 'Whatever our reactions to what happens to the Melians, it is hard to escape a feeling of horror at what is happening to the Athenians.' Quoted at p. 154. See also Connor, *Thucydides*, pp. 87–88; Euben, *Tragedy*, p. 198.

Not only is ambition of this sort unlimited, it is incoherent and irrational; for without a comprehensible world there can be no way of reasoning about it or acting within it.<sup>37</sup>

The norms and understandings that provide guidance to everyday social intercourse are subverted not only by violence but by 'peacetime' politics and political discourse. Pericles plays no mean role in this history of subversion. He is 'not only at home in wartime, and tolerate[s] its climate of aggression, but even foster[s] it'.<sup>38</sup> At I.127.3, Pericles 'urges' (*horma*) the Athenians to war. The verb *hormao* (cf. English 'hormone') means to set in motion or to rush at something or someone, as in battle. Pericles is a source of *kinesis*. He takes pride in making 'every land and every sea . . . the highway of our daring' (II.41.4). In a passage that is particularly suggestive of Thucydides' complex attitude toward Pericles (VIII.97.2), the historian offers the following judgment on Athens' short-lived experiment with a mixed constitution: 'For the first time in my experience the Athenians appear to have governed themselves well.'<sup>39</sup> The judgment includes Pericles' rule and 'implies censure of Pericles' management of affairs'.<sup>40</sup> It further stokes suspicion regarding Pericles' statecraft. By pandering to the population, by challenging the customary understandings of the bond between citizen and *polis*, by implementing an extraordinarily bold war strategy that uprooted established patterns of life, by offending the allies' reverence for *autonomia* (political autonomy), Pericles is a source of *kinesis* and contributes significantly, though perhaps unwittingly, to the deterioration of norms of social conduct. Not only does he pander to Athenian *pleonexia*, or desire for more power and wealth, but, by making Athens invulnerable to external assault, he tries to free it from the need to cultivate 'normal' relations with other Greek cities. He also tries to free the conduct of the war from the need to secure the customary way of life of the majority of Athenian citizens, who are

<sup>37</sup> James Boyd White, *When Words Lose Their Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 79.

<sup>38</sup> Peter R. Pouncey, *The Necessities of War: A Study of Thucydides' Pessimism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 36.

<sup>39</sup> Translation from Connor, *Thucydides*, p. 228 and n. 34, emphasis added (in conformity

with the text, which stresses 'my experience' with the enclitic particle *ge*). See the discussion of translation problems in Hornblower, *Thucydides*, p. 160, who also (pp. 166–168) gives a critical examination of Pericles' stewardship, as do Richard Ned Lebow, *The Tragic Vision of Politics: Ethics, Interests and Orders* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 254–259; and Michael Palmer, *Love of Glory and the Common Good: Aspects of the Political Thought of Thucydides* (Lanham MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1992), p. 113.

<sup>40</sup> Hornblower, *Thucydides*, p. 160.

compelled to abandon that way of life to seek refuge behind the city walls.<sup>41</sup>

But as Pericles and the Athenians undermine the legitimacy and influence of moral norms through rhetorical flair, brazen strategy and raw violence, they not only create a revolutionary world that loses its moral compass but also prove quite incapable of flourishing in the world they create. In the end, the Athenians suffer as much as anyone from the collapse of political order throughout Greece and the concomitant decay of 'those general laws to which all alike can look for salvation in adversity' (III.84.3; cf. Pericles at II.37.3).<sup>42</sup> The tragic lament of Nicias following the defeat at Syracuse (VII.77.1-7), with its ironic use of language previously employed at the Melian conference, makes this point with pathos.

The *History* offers a sustained exposition of humanity's dependence on moral norms – not for philosophically transcendent reasons but because they are the necessary support of prudent conduct. When those norms are in shambles, the protagonists of the *History* find it virtually impossible to chart a rational course of action. Thucydides' history is unquestionably aimed at an audience that values cleverness, sophistication, intellect and self-interest, but it does not simply affirm and reinforce those values.<sup>43</sup> *Gnomé* (foresight or rational calculation) trips on *tuchê* (chance) or is coopted by *orgê* (passion).<sup>44</sup> In some instances, 'sound calculation leads to a poor outcome',<sup>45</sup> in others, carelessly concocted schemes, such as Cleon's assault on Pylos (IV.27-41), succeed beyond hope. We see the actors of the *History* treat morality and prudence as if they were rival terms. Thucydides invites us to consider the cost of doing so.

What are the norms, and how free was Pericles to respect them? The first question challenges us to identify specifically 'international' norms, since we have already discussed the importance of norms such as reciprocity in domestic political life. This is an important issue for International Relations scholarship, because 'international norms' are at the core of one of the most abiding claims of Realist theory: morality is unachievable without first securing 'political order' through the

<sup>41</sup> See Josiah Ober, 'National Ideology and Strategic Defense of the Population, from Athens to Star Wars' in *Hegemonic Rivalry*, pp. 254-259, on the development of a defensive ideology in Athens.

<sup>42</sup> Though the authenticity of III.84 is disputed, we are convinced by Connor's defence of the passage in *Thucydides* p. 102, n. 60.

<sup>43</sup> Connor, *Thucydides*, p. 15. <sup>44</sup> Connor, *Thucydides*, pp. 55-59, esp. 58, n. 18.

<sup>45</sup> Mark V. Kauppi, 'Contemporary International Relations Theory and the Peloponnesian War' in *Hegemonic Rivalry*, p. 18; cf. Connor, *Thucydides*, p. 118.

exercise of power.<sup>46</sup> It follows from this claim that we can discuss morality meaningfully only as it obtains 'inside' states. It is not meaningful 'outside' states, in the anarchical realm of international politics and war.

G. E. M. de Ste. Croix offers a reading of Thucydides that lends some support to the Realist argument.<sup>47</sup> But in general the stark dichotomization between 'inside' and 'outside' does not hold up well in Thucydides' text. It is beyond the bounds of this chapter to explore in any depth the norms that regulated relations among Greek *poleis*, but it is important to verify the existence of such norms in the text. Indeed, Thucydides' claim, advanced in his analysis of the Corcyraean *stasis*, that both private persons (*idiotai*) and states (*poleis*) found prudent action increasingly difficult to achieve constitutes a rather explicit rejection of the 'inside/outside' dichotomy. The text reveals that norms of war and diplomacy regulated the exchange of the dead (III.113.1-5; IV.97.2-98.8), the treatment of prisoners and refugees, Olympic truces, diplomacy through proxenies, the obligations of allies and so on.<sup>48</sup> Perlman shows how the term *archê* evolved to become synonymous with *dynamis*, *despotia*, and even *tyrannis*, precisely because Athens showed such disregard for the norms of *eleutheria* (freedom) and *autonomia*, which, like sovereignty and *civitas regio* in the Westphalian system, were constitutive of the Greek system of city-states.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, Thucydides seems to experience the war as a kind of civil war within a normatively unified space. Herodotus' efforts to forge cohesion among Sicilians, a people who 'go by the same name' (*onomia hen keklemenous*; IV.64.3), serve as a foil to the civil war that is raging on the mainland among people who are also designated by a single name, 'Hellenes'.<sup>50</sup> Within this unified normative space, the actors in the drama, as well as the reader, are clearly able to form judgments of the moral character of leaders of opposing cities, that is, across political frontiers, on the basis of shared understandings of such goods as justice, honour, mercy and other common virtues – at least until those norms lose sway under the combined blows of an

<sup>46</sup> E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), Chapter 9; Hans Morgenthau, *Scientific Man vs. Power Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946).

<sup>47</sup> G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1972).

<sup>48</sup> At IV.97-8 is an interesting debate regarding what should be seen as custom (*nomos*) and what should not. See Hornblower, *Thucydides*, p. 180; Connor, *Thucydides*, on Mytilene, p. 91, and on Nicias, p. 163; and Pierre Ducrey, *Warfare in Ancient Greece* (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), Chapter 9, on treatment of prisoners of war.

<sup>49</sup> Shalom Perlman, 'Hegemony and *Archê* in Greece: Fourth Century B.C. Views' in *Hegemonic Rivalry*.

<sup>50</sup> See Connor, *Thucydides*, p. 126, n. 42.

overweening self – self-sufficiency, war and *stasis*. It is only when those norms become inoperative that the reader finds it difficult to develop a firm grasp of the moral character of such figures as Alcibiades and Phrynichus, who dominate the final books of the *History*.

Do we really mean to argue, then, that Pericles ignored opportunities to legitimate, reaffirm and defend such norms of moral conduct by adopting the policy course he did? The claim gives pause because scholarship in International Relations, goaded by Thucydides' claim that the war was 'inevitable' (I.23.6),<sup>51</sup> is accustomed to searching for 'necessary outcomes', treating Pericles as an extraordinary leader confronting the great forces of history. But, in addition to Lebow's well-argued complaint that the popular 'power transition' reading of 'necessity' is not well supported by the text, it is simply impossible to identify any recurring set of factors in the *History* that render some pattern of outcomes 'necessary'.<sup>52</sup> It is true that 'the Archeology' (I.2–23) seems to suggest such a theme by alerting the reader to the role of 'historical forces' in the genesis of the *History*. But Thucydides' interest in 'historical forces' all but vanishes in the narrative of the war. 'There is, in Thucydides, no systematic treatment of Spartan and Athenian weaknesses other than those of character.'<sup>53</sup> As the narrative unfolds, the attention paid to individual moral character grows rather than diminishes. In the final books, the historian's attention is absorbed by the moral character of two figures. Thucydides' analysis of moral character suggests that it matters to history, that 'individual human action can change the course of history'.<sup>54</sup>

### Hermocrates at Gela: realism, prudence, and moral norms

Thucydides' demonstration of our dependence on moral norms dilutes his Realist credentials. In a provocative article, Forde argued that Thucydides even counsels us to 'resist' Realism.<sup>55</sup> But our alertness to Thucydides' use of antithesis makes us pause before advancing

categorical statements. Nicias, after all, resists Realism, and the outcome is less than impressive. Recall, moreover, the Archeology's account of the mastery and accumulation of political and military power by the Greeks, the devolution of that power on Athens as set out in the *Pen-takontaetia* (I.88–118.2), and Thucydides' amazement at the dimensions of the *kinesis* with which he introduces the *History*. How could we expect normative restraints to operate effectively when history confers such an overwhelming advantage on a people? The claim that power politics is ineluctable pervades the *History*. In the words of Diodorus, 'it is impossible to prevent, and only great simplicity [*euthetias*] can hope to prevent, human nature [*tes anthropous phyzos*] doing what it has once set its mind upon [*hormomenes*], by force of law [*nomon ischyri*] or by any other deterrent force whatsoever' (III.45.7). The difficulty with Thucydides is finding a coherent rule or prescription in the relentless succession of antithetical claims. How does one reconcile the claim that prudent politics requires guidance by moral norms with the claim that prudent politics is inevitable? The text provides a hint in the remarkable speech delivered by Hermocrates.

Hermocrates wants to promote reconciliation between two feuding Sicilian cities, Gela and Camarina, to fend off Athenian intervention. He begins by making clear Athenian interest in the feud. Athens, he claims, seeks to ally itself with certain Sicilian cities only as a first step towards subjugating the entire island. Moreover, those ambitions are, he states in a realist sounding utterance, 'very excusable', since 'it is just as much in men's nature to rule those who submit to them as it is to resist those who molest them' (IV.61.5). Hermocrates urges the two cities to settle their differences so that Sicily can unite to dispel the Athenian threat. But why should the cities of Sicily prefer the collective defence of their island to the Athenian alliance? Realism counsels only the course of action that is most likely to succeed at acceptable cost. Hermocrates, however, evokes the sentiment of Sicilian identity: 'We are neighbors, live in the same country, are girt by the same sea, and go by the same name of Sicilians' (IV.64.3). His sentiment of Sicilian unity is not grounded in some nationalist sympathy or solidarity. Indeed, national sentiment is held in check by the more ancient rivalry between Dorians and Ionians. The idea of Sicily, for Hermocrates, refers rather to a geographical space in which shared norms have emerged in time to facilitate interaction, deliberation and the settlement of grievances. 'Do you not think that the good which you have', he asks, 'and the ills that you complain of,

<sup>51</sup> The use of 'inevitable' to translate *anagkasi* is controversial. See Connor, *Thucydides*, p. 32, n. 31.

<sup>52</sup> Lebow, 'Power Transition Theory'. <sup>53</sup> Hornblower, *Thucydides*, p. 33.

<sup>54</sup> Hornblower, *Thucydides*, p. 146; see also Kauppi, 'Contemporary International Relations Theory', p. 112.

<sup>55</sup> Forde, 'International Realism', p. 154.

would be better preserved and cured by quiet [*hesychia*] than by war' (IV.62.2)?

Hermocrates greets with scepticism the self-assurance that is bred of power and strategic cleverness. He asks his listeners not to fall prey to the illusion that strength is sure merely because it brings confidence (*euelpi*) (IV.62.4). Given that scepticism, he equates prudent action with the defence of Sicily as a space unified by shared norms. He likens war among Sicilian cities to civil war. He evokes civil war using the forceful term *oikeios polemos* (IV.64.5) rather than the more common *stasis*. The expression produces a powerful image of war in the household (*oikos*). He invites his listeners to be terrified, frightened out of their wits (*ekplagentes*), not only in the presence of the Athenians but also before 'the undefined fear of this unknown future' (IV.63.1). The image of civil war, that is, the destruction of a normative space that enables reasoned action and negotiation (with friends as well as enemies) should inspire terror. Terror, in turn, should inspire concessions on the part of the feuding cities in order to preserve that normative space. Hermocrates' argument recalls with irony the words of Pericles, who sought not only to stir confidence in Athenian power and strategic skill but also to inspire *disdain* for the adversary: 'Disdain [*hyperphroni*]', Pericles states, 'is the privilege of those who, like us, have been assured by reflection of their superiority to their adversary' (II.62.4). In this same vein, Hermocrates' invitation to make concessions contrasts sharply with Pericles' principled rejection of any meaningful negotiation.

Against Pericles, Hermocrates asserts that power can cause people to 'confuse their strength with their hopes' (IV.65.4). He realizes that the temptation to test one's power is strong. The defence of Sicily as a normative space will therefore probably require the countervailing application of military power. Hermocrates is not a peace activist. He is trying to forge an alliance. He admits, as does the Realist, that violence is inevitable or 'natural' in human affairs. He admits that Sicily's cities will probably wage war on one another again (IV.64.3). But prudence dictates participation in the violent struggle for Sicily's independence, with the goal of preserving the social norms that make deliberate action and prudence possible. He does not invite us to resist Realism but to apply the Realist's alertness to the permanence of power and violence in human affairs in defence of norms of moral conduct. Pericles, in contrast, knows how to acquire and apply power, and Thucydides values that mastery. But what is missing in Pericles is a full appreciation of

what one might do with power such that the normative conditions for its intelligent and prudent application can be sustained. To state the argument more boldly, Realism, that is, the deliberate cultivation and application of power, depends on the prior existence of a normative space in which to be deployed. If that condition is not met, Realism is a futile exercise in shooting blindly.

Hermocrates' speech and policy are antithetical to Pericles' earlier speeches and policies. It does not engage Periclean policy directly, but at the level of theory. We submit that the antithesis between Pericles and Hermocrates contains a prescriptive lesson. At the same time, however, we acknowledge how difficult it is to pin Thucydides down. Hermocrates, in another passage, uses the language of ethnic solidarity (VI.80.3). Nevertheless, Thucydides employs all his rhetorical skills to concentrate our minds on Hermocrates' words at IV.59-64 and lend those words centrality. The scene provides us with our first introduction to Sicily and Syracuse, the principal instruments of Athens's defeat, and to Hermocrates, a central figure in that defeat. At Gela, moreover, Hermocrates gives the only speech, a privilege that compels the comparison with Pericles. Finally, his speech follows immediately and antithetically on the Athenian triumph at Pyllos, an unexpected victory and the highwater mark of Athens' fortunes.

### Thucydides and contemporary theory

Thucydides' scepticism, as conveyed by his antithetical style of analysis, invites us to revisit Realism, whose ties to scepticism have been noted but not systematically explored.<sup>56</sup> Scepticism regarding humanity's aptitude for moral improvement justifies the focus on power politics and self-help. Pericles, by this definition, is a Realist. The label fits not only his attitude toward policymaking but also the philosophical premises underlying that attitude. Pericles, like Thucydides, had ties to the Sophists. He was closely linked with Protagoras, and his consort

<sup>56</sup> See Charles R. Beitz, *Political Theory and International Relations* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), Chapter 1; Marshall Cohen, 'Moral Scepticism and International Relations' in Charles R. Beitz, Marshall Cohen, Thomas Scanlon and A. John Simons (eds.), *International Ethics* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985); Michael Loriaux, 'The Realists and Saint Augustine: Scepticism, Psychology, and Moral Action in International Relations Thought' *International Studies Quarterly* 36 (1992), 401-420; R. B. J. Walker, *Inside/Outside: International Relations as Political Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

Aspasia animated a lively intellectual 'salon' in which Sophistic thought flourished. Pericles may have drawn more or less self-consciously on Sophistic scepticism in order to 'clear the decks' of received wisdom and thus make room for his strategic innovations.

But Thucydides' subtle critique of Pericles questions the Realists' ability to ground their political philosophy in sceptical premises. Scepticism in Thucydides spreads from doubt regarding humanity's capacity for moral deliberation and action to doubt regarding humanity's capacity to deploy Realist policy in defiance of moral norms. Thucydides excites such scepticism even when statecraft is, as in Pericles' case, brilliantly conceived. It is difficult to think of a Realist argument that might stave off this metastasis of scepticism from doubt regarding human morality to doubt regarding the human intellect's self-sufficiency. Thucydides, in any event, 'makes it clear where he stood: it is not with the sophists who denied the validity of any principle of morality but a short-sighted self-interest'.<sup>57</sup>

Thucydides' invitation to appreciate how norms function as a condition for deliberate action intersects with constructivist literature on norms and law.<sup>58</sup> The *History* shows how norms provide guidance in a non-determinist manner. Thucydides' reliance on a sceptical outlook suggests a way that proponents of constructivism might philosophize about the foundations of that perspective.<sup>59</sup> Inversely, his acknowledgment of the inevitability of power relations should inspire caution in constructivists as they mount their assault on Realist Theory. His account of politics in extraordinary times suggests that we can, and should, assess how material struggle supports or unsettles norms.

<sup>57</sup> Hornblower, *Thucydides*, p. 185, citing Gomme, *Historical Commentary*, revised by A. Andrewes and K. J. Dover (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1945–81), p. 81.

<sup>58</sup> Martha Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1996); Peter J. Katzenstein (ed.), *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Audie Klotz, *Norms in International Relations: the Struggle Against Apartheid* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1995); Friedrich Kratochwil, *The Human Perspective on International Relations* (Princeton NJ: Center of International Studies, Princeton University, 1981); Friedrich Kratochwil, *Rules, Norms, and Decisions: On the Conditions of Practical and Legal Reasoning in International Relations and Domestic Affairs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Cecelia Lynch, *Beyond Apprehension: Interpreting Intra-war Peace Movements in World Politics* (Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1999); Alexander Wendt, 'Anarchy Is What States Make of It' *International Organization* 46 (1992), 391–425; Lebow, *The Tragic Vision of Politics*.

<sup>59</sup> Kratochwil, *Human Perspective*, sets out from David Hume. There is a parallel between the argument developed here and Hume's own rediscovery of the norms of the 'common life' through the exploration of sceptical premises. Compare Terry Nardin's discussion of Michael Oakeshott in Nardin, *Law, Morality, and the Relations of States* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983).

We cannot develop these ideas here, but we raise them to recall Thucydides' capacity to confront each generation's particular theoretical enthusiasm with challenging and even deadly objections. In our view, his capacity to resist encapsulation – not his putative status as the founder of one or another school of thought – remains the reason his work stands as a 'possession for all time'.