

# POWER AND PRETEXT: THE STATUS OF JUSTICE IN THUCYDIDES

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## INTRODUCTION

Thucydides wrote *The History of the Peloponnesian War* “believing that it would be a great war, and more worthy of relation than any that had preceded it” (1.1.1).<sup>1</sup> He described the Peloponnesian War as the “greatest movement yet known in history,” because this conflict affected almost all of mankind (1.1.2). The Peloponnesian War included all of the Greeks and most of the Barbarians as well. This war was a universal war, involving everything that is found in human nature. It affected the two poles of “Greekness” that represented two vastly different ways of life under the idea of being Greek. Sparta and Athens are fundamental opposites, among which are their public positions regarding the status of justice in international relations. The war between them revealed their differences and contrasted fundamental truths about human existence. Thucydides also believed it important to record episodes involving the war between the two most powerful cities, especially since both combatants were perfectly prepared and at the highest ability to

fight because they were at their peak condition in terms of their chosen way of life. Thucydides believed that the greatest rest would give rise to the greatest motion. Before the Peloponnesian War was a great time of rest, allowing the two cities to build up to their full potential. According to Strauss, “Thucydides surely lets us see the universal in the individual event which he narrates and through it: it is for this reason that his work is meant to be a possession for all times.”<sup>2</sup> From a particular event, universal truths can be found that are useful for all of mankind to know. Lessons about the tendencies of human nature can be culled from particular events and can be applied to others. Specifics may change, but the underlying principles and stimuli will remain fundamentally similar. Because of the fundamental immutability of human nature, we know that situations in politics will remain fundamentally the same.

Whether or not one believes that Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian War* is “a possession for all time” depends upon one’s view of whether history can be the vehicle for political understanding (1.22.4). Those with a progressive or linear view of history would not accept Thucydides as a valuable resource for the present and future.<sup>3</sup> To hold a progressive view of

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<sup>1</sup> Robert B. Strassler, ed. *The Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to the Peloponnesian War*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996). Note: from here on reference to this book will be cited parenthetically by book and paragraph number.

<sup>2</sup> Leo Strauss. *The City and Man* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964). 143.

<sup>3</sup> Hegel, Kant, and Marx, for example, all have progressive views of one kind or another. They differ in several aspects, but they hold the same general idea on the progressive nature of history and mankind. All are marked by the idea of the cessation of conflict in human affairs.

history is to believe in the perfectibility of man; men become better and perfected as history progresses. In this view mankind will eventually progress beyond war and dispute and reach a state in which perpetual peace or the perfection of mankind is reached. In the ultimate state of perpetual peace, all problems will be solved by debate, discussion, and contemplation. In this utopia, no country will be armed or pose a threat to another. This view of the perfectible nature of mankind and our ability to progress to a plateau of perpetual peace is not compatible with the principles demonstrated in Thucydides. Those who hold a progressive view of history believe that they are above the ancients such as Thucydides as they had achieved advancements in technological, scientific, and moral knowledge since the time of Thucydides. Progressives or idealists would believe that the nature of mankind has advanced beyond that which was described in Thucydides in the sense that certain political alternatives are no longer available to human beings because we have proceeded past them with our newfound knowledge. Therefore, the wealth of knowledge present in Thucydides would be, for the most part, ignored by idealists and be of no value to them.

In all reality, history has proven Thucydides correct. His work, indeed, has revealed itself to be “a possession for all time.” Because human nature is not entirely malleable, similar situations are likely to occur in history. By saying that human nature is immalleable, it is to say that fundamental aspects of human nature do not change with the passage of time or technological advances. Because of this lack of malleability in human nature, it is useful to look to history as a guide in making current decisions. This is true because history is not linear or progressive by nature. Thucydides does not hold history as locked in a set pattern – progressive or otherwise – but he

does demonstrate a kind of consistency based on the fundamentally consistent nature of the world and the nature of human beings responding to that world. The moderns are no greater than the ancients because human nature does not alter with the passage of time. Because of this fundamental consistency, the present must reflect the past; history often repeats itself – only with differences in details.

Not everyone chooses to accept Thucydides’ account of the war as a true history. Many claim his work to be too poetic to be considered a scientifically historic work. Much of this controversy lies in the methodology in which Thucydides chose to write the *History*. As opposed to writing the exact facts and the word by word speeches, he admitted that some deviations from what really happened occur in his work. Thucydides plainly stated at the onset of his work that he was not present at every speech given, nor was he reiterating them word for word. Instead Thucydides told us that “my habit has been to make the speakers say what was in my opinion demanded of them by the various occasions, of course adhering as closely as possible to the general sense of what they really said” (1.22.1). Thucydides’ method in presenting the speeches was to write them as he considered they should have been spoken. While he maintained the general body of the speech, he added his own flavor. He would put himself in the speaker’s position, circumstances, and current situations. He then articulated the means by which, in his judgment, the position could have been better presented. Thucydides chose to employ the method of writing that he did because of his understanding of history. His aim was not to present a perfect depiction of particulars. The particulars, while necessary, were not considered by him to be the most important matter at hand. The most important element of the *History* is the

lessons that Thucydides tried to convey to the reader about how humans will tend to act and predictably react given certain situations and choices. Because of his understanding of the flow of human choice and reaction in history, Thucydides believed that these lessons will be of use in predicting and anticipating future political events.

The absence of romance in my history will, I fear, distract somewhat from its interest; but if it be judged useful by those inquirers who desire an exact knowledge of the past as an aid to the understanding of the future, which in the course of human things must resemble if it does not reflect it, I shall be content. In fine, I have written my work, not as an essay which is to win the applause of the moment, but as a possession for all time. (1.22.4)

According to Strauss, Thucydides rewrote the speeches so that they would become true; “the true speech is the speech as heard by the man of the highest political understanding.”<sup>4</sup>

However, Thucydides chose to write much of his account in the form of dialogues as a poetic imitation of political life. In discussions between nations, Thucydides wanted the outsider to see both sides and determine on their own what lessons need to be taken from the situation. He imitated political drama which is what one sees in their current surroundings. The right and wrong are not presented nor are lessons which could be learned obviously presented. He does not give us the answers, but forces us to look at the big questions ourselves. Like in the *History*, one must use their own

judgment to determine appropriate application in daily political life.

In my opinion, Thucydides is more of a historian than are the “scientific historians” of today because he went to extreme measures to ensure that he wrote an unbiased history of the events. “Scientific historians” write histories that are as they see the event and are one-sided; therefore they present us with a biased account of history because they do not present all sides. Thucydides is superior because he gives both sides of the argument in all their partiality. He used the dialogue format in effort to present that the views of the political actors in his account did not necessarily reflect his own views. Thucydides intended his work to be used “by those inquirers who desire an exact knowledge of the past as an aid to the understanding of the future, which in the course of human things must resemble it if it does not reflect it” (1.22.4). A one-sided account of events would not allow for the clearest reflection upon the past to aid in understanding future events. For this reason, some refer to Thucydides as “the most political historian, the greatest political historian of all times, the man who has grasped and articulated most fully the essence of political life, the life of politics as it actually is.”<sup>5</sup>

Many lessons can be drawn from Thucydides, but one of the most crucial lessons central to *The History of the Peloponnesian War* is the concern for justice in international relations. In each situation, questions involving right and wrong arise. However, there is no party who appears to be obviously just or correct in its actions, often due to pretexts and manipulation. One is left to wonder what the outcome would be if one party acted differently or used different words to persuade the people. Thucydides passes no judgment on the

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<sup>4</sup> Leo Strauss, *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 94.

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<sup>5</sup> Strauss, *Rebirth*, 75.

outcomes, but rather leaves it to the reader to interpret and struggle with the big questions. In reading Thucydides, several questions come to mind. Does justice act as the motivating factor among nations? If not, what does? Finally, what is the effect upon the citizen and the polis if a nation denies the idea and very existence of justice?

## **THE FIRST MEETING OF THE PELOPONNESIAN LEAGUE**

In the first book of the *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Thucydides addresses the real cause versus the propaganda cause of the Peloponnesian War. At this time, both Athens and Sparta were enjoying peace. However, tensions were mounting between them and their allies. The final straw leading to war between Athens and Sparta was the war between the Corinthians and the Corcyraeans. After coming to a stalemate in the war, the Corinthians began to build up their navy immensely to defeat the Corcyraeans (1.31). The Corcyraeans were greatly dismayed once they heard news of this and were frightened. They lacked allies for they were members neither in the Delian nor Peloponnesian League. Panicked, the Corcyraeans sent envoys to Athens to ask for a protective alliance. The Corinthians discovered the plans of the Corcyraeans to do so and they also sent an envoy to Athens. The Corinthians attempted to prevent the Athenians from granting an alliance with Corcyra.

Historically, the Corcyraeans practiced an isolationist policy. They avoided alliances, finding them to be unnecessarily risky. The Corcyraeans did not care to ally themselves with others thinking they could avoid taking risks at the choice of their allies (1.32). However, this isolationist policy left Corcyra a solitary entity in the face of a much larger enemy. The Corcyraeans

present three rationales for the Athenians to agree to an alliance. First, they appeal to justice. They claim that the Athenians would be assisting a nation that had been treated unjustly by others. Secondly, the Corcyraeans claim that by assisting them, the Athenians would forever be given great gratitude and their goodwill would not be forgotten. Lastly, they appeal to the self-interest of the Athenians. The Corcyraeans were the second greatest naval power in all of Greece. Athens being the greatest naval power would, by acquiring Corcyra, become the strongest at sea by far. They state that out of fear, the Spartans want to go to war against Athens, and strengthening their navy through an alliance would have served only to benefit Athens. The Corcyraeans even suggest preempting the Spartans in this war, and going after them first before they could plot against Athens (1.33).

Fully aware that the Athenians and Spartans were under a truce, the Corcyraeans ensure Athens that by entering into this alliance, they would not be breaching the preexisting treaty with Sparta. The alliance was only a defensive one to protect Corcyra (1.35). Corcyraean emissaries point out that if the Athenians were to refuse a protective alliance with them, they may later find the Corcyraeans as allies of the Peloponnesians. In addition, Corcyra has a strategically opportune location for Athens: en route to Sicily, a crucial naval crossing point to Sparta (1.36).

After pleading their position, the Corinthians speak. They argue that the Corcyraeans acted unjustly in isolating themselves. They also claim that they had never acted unfairly towards the Corcyraeans or any of their colonists, as their policy was to act justly. The Corinthians believe it to be unfair and unwise for the Athenians to protect a nation that has never shared their power with Athens (1.39). Corinth was currently in a treaty with

Athens. Corcyra had never been in any political agreement with Athens. Why should they choose to help them? Because of this situation, the Corinthians threaten hostility and retribution if this alliance should occur (1.40). Corinth went so far as to remind Athens of past assistance, such as in the war with Aegina and the revolt of Samos. They demand gratitude. Instead of allying themselves with Corcyra, Athens should return the past favors of Corinth and avoid enmity. In light of all of these arguments, the Corinthians state that it would be in the Athenians' best interest to reject the demand of Corcyra. The ominous overtones are far from lucid argument.

Realizing the eminence of war with the Peloponnese, Athens chose to ally herself with Corcyra (1.44). They believed that the powerful fleet of Corcyra and their strategic positioning en route to Sicily would prove insurmountable to Athens in a war against Sparta.

Corcyra appealed to justice, gratitude, and the self-interest of Athens. While these may have been perfectly valid arguments, Corcyra used them as pretexts to conceal their true motive. More than likely, their concern was merely for their own self-interest. Their concern for justice was in their own interest: they were being bullied by other nations. The gratitude promised to the Athenians was also due to the same motive. They promised to be useful to the Athenians not for the good of Athens, but for their own preservation.

Similarly, Corinth appealed to justice as well as to the self-interest of Athens. Corinth believed it was unjust for Corcyra to isolate herself. After all Corcyra had never shared power with Athens before, why should she benefit from it now? They also stated that it would be in Athens' best interest to avoid alliance with Corcyra; if they did pursue such an alliance, Corinth would retaliate. This sounds more like a

threat than an appeal to the self-interest of Athens. It is quite apparent that Corinth too was covering its true motives with pretexts.

Athens, as a polis of realists, disregards both arguments. Instead, they choose what they find to be in their best interests. Corcyra's naval power was far too tempting to overlook. Athens plainly disregards the treaty with Sparta, acting unjustly. A new alliance, that was not merely defensive as stated before, violated the treaty. However, no consideration trumped that of expedience. The Corcyraean navy would be useful to Athens in the eminent war against Sparta.

Potidaea was a member of the Delian League that shared ancestry with Corinth being one of their colonies. The Corinthians threatened that if Athens interfered with a colony of Corinth, they would not hesitate to interfere with one of theirs. Athens sought to interfere with Corcyra so Corinth, an ally of Sparta, encouraged Potidaea to act against Athens (1.56). With a Spartan promise to invade Attica, the Potidaeans revolted against Athens even though they were tributary allies (1.58). The wheels were set in motion for war. The essential point to see here is that Corinth actually put its threat against Athens into action. This can be contrasted with the Melians who could never do that. The Corinthians were strong enough to retaliate against Athens. The Melians were not.<sup>6</sup>

Coincidence plays into politics. It so happened that an embassy of Athenians was present in Sparta and heard that speeches would be offered at the Spartan Assembly; the subject being the matter of war (1.72). Four speeches are tendered. Representatives of Corinth, Athens, Sparta, represented by Archidamus the king, and the war party spoke. The finger pointing begins with the Corinthians, laying blame at the feet of

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<sup>6</sup> See Melian Dialogue.

Sparta for allowing Athens to become entirely too powerful. In earlier years, Sparta could have easily accomplished defeat of Athens. With her increased strength, a victory by Sparta would have a lesser chance to occur (1.69). By allowing Athens to grow and imperialize, a boiling point is near. Corinth next places blame on the Spartans. They call them homebodies lacking motivation to leave Sparta. Traditionally the Spartans were quiet, trustworthy, and perceived as “safe” (1.70). The Corinthians directly place responsibility on the head of the Spartans for, by their acquiescence, they allowed the strengthening of Athens and the building of walls following the Persian War. For all intents Spartans were a law abiding body. Their preliminary concern was to conserve what they had. They saw no immediate need for expanding. This is due to the nature of their laws, as given by Lycurgus.

The Corinthians juxtapose their view of Sparta with that of Athens. The Athenians are innovative, quick, courageous, enterprising, and covetous (1.70.2). In contrast, the Spartans are passive, conservative, cautious, and slow to act. The Athenians were never at rest while the Spartans prefer to be at rest. The Corinthians blame the old-fashioned habits of Sparta as the reason that they could not accurately perceive Athenian innovation and action as a threat. The main point made by juxtaposing Athens to Sparta is to show that nations have characters that are formed by their regimes and laws. People living under monarchies act differently than do those under democracies. Athenians without their city are fine; they were self-sufficient. The Spartans without their city are lost and worthless. The Spartans are meant to take offense to this. They are meant to be inspired to motion (similar to that of the Athenians) to fight the Athenians. However, does this not suggest that the Athenian way of life is better?

The Athenians then state that they were not going to offer defense on the allegations against their breach of treaty (1.73.1). However, they want to remind the Spartans of their merits and show how they were entitled to their possessions. They remind the Greeks that they helped save Greece from the Persians, especially at the Battle of Marathon and in numerous naval victories (1.73.4). This is used to justify their empire. Their past actions do not merit their unpopularity among the Greeks. At one point in the Persian War, the Spartans deserted the Greeks, while the Athenians led them to victory. In defense of their empire, they claim that they were moved by necessity in three ways: fear, honor, and interest. In fact, given this situation, any of the other Greek poleis would have done the same thing. Fear was the most excusable of their three justifications. No one can deny the right of a nation to defend itself (1.76.2). The Athenians claim that if Sparta were in the same situation, they would have done the same thing. However, Sparta would have ruled over their empire in a worse manner than Athens. Sparta, due to their regime, would have acted more tyrannically towards their imperial subjects. The Athenians, as a product of democracy, claim to rule subjects in a moderate and measured method because it is in their interests to do so (1.76.4). They were moderate within the bounds of necessity. However necessity moderates everyone, and despite this, the Athenians ruled justly and moderately over their empire. The Greeks should have been thankful to have Athens do so, because not all nations would do the same in their place.

The Athenians claim that “it was not we who set the example, for it has always been the law that the weaker should be subject to the stronger” (1.76.12). They bring up the idea that the strong shall rule the weak. This statement has no consider-

ation to justice as a reason for rule, only power.

When calculations of interest have made you take up the cry of justice – a consideration which no one ever yet brought forward to hinder his ambition when he had a chance of gaining anything by might. (1.76.14-16)

The Athenians also point out that it is only in a situation where they are threatened that the Spartans cry out for justice. The Spartans feared Athenian power and resorted to the cry of justice to cloak their self-interest. On the contrary, the Athenians claim that those who are powerful never bring up justice to gain anything for they do not have the need for that claim. They did not deny the existence of justice in international relations, but they did deny its applicability in all situations. Justice plays an important role in settling arguments, but only when it can be used among equals. Otherwise, it is appealed to by the weaker party to protect themselves from the stronger party. Finally, the Athenians remind the Spartans that this argument would end in one of two choices: arbitration or war, so they should decide carefully (1.78). While the Corinthians tried to inspire Athenian style motion in the Spartans, the Athenians attempt to inspire the opposite, hoping that reminding the Spartans of their great power and of the fact that a good deal should be considered before entering war would encourage them to stick to their tendency to rest.

Thucydides placed a lot of importance upon the Athenian embassy. The members remained nameless to give the effect that it could have been any Athenian

speaking.<sup>7</sup> They were also unique in that they were not sent by their city to defend their city, and they gave a speech to do so outside their own city. The Athenians spoke frankly, even though they were not officials of Athens, thus demonstrating the power of Athens. The powerful do not have to cloak their true meanings in the idea of justice or with excuses. The powerful can speak freely and openly of their actions to anyone – even if they are not of the ruling class of the polis. This immediately proved the Corinthian point to be true: Athenians functioned perfectly well both in and out of the city. They did not rely on the city for their ability to speak and act. Spartans outside of the city, on the contrary, acted according to no law but only to their own will. They tended to be rude, destructive, and menacing (1.77.6). They did not know how to act outside of their polis, free of laws. They were not educated by their regime to function as individuals outside of their polis, so they did not know how to do so.

Once the Athenians began to speak, it is obvious that they did not come to make an apology. The intent was to advise the Spartans to make their move carefully and only after slow deliberation. This speech was bold, frank, and filled with candor. Neither explanation nor interpreters were required. There was a bone of contention here, however, between the direction Thucydides believed Athens to provoke thought as opposed to that stated by Athens. It was Thucydides's assertion that the Athenian intent was to cause Sparta to remain at rest by the great power of the city. The Athenians claim that they merely spoke to the city in a reasonable, fair light in order to validate the worthiness of their city in holding such an empire.

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<sup>7</sup> Michael Palmer, *Love of Glory and the Common Good* (Lanham: Roman & Littlefield Publishers, 1992), 49.

Next, the king of Sparta, Archidamus speaks. He represents the peace party of Sparta. He is known to be wise, moderate of soul, and wanted peace. He states that if the Athenians would continue to misbehave, war should be the answer, but carefully considered – even if they must ally themselves with the Persians! Victory should be thought of as almost certain if war was to be waged. Sparta was a land power; Athens ruled the seas. Attica was the only place that Sparta could devastate, which would not harm Athens much (1.81). In response to the Corinthian claim that the Spartans were too trusting and slow, Archidamus says that they were moderate and had self-control (1.84.2). In response to the Corinthian claim that the Spartans are not taught to think for themselves, he states that the Spartans were not taught to think of themselves as above the laws (1.84.3)! He also mentions the power of chance – things can go wrong easily, so war should only be taken on after careful consideration. Archidamus was considering the practical aspects of politics in his argument. He was most concerned with necessity. War should not be waged on a whim. By entering in such a war, the Spartans could end up destroying themselves; therefore, they should proceed with caution and only undergo war if it is absolutely inevitable. Archidamus appeals to the self-interest of Sparta by saying that the war should be waged with caution. However, he is primarily motivated by fear.

Finally, the war party of Sparta speaks, as represented by Sthenelaidas, an ephor of Sparta. He claims that the Athenians, in their lengthy speech, only proved to praise themselves and not deny mistreatment of Spartan allies. He also believes that if “they behaved well against the Persians in the past, but ill toward us now, they deserve double punishment for having ceased to be good and for having become bad” (1.86.4). If they had once acted properly towards the

Peloponnesians and now do not, their improper actions were not due to ignorance. To ignore the wrongs of an ally would be unwise. He appeals to honor and justice to motivate the rest of the Spartans to war. He demands immediate retribution for the wrongs done to Sparta. To prevent further Athenian expansion, to uphold the honor of Sparta, and to maintain its present allies, Sparta must act now (1.86). One can see by his argument, the immoderateness of his concern for justice. Precautions and deliberation should be undertaken when determining what is just and unjust, should they not? His concern for justice was feeble, if existent; his main motivation was honor. The assembly then voted for war against Athens, acting against the Spartan tendency of rest.

## **THE SECOND MEETING OF THE PELOPONNESIAN LEAGUE**

At the second meeting of Sparta and her allies in 440 A. D., the issue of war among the Greeks was discussed. First Corinth speaks, demanding war against Athens (1.119). However, they had previously, on their own accord, solicited the individual poleis for votes in favor of war. They did this out of fear that war may come too late to save Potidaea. Corinth praises Sparta for voting for war and for taking the care to arrange the current assembly of the Peloponnesian League. Corinth refers to this as a duty of Sparta due to their “supremacy” (1.120.4). To earn the honors and prestige of being the leader, Sparta must lookout for the common interest of all members of the Peloponnesian League. In addition, Corinth shows them the risk of allowing Athenian power to go unchecked. The Corinthians note that inactivity is the surest way to lose the goods known to the poleis in their time of peace and reprieve. Peace may always

sound favorable to war, but to sustain their ways of life, war was necessary (1.120). They then try to paint an optimistic image for the rest of the Peloponnesian League to calm their worries. Loans from Delphi and Olympia could surely provide the loans needed to finance such a project (1.121). The Corinthians assure Sparta that with these funds and some practice, the Peloponnesian fleets could soon equal those of Athens. Bribes could be made to allies of Athens to allow for fortifications to be established in Attica.

Most importantly, the Peloponnesian League must remain united against Athens, for the lack to do so would result in slavery (1.122). Athens must not be allowed to expand their tyranny. As the Peloponnesians had removed tyrants in individual cities, they must not permit Athens to further their tyranny over all of Greece. It seems as though Corinth is appealing to justice here; no one would claim it is just to rule as a tyrant. They also called to the self-interest of the Peloponnesians; would anyone want to be under the rule of a tyrant? After appealing to justice, Corinth shifts to an appeal to the gods. They claim that the god of Delphi encouraged the war. Such approval for war from the god would only occur if Athens had broken the treaty already (1.123). Therefore, the Peloponnesians would not be in the wrong for warring against Athens. The treaty had already been broken, according to the god of Delphi's encouragement, so the Peloponnesians no longer had a reason to honor it. Corinth states that "the identity of interests is the surest of bonds whether between states or individuals," that war that may have seemed at first to be only to save Potidaea, but war was really in the interests of all to prevent further Athenian tyranny (1.124.3). Finally, the Corinthians state that a Peloponnesian vote for war was necessary to refuse Athens from attaining her ambition of universal empire (1.124).

The majority voted for war. A year later, war against Athens began (1.125).

While Corinth states many reasons to go to war with Athens, the main driving factor was self-interest. They appeal to the honor of Sparta, in an attempt to make them feel shamed if they were not to act. However, was the honor of Sparta really a concern to Corinth? They then appeal to the self-interest of the Peloponnesian League – Athens was becoming too much of a threat to everyone. They also appeal to justice, referring to Athens as tyrants. Finally, the gods are mentioned. If the Oracle at Delphi supports the war, Athens must have broken the treaty – it would be just to retaliate. In reality, Corinth speaks out of self-interest. They do not want their security and well-being to be threatened further by the ever strengthening Athenian empire.

The year between the decision and the outbreak of war was spent searching for the best "pretext for war as possible" (1.126.1). Why did the Peloponnesians feel that they needed a pretext for war? Self-interest and the desire to stop Athenian imperialism could not be the stated causes for war. For some reason, poleis feel that they must appeal to a reason to go to war so that they may justify themselves to any other parties. Humans want to feel in accord with justice, it seems to be in their nature. The reader is shocked about what the Athenians say when they claim that power is the only thing that determined relations between poleis. This is because no one talks like this openly. As long as the idea of justice exists, people will desire to have their motives or causes seem just.

The Spartans send an embassy to Athens demanding that they "drive out the curse of the goddess" (1.126.4). Their stated cause was for the honor of the gods; however, their actual cause proved to be different. Pericles, a powerful Athenian, was known to have a connection to this curse. By

driving Pericles out, Sparta hoped to weaken the Athenians' leadership and morale (1.127). In response, the Athenians demand that Sparta drives out the curse of the goddess of the Bronze House and the curse of Taenarum (1.128). Sparta then demands that Athens repeal the Megarian Decree, re-establish independence to Aegina, and cease the siege of Potidaea (1.139). Once nations begin going back in history to justify foreign policy, there is no turning back. An endless cycle of past misdoings are brought up and tossed back and forth between parties. All the while, both parties know that these past offenses have absolutely nothing to do with the resolution of the current issue at hand. Ultimately, it is hard to resolve anything when going back in history. The Spartans realized this and abandoned the method pretty quickly. Finally, the Spartan ambassadors arrive with an ultimatum: the only possibility for peace in Greece would be for Athens to dismantle her empire (1.139.3). The previous demands were not even mentioned with this message. By examining what was brought to the table by the Spartan ambassadors in their negotiations, it can be inferred that the reason for conflict had nothing to do with the previous demands; they were merely pretexts. The true reason for war, the greatest cause, was that Sparta did not like the amount of power held by Athens. The Athenian empire was perceived as a great threat to Sparta.

Upon receiving this Spartan ultimatum, the Athenians held an assembly to determine how to proceed. Of the many men who spoke that day, Thucydides chose to include the speech of only one man, Pericles (1.139.4). Pericles was the most influential man in Athens at that time. Pericles begins his speech by noting a key difference between himself and the rest of the Athenians. Throughout all circumstances, only he has remained consistent with the same opinion. He is not subject to his passions,

but to his reason and the good of the city. No concessions must be made to Sparta (1.140.1). He also mentions a problem of democracy: The attitude of a nation deciding to wage war is different from the attitude held during war. He knows that should Athens be triumphant, the assembly will take all credit for the idea. In times of peril or hardship, Pericles will take all of the blame. This foreshadows what is to come later.<sup>8</sup> After mentioning this problem with decisions made by democratic assemblies, Pericles returns to the situation of the moment.

Pericles firmly states that Athens must not concede to Spartan aggression (1.140). Athens would not be going to war over the Megarian Decree, but for the greatest matters. Pericles understood that the calls to past offenses were merely the pretext for war, but not the real cause. To fight against the Spartans would send a message: this is how they respond under pressure (1.140). To give in to one demand would only open the door for Sparta to ask for more. The Periclean understanding of relations between cities is that if one backs down or enters negotiations, they will become a slave (1.141). By refusing to concede to Sparta's demands, Athens asserts herself as Sparta's equal. If Athens were to back down, Sparta could continue to make demands. Athens would then descend into a lowly position, acting as a slave of Sparta. Cities exist in a state of nature with one another; the strong rule. The strength of each city determines its position in international relations. This apparently small matter is a question of Athens' resolution. It was really the character and position of Athens that was at stake (1.141).

Pericles points out that the Athenians had the advantages of money, a strong navy, and their ability to live off of the sea. The Spartans, by contrast, were farmers who did

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<sup>8</sup> See Third Speech of Pericles.

not want to leave their land; they were very slow to act. The Peloponnesians were not centrally organized in their league. The Spartans also did not have money (1.142). They also lacked naval training which they could not quickly or easily acquire. Even if Sparta were to receive loans from Olympia or Delphi and bribed Athens' allies to join their navy, they would still not be a match for Athens' naval prowess (1.143).

Pericles attempts to place the image of Athens as an island in the minds of the Athenians. This was to remind them that they are powerful and self-sufficient, and that they could afford to allow Attica to be attacked (1.143). Pericles's game plan was indeed to allow Sparta to attack Athens and remain behind the city walls. Athens must not trust her military abilities to fight the Spartans over this territory. This would pose a great risk, because Sparta forms its citizens to be warriors, and Athenians focus more upon naval power. The territory could be sacrificed, and Athens could attack Sparta with her navy and empire, her greatest strengths (1.143). Pericles takes note of the particulars in this situation. He says that

If I had thought that I could persuade you, I would have bid you go out and lay them waste with your own hands, and show the Peloponnesians that this at any rate will not make you submit. (1.144.5)

Pericles is aware that the Athenians will be pained to lose their land and homes in Attica. If he could get them to destroy it themselves, he would do so to prove a point to Sparta: Attica is of no great importance to Athens, and Sparta can invade with full vigor to no result. But, men are attached to their possessions, and Pericles is aware that he cannot sway them to destroy what is their own.

In conclusion, Pericles states that Athens must accept this war as unavoidable. The path to victory would be in focusing on the war against Sparta and not diverting to expand the empire or to take on unnecessary risks. He fears more the mistakes that could be made by Athens than enemy attack. Pericles believes that the only way Athens will lose is if she pursues her empire further during the war (1.144.2). He does not say that it is unjust to expand the empire; he only says that it is not prudent to do so during war. Pericles compares the current situation with the Persian war. He appeals to the glory of the ancestors of the city to motivate the citizens. The Athenians must not fail their fathers by failing to pass on their powerful state to the next generation (1.144).

While Pericles suggested a safe and prudent solution to face Spartan attacks, it was also very uncharacteristic of the Athenians. The Athenians were a people of motion; the Spartans, a people of rest. This war would serve to reverse their roles, if fought in the manner that Pericles suggests. Pericles plays games with the idea of glory. He appeals to glory in the minds of the Athenians, but he suggests action that is not glorious. The Athenians will want to utilize the war as an avenue for pursuing glory. How can they do this if they are hiding behind their city walls, allowing Sparta free reign to attack the countryside of Attica? Could the Athenians accept this? The war would not be a short one, as Pericles notes; how long could Athens watch Sparta attack their lands without retaliation? This was certainly against the Athenian character. Also, could Athens survive without expanding her empire? Once an empire is established, it seems as though it must continue expanding in order to survive.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See Sicilian Expedition.

## MILEAN DIALOGUE

After the successful expedition of Athens against the Spartan colony of Melos, the Athenians encounter another problem regarding resistance in their empire. The Melians, after their defeat, refused to submit to the rule of Athens. Instead of cooperating with their new rulers, the Melians met the Athenians with an air of open hostility (5.84.2). Before doing any harm to the land, the Athenians send an envoy to attempt negotiation with their new subjects. Instead of bringing the Athenian envoys before the people, the Melians gave audience to only the “magistrates and the few” (5.84.3). Because the Athenians were only speaking before the few, and not the many, they suggest an open, honest, and frank debate to the Melians. An open debate would lack the need for deception and allow for interruption and rebuttal. This act demonstrates the power of Athens. Their ability to be frank in an international debate demonstrates that they have the power to do so. The weak tend to avoid such frankness out of fear of retaliation for what was said. The Athenians fear no one and they speak candidly. The Melians agree to such an arrangement, but verbalize that they feel they only had two options: defiance and war or slavery (5.86). According to Palmer, “under such circumstances no fair discussion is possible because the Athenians have come to the debate in full force intending to be judges in their own case.”<sup>10</sup> In response, the Athenians express that the debate was only for the Melians’ own good. If they were to stop the debate and the Melians were to continue acting defiantly, the Athenians would physically subdue them (5.87). The Melians agree to continue with the debate, realizing that if they did not they could suffer greatly at the hands of the Athenians (5.88).

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<sup>10</sup> Palmer, *Love of Glory*, 65.

The Athenians begin the dialogue by stating their position that the idea of justice is irrelevant in this debate. They claim that “right...is only in question between equals in power, while the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must” (5.89). The idea of justice only exists in international relations, according to Athens, when the parties involved are of equal power. The Athenians seem to be suggesting that the powerful determine what will occur in international relations; the weak must accept their decisions and submit themselves to a greater power. In response, the Melians try to appeal to expedience. Would it not be useful to the Athenians to be just so that others are kind to them when they fall? A nation cannot be the most powerful forever, history has shown us that. One day, the Melians may be stronger and the Athenians may be weaker. That is the nature of international affairs. This statement by the Melians is an attempt to find an equal ground with the Athenians. It acknowledges the idea put forth by the Athenians, that differences in power are what must be taken into account in international relations and not justice. However, a future threat of a strong Melos seeking vengeance upon a possibly weak Athens was not a very strong argument. The Athenians respond, pointing out the weakness in the argument of the Melians; the future is not the present. Furthermore, they appeal to a different aspect of self-interest. The Athenians claim that it would be in the best interest of both Athens and Melos for the Melians to submit to their rule. Without resistance, the Athenians could absorb the Melians into their expanding empire and the Melians would avoid great suffering and destruction (5.93).

Seeing that they cannot win at this argument, the Melians inquire about the possibility of neutrality. The Athenians, however, would not accept neutrality. The

Melians must be their enemy or their subject. Neutrality would be seen by the rest of the Athenian allies as weakness on the part of Athens. It would also lead these allies to question why they are taking the risk of supporting Athens as an ally when they could just remain neutral, distant from the risk of bloodshed. Independence from Athenian rule must be due to one's power and nothing else. The Melians try to raise the argument that by accepting their neutrality they will avoid making all other neutrals their enemies. All other neutrals would not fear an attack from Athens claim the Athenians. Melos is a weak island nation that has acted recklessly in their relations with Athens by refusing to comply with their wishes. Land-dwelling neutrals would not see the Athenians attacking a small island nation as a threat, because the situation does not imply an attack to them. The differences in power between Athens and Melos are much greater than between that of Athens and a land neutral; therefore, a land neutral should not fear an Athenian attack for merely being neutral. Athens is also known as the masters of the sea. The fact that Melos is an island makes it important for the Athenians to conquer as masters of the sea; it is seen by some as a stepping stone to conquering Sicily, a lofty goal that hung above them. Yet again, this would not be perceived as a threat to land-dwelling neutrals because the land was not Athens's forte.

Realizing that their argument met lack luster reviews, the Melians then abandon their argument of self-interest and appeal to honor as their reason for resistance. They claim it would be base and cowardly for the Melians to submit to Athenian rule without any resistance (5.100). The Athenians point out that the Melians could only appeal to honor, similarly as with justice, if the two powers at hand were equal (5.101). Since the two were

unevenly matched, the issue of self-preservation was the only one that should be considered. "With honor as the prize and shame as the penalty," the Melians are sure to lose either way (5.101). They feel it would have been shameful to surrender to Athens without a fight; however, it would have been equally shameful to enter into an unequal fight and lose because they did not recognize that they should not have caused trouble with a party of superior power. Thus the Melians are defeated yet again in the debate.

Finally, the Melians resort to an appeal to hope. They claim that chance would not always be on the side of the strong during battle. Melos could always hope that by some twist of fate they may be victorious to a far more powerful opponent (5.102). The Athenians respond that hope is a foolish resort for the weak to indulge in. Were their powers more equally matched, hope could be a reasonable comfort to the Melians; but, because the Athenians possess such greater power, hope was a delusion (5.103). Further, the Athenians bring up the issue of the divine. They state that even oracles and prophecies could not save the Melians (5.103). The Athenians seem to deny belief in the divine here by referring to the divine as "inventions" of man (5.103.2). They suggested that the idea of the divine was only created by men to give them hope; hope that the weak cling to stupidly. To counter this statement, the Melians claim that the gods would side with them because they are acting justly in this situation. Recognizing the weakness in this statement, they add that if not the gods, the Spartans would spare them – even if it was only to avoid the shame of abandoning an ally (5.104).

The Athenians reply that "of the gods we believe, and of men we know, that by necessary law of their nature they rule wherever they can" (5.105.2). Here they

suggest that they were similar or equal to the gods operating on the same principles. How audacious, a nation that claims to rule as gods! It appalls the reader to see how openly irreverent Athens is in reference to the divine. They claim that they rule as the gods do – but on earth – because they both understand that by nature, one must rule where they can to avoid being ruled. Therefore, the Athenians do not fear disadvantage. According to the Athenians, if anything, the gods would side with the Athenians because they are acting in accord with the law of the cosmos. In response to the possibility of the Spartans being the savior of the Melians, the Athenians put forth that the Spartans would not come to save the Melians because it was not in the best interest of the Spartans to do so (5.105). The Melians attempt to argue that due to their proximity to the Peloponnese, the Spartans would save them because it is convenient. Also, the Melians and Spartans share common blood and they could plead this to the sentimentality of the Spartans to save them (5.108). The Athenians argue that the Spartans may have been sentimental but they were, more importantly, cautious (5.109). Alluding to the disastrous outcome of the battle at Sphacteria, the Athenians state that it is unlikely for the Spartans to cross the seas alone to fight the Athenians – the “masters of the sea” (5.109). The Melians suggest that the Spartans could even send others to help, or that the Spartans might invade the Athenian lands, attempting to reference the Thracian campaign and Brasidas (5.110).

In response, the Athenians state that none of the arguments made by the Melians have been particularly compelling. Their strongest appeals were to possible future strength and hope, and their actual strength is feeble in comparison to Athens (5.111). They then encourage the Melians to rethink their arguments to try to save themselves from disgrace and destruction. Finally, the

Athenians state that it would not be dishonorable to accept a reasonable offer from the most powerful city in Greece instead of being destroyed by them. The Athenians leave the Melians with a lesson in international relations:

And it is certain that those who do not yield to their equals, who keep terms with their superiors, and are moderate towards their inferiors, on the whole succeed best. (5.111.4)

It seems as though these are the Athenian steps to being successful in international affairs, with regards to differences in power. They then leave the matter to the Melians to consult and decide. The Melians refuse to submit to Athenian rule, and the Athenian siege of Melos began. Several months later, the Melians were forced to surrender; all of the men were put to death, and the women and children were taken into slavery (5.116).

The Athenians personally stated that it would not be within their own interests to destroy the Melians. So why did they do it in the end? The Melians rebelled, after hearing the arguments of the Athenians and knowing that the Athenians believed them to have little chance of victory. To spare the Melians after this rebellion would have sent a message to other Greeks under the rule of the Athenians. Sparing the Melians after their surrender could encourage others to revolt, believing that if they surrendered they too would be spared. Also, to spare the Melians would not give Athens trustworthy allies. The most expedient decision after such a rebellion is to do as the Athenians did and destroy the Melians. The Athenians would rather have had to rule with an iron fist to maintain their power than risk losing it and being ruled by others. As Palmer states, “there are no benefits accruing to weakness in political life and no rewards for

justice.”<sup>11</sup> The weaker party, the Melians appealed to justice as opposed to self-interest. It resulted poorly.

As we can see from this situation, “cold, calculated self-interest shows itself to be very powerful in international affairs and concern for justice very weak.”<sup>12</sup> To survive, Athens must rule as they see fit to their self-interest. Justice is not to be appealed to in international relations—unless among equals. When dealing with two unequal powers, the strong determines the outcome. While the Melians can try to appeal to expedience, honor, the gods, and the Spartans, the Athenians will win the argument because they hold the most power. It does not matter if the Athenians are just in forcing the Melians to submit to their rule, but they have the might to do so. Words and appeals to different arguments may sound nice, but in the end it is futile to make such arguments unless a nation has the power to back up their words. An empire such as Athens cannot rest. It must always expand to maintain its superior power and the fear and respect of others.<sup>13</sup>

## PLATAEA

Having been held under siege by the Peloponnesians, the Plataeans developed a plan and, with several Athenians, conspired to break away from the Peloponnesians (3.20). The plan was executed and a large party of Plataeans escaped from the besieged city. The majority, however, remained within the city and refused to give way to the Peloponnesians. Unable to hold fast against the siege, the Plataeans finally surrender. Under the term of surrender they acquiesce to Sparta and accept them as their judges.

They are told that the guilty would be punished according to the laws. When the judges from Sparta arrive, no formal charges are given. However, the Spartans only ask “whether they had done the Spartans and allies any service in the war then raging” (3.52.4). Notice that this question did not involve justice, as sending judges would usually imply. Instead, it asks the Plataeans if they had been of use to the Spartans in this war. This question exemplifies that they act purely on their narrow self-interest and there is no attempt to justify action based on any principle. They identify the “just” with what was immediately profitable to them.

The Plataeans respond by stating that the Spartans would not be likely to be impartial in judging their case. They complain that they expected to be judged with right and wrong, or justice, in mind and not merely based upon what they did to help Sparta (3.53). The Plataeans claim that the trial would surely be a sham, to gratify a third party – the Thebans. They then remind the Spartans of specific instances in which they had aided the Spartans, such as against the Persians and the Messenian Helots (3.54). The Plataeans then blame the Spartans for their alliance with Athens. It was only due to the fact that they were denied assistance by the Spartans that they were told to ally instead with the Athenians. The Spartans told the Plataeans that they were too far away to assist. Therefore, it was not wrong for the Plataeans to continue to assist Athens, even when the Spartans asked Plataea to desert, because the Spartans once told them to ally with Athens instead. Being loyal to their allies was not wrong, and they should not be punished for it.

In addition, the Plataeans attempt to appeal to the Spartans self-interest by way of their image. They claim that the Greeks look to Sparta as a shining example of justice and honor. However, by passing a sentence based not on justice but on self-

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<sup>11</sup> Palmer, *Love of Glory*, 73.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>13</sup> See Sicilian Expedition.

interest, this opinion would change (3.57). If the Spartans were to allow Thebes to destroy Plataea, the Hellenes would no longer see Sparta in a positive light, according to the Plataeans. They then contrast the character of the Thebans against that of their own by comparing how each would care for the graves of fallen Spartans. In the past, the Plataeans tended the graves of the Spartans that fell in their lands to the Persians. Would the Thebans have done the same? The Plataeans consider that to be doubtful (3.58). To conclude, the Plataeans state that they did not surrender to Thebes; they surrendered to Sparta. Therefore, it should not be the Thebans left to influence the judgment of Sparta and destroy them (3.59).

After hearing the argument of the Plataeans the Thebans respond, speaking out of fear. They do not want the Spartans to be influenced or persuaded by the words of the Plataeans, so they want to have the final word in the discussion (3.60). The Thebans begin with the origins of their disagreement with Plataea. They claim that the Plataeans, upon the settlement of Boeotia, refused to recognize the supremacy of the Thebans and submit to them. As a result, the Plataeans had always been considered traitors to their land (3.61). In addition, the Plataeans had habitually sided with Athens. They did not submit to the Medes because Athens did not do so, not for a great or just reason. In turn, once Athens began to attack the Hellenes, the Plataeans followed suit (3.62). The Thebans claim that they only submitted to the Medes because they were under a tyranny at the time and had no other choice. In response to the Plataeans alliance with Athens, the Thebans claim that if the only purpose of the alliance was to protect Plataea from Thebes, they should not have joined Athens in attacking others and only beckoned Athens to fight Thebes (3.63).

Thebes also argues that the Plataeans had no motive to ally themselves with the

Athenians. Under their alliance with Sparta against the Medes, the Plataeans were perfectly safe from Thebes – or so they claimed (3.63). As a result, the alliance of Plataea and Athens was completely unnecessary and was a choice made by Plataea. While Thebes did Medize, it was only because they acted under compulsion (3.63). However, the Plataeans try to claim that their unwillingness to Medize was a good done to the rest of Greece while the Thebans claimed that it was only because the Athenians did not Medize as well. Also, the Thebans point out that before the siege, the Plataeans were given a choice to become neutral or to continue to serve Athens. According to Plataea “when the Athenians took the path of injustice you (Plataea) followed them” (3.64.4). While the Thebans once submitted to an enemy, it was under compulsion. They claim that Plataea Atticized all too willingly to be forgiven.

In response to the Plataeans’ cries against the Theban invasion during a time of peace, the Thebans do not denounce the action. However, they admit that they only did so because they were invited by a group of Plataeans who seemingly were concerned for the well being of their polis that had Atticized (3.65). Therefore, the blame was not to be placed upon the Thebans, but upon Plataea for Atticizing. According to the Thebans at Plataea, their intentions were not hostile. The Plataeans who encountered the Thebans began the bloodshed and dishonored an agreement to refrain from violence. Not only did Plataea breach the agreement and kill Thebans in Plataea, they also killed Theban prisoners contradicting their prior pledge (3.66). In spite of all of this, the Plataeans continue to point the finger towards Thebes as the unjust party.

In conclusion, the Thebans state that the Plataeans are not deserving of the forgiveness for which they asked. “The pity which they appeal to is due rather to men

who suffer unworthily; those who suffer justly, as they do, are on the contrary subjects for triumph” (3.67.4). Because the Plataeans had acted unjustly, they deserve the punishment that Thebes desires for them. They acted against the law by attacking the Thebans in Plataea, and they did so without compulsion. The Spartans could not allow the eloquent and manipulative speech of the Plataeans to sway their decision away from what they perceived to be just (3.67).

While the Thebans claim to only appeal to justice in their argument, they imply an argument of self-interest to the Spartans. By pointing out that they only Medized under compulsion and that the Plataeans Atticized willingly, the implication was of loyalty. The loyalty of the Thebans proved beneficial to the Spartans, for they were their allies. Had the Spartans spared the Plataeans, it would have been unlikely that they would be truly loyal to Sparta. The Plataeans originally Atticized without threat; they desired to be in cohorts with Athens. Would they have served as a good ally to Sparta if they were spared? Would they have been willing to forget the ties that they willingly forged? The Theban argument surely brought these questions to the minds of the Spartans.

Plataea attempts to justify their alliance with Athens to Sparta – Sparta refused them previously. The image of Spartan honor and self-interest was also appealed to by the Plataeans. Truthfully, Plataea is not concerned with Sparta maintaining an honorable appearance. They made these appeals to try to persuade Sparta to side with what is in their interest.

Similarly, Thebes acted out of fear and self-interest as well. They claim that Plataea’s alliance with Sparta was unjust because it was superfluous. Thebes, on the contrary, allied with the Medes only under compulsion. Allying with an enemy can only be just if one is compelled to do so,

according to the Thebans. Using this claim to support their next point, they claim that they would be more loyal allies to Sparta than Plataea could be. Yet again, they are merely making these claims out of fear and self-interest, and not in the true interests of Sparta.

After hearing both sides, the Spartan judges decide to base their decision upon the usefulness of Plataea to them. The Plataeans had done the Spartans no service in war. As a result, the Spartans execute, without exception, all of the Plataean men (3.68). These executions were not without purpose. It was not only because the Plataeans had not proven themselves useful to the Peloponnesian League during the war, but also to avenge the Thebans. By providing revenge for the Thebans, the Spartans pleased them. This action was out of self-interest because at that time, the Thebans were considered particularly useful in the war effort. By pleasing an ally, the Spartans acted in favor of their self-interest. It would not have been expedient to protect Plataea. Had they been spared and agreed to come onto the side of Sparta, they would not likely have been loyal or useful allies. The gratitude held by the Plataeans would have been short-lived. Gratitude held based out of fear is hardly reliable. Had the gratitude been held out of a love of Sparta, it may have been longer lasting. This action would have also upset the Thebans and made them less likely to act in favor of Spartan interests. Even though the Spartans knew that their decision would be based upon self-interest only, they still held a trial for the Plataeans. They had to maintain the appearance of justice before their allies and the rest of Greece. If they had not appeared just to Thebes, they would have been comparable to the tyranny of Athens.

The Spartans may have appeared to be the just polis in the account of the Peloponnesian War, but they were just as

guilty as Athens in acting out of self-interest. The Spartans may not have been as frank as the Athenians were, but they were hypocritical. They allowed themselves to appear to be just, when in truth they acted according to the Athenian Thesis as well. Perhaps this is why Sparta prevailed in the end. They knew how to act in terms of self-interest, but they cloaked it well by maintaining an appearance of acting justly. The trial was indeed as Plataea suspected, merely a sham. By holding the trial, Sparta appeared just and could not be accused of acting like a tyrant. It also gave the citizens of Sparta the belief that their nation believed in and supported the idea of justice. The Athenians openly acted in their own self-interest and with the opinion that the strong determine the fate of the weak, regardless of what is just and regardless of common opinion. This returns us to the idea that human beings need to feel that they are acting in accord with justice. A successful nation will know how to act in its own interest, but present it in a manner that appears just to others and to its own people.

## MYTILENIAN DEBATE

After attempting to revolt against Athens unsuccessfully, the Mytilenians faced a grim verdict from the Athenians. By decree, the Athenians stated their intention to kill all of the men and enslave all women and children of Mytilene. The Athenians later chose to reevaluate this decision (3.36). The first decision of the Athenians was made out of anger; this revolt had struck at the heart of the Athenian empire. For one polis to revolt is to threaten the entirety of the Athenian empire. For the empire to be upheld, such rebellions must be crushed. The peace party of Athens brought about a debate on the Mytilenian issue, and they put it to vote.

Two speakers come forward to represent their respective parties: Cleon and Diodotus. The first to speak is Cleon, a man noted to be the most violent man of Athens as well as the man who was most in favor of the death penalty for the Mytilenians the previous day. Cleon draws attention to the situation as a reason why a democracy is incapable of empire; they are being too tender hearted to do what was necessary to preserve their rule (3.37). He points out that imperial rule is tyrannical rule. In order to preserve this rule, the subjects of the empire must fear the Athenians. According to Cleon, it was unjust for the Mytilenians to rebel. The Athenians did nothing to compel them to do so; on the contrary, the Athenians treated the Mytilenians very well giving them a good deal of independence and honor. However, human beings are naturally contemptuous to their benefactors, and Cleon claims that Athens was too nice to Mytilene. According to Cleon, the mistake of the Athenians was treating the Mytilenians differently than their other subjects (3.39). Not only did the Mytilenians not show Athens proper gratitude, but they encouraged other allies to rebel as well. Therefore, in order to keep other allies from rebelling, Athens must destroy the Mytilenians – it was a matter of expedience (3.40).

Cleon draws attention to three things as the causes for the destruction of an Empire: pity, sentiment, and indulgence (3.40.2). Compassion must only be used when it is useful – that is, only if the other party will return it. When contempt is given in return for compassion, measures must be taken. The radical brutalization of the Mytilenians was necessary for the preservation of the Athenian way of life – there were only force and fear to hold it in place. Sparing the Mytilenians would have done the Athenians absolutely no good. Yes, it would have put some gratitude in the minds of the Mytilenians for Athens, but this

would have been forgotten soon and they would be disloyal again (3.40.3).

Another issue at hand was the destruction of an entire people, and not just the army. Granted, the women and children were not physically engaged in the fighting against Athens, but they would not have helped Athens either. Cleon concludes that they must be killed because if they were spared they would not be loyal to Athens (3.40.6).

Diodotus then speaks. He begins by telling the Athenians that he would have to use deceit while addressing them because it was impossible to talk to the democratic assembly without deceiving them; good men are forced to deceive the council just as much as bad men are. A democracy would not vote for a proposal unless they trusted the speaker; however, they trusted on the wrong grounds, and Diodotus takes note of that (3.42.5).

Diodotus appeals to the self-interest of the Athenians. He argues that to slaughter the Mytilenians would be unhelpful to Athens. He questions the reasons for executing the Mytilenians and points out that capital punishment does not stop crime. Capital punishment does not stop murderers from killing, and in turn executing the Mytilenians would not discourage others from revolting against Athens. It is impossible to control the passions of men, no matter how brutal and harsh of a ruler Athens were to become. No matter how harshly Athens could punish Mytilene, other poleis would still have the same desires to revolt because they wanted freedom. It is pointless to punish the Mytilenians because the passion for freedom possessed by the rest of the peoples held under Athens's empire could not be extinguished with the execution of the Mytilenians.

Diodotus concludes that the Athenians should not choose to kill the Mytilenians because it would not be useful to them.

He says that it is not a question of justice. Diodotus does, however, agree to the killing of the soldiers. He distinguishes between those who are responsible for the revolt and those who are not (3.47). He believes that if Athens punished both, it would only send the message to other cities that if the few (the militants and the oligarchs) rebel, the many (women, children, etc.) might as well join them. The civilians would have had no choice in the matter because regardless of their participation in the revolt, they would be killed by Athens anyways (3.47). Although he had stated his speech was to only take into account self-interest, here Diodotus appeals to justice. The question of guilt or innocence considered in the responsibility for the revolt and who should be punished is certainly a question of justice (3.47.3). He chooses to hide this appeal to justice with self-interest. Diodotus is aware that if he would have openly appealed to justice, the argument would have been lost upon the Athenians. The Athenians do not hold justice as a primary concern. In international relations, the Athenians care more about their own self-interest. For Diodotus to use deceit was wholly necessary in this situation. An argument based upon the idea of justice would barely merit their attention, much less win them over.

Athenians could only be expedient if they act based on their understanding of human nature: that the strong conquer the weak. Diodotus claims that Athens could not be angered by the actions of the Mytilenians, which were only driven by their nature. He notes that Athens had not been injured by this revolt, so there was no point in seeking revenge. To seek revenge would be an act of passion, not an act of pure calculation of self-interest. This would have fundamentally contradicted the Athenian Thesis because revenge was not included in their idea of self-interest. Diodotus was able to speak to the Athenians on their terms – on the basis

of self-interest – and was able to cloak justice in these terms. As he stated previously, he would deceive the assembly. He did so by making his argument for what he believed to be just appear to be in terms of self-interest to the Athenians. On the contrary, Cleon began his speech by appealing to justice, but he really appealed to expedience and necessity instead. One can see through these speeches that what a politician claims to appeal to is not always what he will appeal to with his argument. Men can cloak their motives with well-constructed arguments and carefully manipulated words, this makes politics tricky. To achieve the right action in this situation, Diodotus had to lie to the people of Athens and convince them that he was appealing to their self-interest, something that they would vote for. In the end, the Athenians voted in favor of Diodotus and recalled the death sentence upon the Mytilenes. The Athenians believed that they were voting for what was most expedient, but instead they voted for the “just” decision. Cleon, as the most violent man in Athens, did receive satisfaction through bloodshed as well. Instead of executing all of the Mytilenians, he put to death the “prime movers in the rebellion” (3.50.1). Cleon’s intense violence was moderated by Diodotus’s speech and the decision of the Athenians.

From this situation, what can be inferred about justice in international relations? It is easy to see that the demos cannot always make the right decision on their own. They tend to be easily influenced by the arguments of the politicians. However, in this case, it took a wise statesman to manipulate the demos towards making the right decision. Unfortunately, one cannot always depend on having a wise and just statesman to lead the people. In the case of the Mytilenians, was it just for them to revolt against Athens? Athenian imperial rule was described by Cleon as like that of a

master ruling the slave, as that of a tyrant (3.40). Tyrannies have never been considered particularly just because, by definition, they rule in their own interest without the people’s best interests at heart.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, can it be considered unjust for the Mytilenians to revolt against unjust imperial rule? However, as one can see from this situation, justice does not always play the primary role in international relations. In some cases, might makes right. Athens may have ruled over its empire as a tyrant, but it was foolish for the Mytilenians to revolt. The rebellion of the Mytilenians may have been for the sake of pursuing justice; however, it was not a wise choice because Athens was far more powerful and could easily crush their revolt. If Athens were oppressing an equal power, the equal power would have a just reason to revolt. Why should they submit to the rule of someone who is not stronger? However, because the Mytilenians were greatly weaker than the Athenians, it was only foolish for them to revolt. One could go so far as to consider it an unjust decision due to the senseless loss of life that would be suffered by the Mytilenians in a revolt against a much stronger power.

## **FUNERAL ORATION OF PERICLES**

After the first year of the war, a public ceremony was held for the fallen men of Athens. Pericles was chosen to deliver the eulogy (2.34). First, Pericles questions the laws that require a eulogy at a funeral ceremony. The difficulty with praising the dead at such a ceremony was pleasing the entire audience. Two types of people are in attendance: the loved ones and friends of the fallen men and the others. The loved ones would be pleased to hear the praise of their fallen;

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<sup>14</sup> This idea is reflective of Aristotle’s *Politics* (4.10).

they may even think that he did not do enough to praise the dead (2.35). The rest of the audience, however, would more than likely think that Pericles praised the fallen entirely too much, and “when this point is passed, envy comes in and with it incredulity” (2.35.2). This would have led to the speech being held under suspicion of exaggeration by the rest of the audience. Therefore, it is seemingly impossible for Pericles to please both parties by praising the dead. It seems impossible to do justice to the men who died and have the people present believe what was being said; they expect exaggeration and come prepared not to believe the praise. People would also become envious of the soldiers’ praise and become hostile towards the speaker. This is an interesting way to open a eulogy, but Pericles feels that he needs to justify his lack of traditional eulogy and make the problems that he faced in doing so visible to the entire audience.

As a result, he chooses to focus on the praise for the living instead of the dead. He then praises Athens. Three major themes can be seen in the speech: the pursuits that brought Athens to greatness, the regime of Athens, the national habits that brought Athens to greatness – and with that, the particular men that fell fighting for Athens. Pericles avoids speaking of particulars to keep the focus of the speech upon the greater and more pressing purpose: keeping morale up during the war Athens is currently engaged in. He would offer praise to the fallen and advice to the living.

First, Pericles praises the ancestors of Athens who obtained maintained Athens (2.36). Worthy of more praise, however, were the fathers of the current generation for expanding the empire. The current generation was to be praised the most, for maintaining and expanding the empire of Athens and for making Athens self-sufficient (2.36.3). Pericles attempts to put the focus

on the present undertakings of Athens and upon the future of Athens. Reminding the Athenians of the accession from one generation to the next kept their focus on preserving and bettering their current Athens for the next generation. This also placed great expectations in the heads of the Athenians. It would be a shame for this generation to fall short of those that had preceded it.

After praising the ancestors of Athens, Pericles goes on to praise the democratic institutions of Athens that contributed to the city’s greatness (2.37). The freedom of Athens extended to all parts of Athenian life. It was not a jealous freedom, such as that of the Spartans (2.37.2). It was also not a lawless freedom. The laws, unwritten or not, if broken would result in the disgrace of the party who broke them (2.37.3). Note that Pericles does not speak of divine retribution for doing injustices by breaking laws. The only relevant retribution is shame within the polis. Because the laws of the polis are based on equality, the society is based upon merit. Men could prosper in the city as much as they merit to do so. All men are treated equally, but Pericles recognizes that not all men were equal in their abilities. The best men would rise to the highest esteem in Athens. Pericles also makes mention of the recreational activities provided by Athens for relaxation. Among these is sacrifice, a divine practice (2.38.1). Does Athens not take religion seriously? It is an obvious contradiction with the civil religion of the other Greek poleis. It is clear that Pericles views religion as a myth – it is only a political tool for motivation that Athens did not need due to its beliefs. Serious religion would have contrasted their way of life. Athens could not submit to the gods (or at least appear to) for they submitted to the rule of no one. If the Athenians would have submitted to the gods as all other poleis did, how could they have been seen as superior by others?

Pericles praises Athens for her superiority. Athens does not rely on specific or rigorous training for military feats, but relies on the natural capacities of citizens to conquer enemies, defend the city, or face any other challenge (2.39). Athenians appreciate the finer things, yet remain unostentatious; they love wisdom without becoming soft (2.40). All citizens in Athens are included in politics; they are all also interested in the public affairs of the cities. Those who do not participate are regarded as useless (2.40). Popular deliberation upon issues is not viewed as an impediment to action as in other cities, but as a means to action. The courage of Athens is, therefore, astonishing because they know all of the risks when taking upon a task because they deliberate upon it. When other nations take risks, their citizens are often cloaked in ignorance when undertaking them because they did not participate in deliberations (2.40.3). Athens is also generous in relation with her friends. To gain friends, she grants favors – she does not demand them (2.40.4). By granting such favors, friends are held in debt. When the friends of Athens return favors, it is viewed as payment and not as a gift (2.40.20). Pericles claims that Athens did so not out of “calculations of expediency, but in the confidence of liberality” (2.40.5). Did he really mean this? By granting favors to allies, Athens gains control of them. The allies were then held in debt and when Athens chose, the ally would repay the debt. Pericles continues that Athens was the model polis for all of Greece (2.41). The self-sufficiency of the Athenians is second to none. In addition, Athens is beyond worthy of her reputation due to her deeds (2.41.3). To be defeated by Athens is to fall to the best.<sup>15</sup> Because Athens is the best, they are worthy to rule others. Athens is so great that she does not need poets to sing her praises. Poets tend to exaggerate

circumstances, and Athens is not in need of exaggeration (2.41.15).

Finally, Pericles turns to the subject of the fallen soldiers. He states that he had already delivered the majority of his praise for them through his praise of the city. These men died the most glorious death, because they fell fighting for their city instead of surrendering or running away from battle (2.42.4). These men had fallen in the face of risk instead of averting it to return to, enjoy, or protect their personal wealth (2.42.4). They had placed the polis above their personal desires. Dying in battle may have been the only virtuous act committed by some of these fallen men. Because of this, what would be remembered is that which was most important to the polis: that they died in battle. By highlighting the possible imperfections of some of the soldiers, Pericles serves to soften the envy of the listeners. He also displays that the public deeds outweigh the private. Those who may not have been the most well-established citizens of Athens could have sought to better how they were to be remembered by pursuing such public deeds.

Pericles then calls upon the living to emulate the honor of the men who fell fighting for Athens. Throughout his speech, he tries to arouse an *eros* for the polis. He needs the citizens to be so attached to achieving glory for Athens that they would be willing to risk their lives in battle after seeing their fellow countrymen fall. An Athenian who fell in battle would be remembered forever and by everyone. Pericles tries to universalize the glory of heroes. He claims that they even have “the whole earth for their tomb” (2.43.3). The immortal glory of Athens transcends any private suffering of the individual. Those that would fall for the honor of Athens would not even feel death. (2.43.6). Does Pericles honestly believe this? To the parents, Pericles suggests that they have

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<sup>15</sup> Palmer, *Love of Glory*, 24.

more children if they could; and if they could not, to seek solace in the fact that their child died the most glorious death (2.44). To the sons and brothers of the fallen, Pericles advises them to fight against the envy of their relative's glory, to beat this envy by trying to die in such a glorious way themselves (2.45). As for the widows, Pericles recommends that they remove themselves from the public eye. The widows would only dwell upon the loss of their husbands and would keep the city wedded to particular losses. These particular losses need to be overcome by the city so that it will not lose sight of the larger goal.

Motivation through glory can be problematic for the city itself. It can leave to self-destructive undertakings that appear glorious in theory, but prove detrimental in practice. The Sicilian Expedition comes to mind.<sup>16</sup> The only way that one can attain glory is to take upon a great amount of risk. If it were not for the risk involved, could not everyone have the glory that Pericles spoke of? The irony of this speech is that Pericles promoted glorifying the city in battle, when his plan to defend the city included hiding in safety behind the walls of Athens. Hiding behind walls and not retaliating against a Spartan attack is not really glorious, is it? Athenians were to watch their homes, fields, and possessions get completely destroyed by the Spartans from the safety provided by the city walls. It seems as though there is a contradiction at the heart of Athens between glory and preservation. If they desired glory, they would not be content with resting inside the city walls once Pericles was gone. However, what is best for the city is not always what the people want. This is a fundamental problem of Athens as a democracy.

In the Funeral Oration, Pericles conveniently avoided all particulars. He did not

refer to any of the fallen by their names; he only spoke of them collectively. But Pericles could not refer to each of these men by name. He could not painstakingly list their attributes and how they would be missed individually. Pericles needed to keep the focus of the Athenians upon the big picture, and not the particulars. Focusing on particulars would only have led people to dwell upon individual losses and lose sight of the *eros* for Athens and the desire for this type of glory that Pericles was trying to incite. However, this brings about an interesting point. Pericles was trying to excite the Athenians to fight for glory, for eternal remembrance, for something truly great. In this speech, Pericles did not even mention the fallen men by name. Could the Athenians see that the type of glory that Pericles was telling them to fight for was not attainable by average men? Who is to say that if the men in the audience of the Funeral Oration were to have fallen in battle while pursuing the glory that Pericles spoke of, that he would even have mentioned their names in ceremony? A nameless, faceless praise was not what these men hoped to attain nor was it what Pericles suggested to them. However, to tell the men of Athens that this was to be the only praise and recognition that they would receive would not have been prudent. It would not have incited them into battle.

There is another problem with using glory to motivate the people. Glory cannot be had equally among men. If it is, then what is so glorious about it? Pericles had already stressed in this speech the inequality of Athenians in their ability to achieve what their merit permits them. Therefore, glory should be held unequally as well. Different men are worthy of different levels of glory. And only great men, truly great men, such as Pericles are capable of the glory that he speaks of. The names of the Athenians who fell in battle would not be remembered

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<sup>16</sup> See Sicilian Expedition.

individually; the city that they fought for would be remembered.

Is this speech inciting an *eros* for the city of Athens, or a love of glory itself? Is it not problematic to try to use glory as a motivator? Is it healthy for the city? What kind of citizens does this encourage? For those who are already ambitious, this talk of glory could make them delirious. They can be blinded by their quest for immortal glory. In seeking such glory, men can become ignorant to practical difficulties and their own weaknesses. They can become arrogant and blind to the possibility of defeat. Such an *eros* for glory can develop into a kind of madness. Then, the citizens are not acting in the interest of the polis, but in their own interest to pursue glory. Could the powerful and great individuals of Athens have been persuaded to sacrifice everything for the polis, as Pericles suggested? This quest for glory has the potential to shift the focus of the people from gaining glory for the city to gaining glory for themselves. This would defeat the entire purpose of Pericles's speech, would it not? Glory is dangerous in that some may lose sight of the greater good by focusing on their own self-interest. Pericles aimed for the glory of the city to reflect upon the individual. Therefore, it was in the Athenians' self-interest to act in accord with what was best for the city. However, a misunderstanding of Pericles's call to glory could lead to a reversal of the relationship between the glory of the individual and that of the city. As to be seen later, Alcibiades portrays this reversal perfectly. He wanted his own glory to reflect upon Athens instead of the glory of Athens to reflect upon him. The ideas of glory and shame were actually pretexts used to motivate the Athenians. The true motives of Pericles were fear for the well being of Athens, as well as expedience. The war needed to be continued or Athens would be

destroyed, but the people needed the idea of glory to motivate them.

### THIRD SPEECH OF PERICLES

The third and final speech of Pericles is markedly different from his others. This speech takes place after Athens had seen many privations. The Athenians had been struck by a terrible plague. In addition, Attica had been invaded twice by the Peloponnesians (2.59.1). As is common in war, once misfortune strikes fingers point to the leader. Pericles is seen as the reason that Athens was at war and was subject to such risks. He, not Sparta, is the reason for Athens's malcontent. In an attempt to salvage what they had, the Athenians repudiate their leader and send envoys to establish peace with the Spartans (2.59.2). These envoys are of no success. The Athenians are angered and bitter. Their democracy had reverted to a sort of mob rule. In an attempt to sooth the Athenians and get them back on track, Pericles speaks to the assembly (2.59.3).

Pericles reproaches the Athenians for holding him to blame. Yes, Pericles promoted the war, but the Athenians were the ones who had voted in favor of it (2.60.4). He reminds them that they have to hold the good of Athens above their personal concerns. Pericles takes a moment to praise himself. He feels that he needs to distinguish himself from the rest of the Athenians to remind them that he merits being their leader. In order for the masses to actually hear what he is saying and consider his argument, he has to prove himself worthy to his audience. He brings to attention the Athenians' opinion of his own virtues; they held him highly. In doing so, he avoids appearing too arrogant. His praise is put into the mouths of the Athenians. Pericles emphasizes that he possesses the qualities

needed for political leadership. He is “second to no man” in deciding what must be done for Athens (2.60.5). He has never succumbed to a bribe, and he has a strong love of country. Pericles states that any of these virtues without the others would be either dangerous or useless to Athens (2.60.6). Indeed it is because of these qualities that he possesses that the Athenians accepted his advice in the first place, thus they should have no reason to be reacting in such a manner after a few problems had arisen (2.60.7).

Pericles reminds the Athenians that they are without a choice in determining whether Athens would remain at war or take a role of submission. He briefly alludes to glory. The Athenians have a renowned reputation. It would be disgraceful if they were to fail to live up to such expectations due to adversities (2.61.4). Could they really give up so easily? To avoid shaming their name, they must move past their individual grief caused by the plague and focus solely upon the safety of Athens (2.61.4). To appeal to safety alone would not appeal to the Athenian character. As to be seen in Nicias’s speech regarding the Sicilian Expedition, appealing to safety and preservation did not work on the Athenian assembly.<sup>17</sup> Honor or glory must be mentioned due to the engrained makeup of their character.

The loss of particulars is trivial, Pericles states. The Athenian navy can go anywhere and conquer what they wish (2.62.2). They may have lost houses and land, but acquiring new resources will prove no difficult feat. The Athenians must forget about passions and particulars and remember that preserving the liberty of Athens is of greater consequence. As long as this liberty is preserved, Athens could get new particulars due to her strength (2.62.3). In order

to regain the losses suffered fighting for Athens, they must continue fighting for Athens. Preserving the empire is of the greatest importance. It is not only why the war was begun, but also why it must be continued, and how it could best be won. However, does Pericles take into account the attachment of human beings to particulars? Particulars are hard to replace; people attach themselves to them and it is hard to offer substitutes or replacements.<sup>18</sup> The anger of the Athenians is easy to comprehend.

Pericles speaks very plainly to the assembly. He tells Athens openly that they hold a tyranny. To have taken it may appear wrong, but to lose it is unsafe (2.63.2). The Athenians are faced with a choice: subjection or rule. Giving up the empire means sure destruction. This appeals to the fear of the Athenians, but that appeal is cloaked in one aiming at their sense of honor. As Palmer states, “if they want the honor of ruling an empire they must accept the burdens.”<sup>19</sup> Pericles no longer says that the empire was acquired in good fashion as he had claimed in the Funeral Oration. Yet again, Pericles reminds the Athenians that they voted for the war and, therefore, they voted to endure all that could be expected with war such as invasion or loss (2.64.1). The plague was not an expected outcome of war, and the Athenians should not have blamed Pericles for such troubles. The Heavens were the only blameworthy party for the onset of plague (2.64.2). He does not, however, suggest that this plague was sent by the gods to punish Athens for holding her tyranny.<sup>20</sup> He calls again upon the name of Athens. Athens and her empire may one day decay, as all things do. However, the memory of Athens will live on forever (2.64.3). Can Pericles really promise this

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<sup>17</sup> See Sicilian Expedition.

<sup>18</sup> See Second Meeting of the Peloponnesian League.

<sup>19</sup> Palmer, *Love of Glory*, 36.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

glory? No, it is far beyond his power to promise such a thing. This glory depends on a poet or historian to convey the actions of men to future generations, as much as Pericles would like to deny the need for a Homer.

In aiming for such glory and maintaining an empire, Athens would naturally face undesirable reactions from others. Their allies would point to Athens as tyrants due to their jealousy of their power (2.64.4). The hate and envy attracted by Athens's power would be short-lived. The glory attained by Athens could not be (2.64.5). Pericles holds up the carrot of immortal glory to the Athenians. To win would be glory; to lose would equal destruction. Pericles tries to engrain in the minds of the Athenians a desire for immortal glory to overshadow their desire for personal necessities. Immortal glory is the mirage to make the Athenians forget the harsh reality of war. Pericles is well aware that the promise of such glory is an illusion. Would this illusion serve detrimental to Athens once Pericles was gone?

Finally, Pericles reminds the Athenians that this disgraceful behavior would not bring Athens to glory that would last for the ages (2.64.6). They must redouble their efforts against the Peloponnesians and stop sending envoys to Sparta to ask for peace. These actions are only signs of weakness. He attaches the private good to the public. What is best for Athens, by continuing the war, would be best for the private citizens. The Athenians are persuaded to persevere through the hardships of war. However, they still show their anger by fining Pericles. He is then re-elected as general to lead them in all things (2.65.3-4).

The chief intent of this speech was to keep the Athenians on task and to maintain Pericles's foreign policy. The Athenians wanted to give up. He pleaded to the greatness of Athens. They must maintain

their habits, even if they include tyranny, to uphold their empire and greatness. The trouble with democracies is that they tend to give up easily in the face of adversity. Democracies tend to lack a reasonable notion of the future. Not being armed with a conception of the future, they often give up easily when faced with difficulties or war. In a democratic society, people often desire what is best for them and not for the whole. When things get tough, they want to cut their losses. They want to stop the cause of the discomfort to them without thinking of the good of the whole or of the future outcome of their decisions. It takes an ingenious leader to keep them on track and to keep their goal in focus.

In order to maintain the empire, it must be expanded. Once the growth stops, the ruling city will turn in upon itself. The citizens will notice the problems with their own city once it ceases to grow. As long as the city expands, the citizens do not focus on struggles for power domestically. The citizens and rulers will not be happy with changing their strategy from expansion to preservation. The problem with an empire that must expand is that it will ultimately expand beyond its capacity to maintain itself. At some point, the city will lack the capacity and manpower to extend its rule. In the words of Strauss,

The longing for sempiternal and universal fame points towards universal rule; the concern with sempiternal and universal fame calls for boundless striving for ever more it is wholly incompatible with moderation.<sup>21</sup>

Contrary to going after a manageable goal, the Athenians desire something more. They crave universal empire. Such a quest will lead Athens to its own destruction. The

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<sup>21</sup> Strauss, *City and Man*, 228.

Sicilian Expedition alone is a feasible goal, according to Strauss.<sup>22</sup> However, to attempt to triumph over Sicily in addition to the rest of the known world is an unrealistic goal. Before undertaking a conquest, a nation must consider what it is capable of. Could Athens protect Attica, fight the Peloponnesians, and conquer Sicily simultaneously?

## THE SICILIAN EXPEDITION

During the winter of the sixteenth year of the war, the Athenians voted to attack Sicily. Thucydides points out that Athens had not truly taken into consideration the size of Sicily and their power before making this decision (6.1). The real reason for the attack on Sicily was the ambition of Athens. Secondary to the cause, Athens wished to aid their allies. By always honoring their alliances and providing aid, Athens is able to maintain its power. Nations with Athens as their ally would often become reliant upon Athens for aid rather than become self-sufficient. This kept them continuously inferior to Athens, which is how they wanted the nations of their empire to be.

The Eggestaeans sent an envoy to Athens to seek their assistance against the Selinuntines (6.6). The Selinuntines were allies of Syracuse, and Syracuse had been positioning itself to dominate all of Sicily. Eggesta was one of the few allies in Sicily left to Athens. If the Syracusans were permitted to annihilate this ally, they would be well on their way to dominating all of Sicily. Ultimately, it would have been in the interest of Athens to fight against the Syracusans. The Athenians then sent envoys to Eggesta to determine if Eggesta had the money that they promised to finance the war

as well as to assess the state of the war with Selinuntine (6.6.3).

The Athenians return from Eggesta with a promising report. This report was false – in general as well as in regards to the financial standing of Eggesta (6.8). To gain the Athenians' confidence, the Eggestaeans return with a full months pay for the Athenian ships needed for the war. Basing their trust in the false report, the Athenians vote to send sixty ships to Eggesta (6.8). Nicias, a man elected to command against his will by the second election concerning the Sicilian expedition, viewed the matter with caution and doubt. He speaks to the assembly attempting to dissuade them from sending envoys. He begins by stating that he is not speaking against his own beliefs to gain honor; he is expressing his true opinion on this matter and is not trying to deceive the assembly (6.9). Nicias tells the Athenians that they have nothing to do with the war of Eggesta and that it would be more prudent to tend to matters closer to home. To divide Athenian power and send part of the forces one way and the other to Eggesta would be dangerous. If Sparta learned of their plans, they could vigorously attack a less potent Athens (6.10). In addition, Athens has other matters to tend to, such as the Chalcidians who had been revolting against Athens for several years. They would need to be subdued before Athens attempts to aid Eggesta, according to Nicias (6.10). This appears to be an argument for self-interest. Athens should take care of more pertinent problems that directly affect Athens before journeying far to assist another nation in battle. In addition, Nicias points out that because Sicily is so far away, it would be impossible to maintain long term control. Sicily is also more likely to attack Athens and their allies if Athens were to initiate the first move. The reputation of Athens would rest higher in the minds of the Sicilians if it were to go untested as well,

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

according to Nicias. If anything, it would have been best to display the power of Athens quickly in Sicily and then return home (6.11.4). Given the chance that there was a reversal of power during this expedition, Sicily would then lose any admiration they had ever held for Athens. Most importantly, Sparta remains the predominant threat to Athens at this time. Why attack Sicily when Sparta was yet to be defeated?

Only having recently begun to enjoy the bounty won from war and unaware of the plagues and troubles before this time, the young grew excited and anxious to go to Sicily. Nicias points out that these men should not be the ones to influence the decisions of Athens (6.12). Being of impressionable age, the younger men could easily be influenced by their leaders merely by the thought of the money they would win in war to balance extraneous expenses. Nicias then calls upon the older men of Athens to intercede in swaying the irrational attitude of the younger towards going to Sicily. The Egestaeans should be left alone in their struggle against Selinuntine as they do not have the reserves to aid Athens in turn. It is not in the best interest of Athens to aid allies who cannot be of use to them. Egesta began their war against the Selinuntines without consulting Athens, which was contrary to their agreement (6.13). In conclusion, Nicias asks the assembly to vote for a second time on the expedition to Sicily (6.14).

Alcibiades then speaks – the most enthusiastic of the Athenians for the Sicilian expedition. He was angered by Nicias's speech because Nicias had attacked him in it – Alcibiades was the shining example of a commander who tried to excite the young in order to receive personal gain in Sicily (6.15). He was then viewed by the Athenians as a potential tyrant who threatened Athens's future well-being. Publicly, he

was ambitious, and his private life was viewed as offensive to the people (6.15). From the onset of his speech, Alcibiades recognizes that Nicias attacked him. He counters by arguing his worthiness to command the expedition. The wealth of his private life is acknowledged to have been won fairly. This and his prestige to foreigners should not be wrongly viewed in a negative light, but as things that he has earned due to his excellence. Alcibiades reiterates that he should be given credit for the formation of a coalition against Sparta at Mantinea (6.16). Instead of calling upon only Alcibiades to command the expedition, he suggests that Nicias be chosen as well. Together the two possess youthful energy and good fortune (6.17). In addition, the Sicilians lack political unity and would be easily divided. Alcibiades also believes that the barbarians in Sicily are to be more likely to assist the Athenians than the Syracusans (6.17). The Athenians at home could rest at ease as well. Even with the Athenian fleet remaining homebound, they would still surpass the powers of the Spartan navy. Athens would be relatively safe as the expedition was underway (6.17).

Alcibiades continues that Athens should honor its alliances. Honoring their allies would allow the empire to expand further. The concept of alliance with Egesta was not for them to be of great assistance to Athens in her own domain, but to keep Athenian enemies occupied in Sicily and less likely to attack Athens (6.18). Furthermore, he claims that

We must not be content with retaining what we have but must scheme to extend it for, if we cease to rule others, we shall be in danger of being ruled ourselves. (6.18.3)

Had the empire ceased to expand it would risk losing everything. If Athens desires a

peaceful life, they have to ready themselves to be accustomed to the way of life of those that they rule. Should they cease to expand, they would cease to be free (6.18). Athens is not accustomed to inaction, and therefore should not adopt such a policy. Even if Athens did not achieve a permanent victory over Syracuse, they would still have injured them significantly. This would do nothing to harm the reputation of Athens but would hurt Syracuse, contrary to Nicias's claims (6.18).

Nicias speaks again to defend his point of view against the speech of Alcibiades. This time he decides to use a different approach than used previously (6.19). He claims that the poleis in Sicily would likely resist the forces sent by Athens, as they have no incentive to change. They do not depend on one another; they have their independence and their society is stable (6.20). They would pose a great threat to the Athenian invaders. The Athenians find themselves with a choice: to send extremely powerful forces to avert the need for sending for assistance later or a shameful withdrawal (6.21). They formulate that the expedition should not only be strong in force, but should also have adequate provisions and monetary support. Warriors will be needed not only from Athens, but from the rest of the empire as well. Nicias cannot do enough to reiterate the difficulty and danger that was to be faced by the Athenians in this expedition – success could only be achieved with immense power (6.23).

Could Nicias have failed any more miserably in his efforts? Rather than instilling a healthy fear in the people, he only serves to stimulate the vigor for the expedition (6.24). Apparently, Athens likes a challenge. They have a desire for glory that was instilled in them by Pericles. They want to act upon this desire. With enthusiasm, the people demand that Nicias command the expedition (6.25).

A big drawback with Nicias's appeal was that he did not have an Athenian character. He resembled a Spartan. He desired to rest and preserve. He did not seek to expand the empire; he was not outwardly brave and innovative. With this lack of bravado, Nicias could not truly persuade the people of Athens. They did not want to rest upon their laurels; they desired action! For the Athenians to be persuaded by his speech would have been contrary to their innate character. His interests were very much the same as the common interest of Athens – or at least they appeared to be in speech. It would have been more beneficial to Athens to forego the Sicilian Expedition. There would have been too much risk and danger to undertake; too many things could have gone wrong. Nicias followed the ideas of Pericles; it would be best sometimes to play it safe in war. He appealed to fear and caution while attempting to persuade the Athenians, and not self-interest as Pericles would have done.<sup>23</sup> Nicias had an underlying purpose in preventing the expedition. Nicias spoke in his own interests, as the Sicilian Expedition would have been a great risk to his personal fortune and well-being. A powerful man such as Nicias could risk losing his fortunes, reputation, and livelihood in such a dangerous undertaking. Nicias's misconception of the "common good" was to keep the Athenians from risking their current possessions for future intangibles. Pericles's understanding of common good as portrayed in the Funeral Oration translates to a love of glory and lack of concern for personal loss. Clearly, Nicias's concern was not merely for the common good of Athens but for the security of his own wealth and status. However, his plan backfired proving only to incite a thirst for glory in the young men of Athens instead of caution.

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<sup>23</sup> Palmer, *Love of Glory*, 103.

Upon departing for Sicily, the Athenians realized just how dangerous this expedition could be (6.31.1). However, they were comforted by their eagerness to obtain glory. The size and the strength of their fleet helped to ease their worries. It was as though the men had an *eros* for the expedition to Sicily. It was not a rational undertaking, but a passion. The Athenians were restless, they desired motion. With this motion, they wanted glory.

In both the case of Nicias and Alcibiades, they recognized the need for the “fine-sounding.” Neither man stated their actual reason for supporting their cause. Nicias wanted to preserve his fortune and safety. However, he could not outwardly state this. Why would the rest of Athens support him in protecting his own wealth and forgo the Sicilian Expedition when they had the opportunity to win their own fortunes there? Nicias spoke because he wanted to preserve his own interests. He used pretexts, however, to mask his true motive. The expedition was a great risk, and avoiding it would follow in the way of Pericles. He may have believed the reasons he put forth not to go to Sicily, but his belief in these reasons was not why he rose to speak. Alcibiades wanted to win glory and fortune in Sicily. However, he also used pretexts to cover his true motive. He appealed to the desire of fortune and glory for not just himself, but for all. He argued that Athens must honor her alliances. In reality, he just wanted a chance to win himself glory of a Periclean level.

Did anyone have Athens’ interests at heart? Neither Alcibiades nor Nicias did, but they had to pretend. Pretexts are a necessity in motivating people when the true motives would not serve to do so. Anything can be used as a cover to achieve one’s own ends; it depends on the passion and conviction incited in the nature of the people to determine what to use to motivate them. If the

people believe the fine-sounding pretext, they will work to accomplish the goal. Unknowingly, they will also accomplish the true motive, which is often a baser thing. Such deception in politics is a necessity. Every leader of every polis has to deceive the city at one time or another, whether for good or bad. People tend to want what is worst for them.<sup>24</sup> They choose what they want and not what they need. They need a leader to steer them onto the course of what they need.

Alcibiades fled Athens after being found guilty for defacing the Hermae, the religious statues of Athens. He was called upon by the Spartans to join a meeting at which Corinth and Syracuse pressed Sparta to declare war. Sparta was swayed to send envoys to avoid the surrender of the Syracusans. However, they had no intention of sending actual aid to Syracuse (6.88).

Alcibiades rises to speak. First, he addresses the prejudices held against him by Sparta. He feels that this was important to avoid the same mistake that Athens made; they allowed their private dislike for Alcibiades affect the public interest. He claims that he was not always on bad terms with Sparta. Granted he was until recently the leader of the anti-Spartan sentiment, but he had previously been kind to Sparta at Pylos (6.89). Since he was speaking to oligarchs, he tries to justify his position in Athens by stating that he was moderate in his support of democracy. Alcibiades asserts that he was expelled from Athens because he wanted to moderate the *demos* more than was tolerated. Alcibiades has the audacity to blame Athens for his own actions. He cannot try to change the regime with a hostile force threatening the polis (6.89.6). Alcibiades has most certainly taken the Athenian Thesis to heart. No matter the circumstance, he acted

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<sup>24</sup> This tendency among democracies is reflective of the view held in Aristotle’s *Politics* (4.4).

in his own self-interest. He basically raised himself to the status of the polis. Indeed, Alcibiades was without a polis to call his own at this moment. He tried to assert himself as independent and with interests separate from those of Athens.<sup>25</sup> He wanted Sparta to believe in the genuineness of his advice and to disavow himself from Athens. Alcibiades attempted to show through his speech that the interests of Sparta and himself were one and the same. They both wanted to see the fall of Athens.

Alcibiades then reveals the “true plot” of Athens to Sparta. Athens desires not only to conquer Sicily, but then all of Italy and Greece. Each conquest would serve to fund the next until Athens had conquered all. However, this was not the plan of Athens. This was the plan of Alcibiades. But, by portraying this as the plan of Athens, he hoped to display the threat to Sparta that Athens posed in Sicily. Furthermore, Alcibiades insists on his own importance by pointing out that Sparta would be at an advantage by naming him as their adviser. To serve and defend the Peloponnese, Sparta must send aid to Syracuse. Understanding that Sparta was not easily persuaded to take on an offensive role, he appealed to the idea of defending what was theirs (6.91). This could motivate Sparta to motion. He further suggested that Sparta send troops Decelea. Alcibiades knew that this was the greatest fear of the Athenians, for this would have prevented the allies of Athens from bringing them tributes (6.91.7).

Because Alcibiades knows that he could be viewed in a negative light for disloyalty to his own polis, he attempts to justify his own actions (6.92). He was unjustly expelled from Athens, so he could not be considered a traitor. Athens was no longer his home. It could not be considered betraying the city if one was aiding the

enemy for the purpose of recovering the city and making it right again. Alcibiades did not plan to pursue a future at Sparta nor did he plan on devastating Athens beyond repair. His motive was not vengeance. He would have rather set up the chance to return in triumph. Alcibiades’s enemies who expelled him from the city would be to blame for the poor state of Athens. He wants them to ask themselves if they had only chosen to keep Alcibiades on board, would they have suffered such a defeat? Alcibiades could then heroically return reclaiming the rule of Athens – crippled as it may be.

The Athenian Thesis is ultimately detrimental to the citizens, for example: Alcibiades. Is it possible for a polis to sanction the idea that only power, and not justice, determines the result of international relations without affecting the citizens? How long can they believe that that policy applies internationally, but not domestically? Alcibiades’s concern was only in his self-interest, and not in the good of Athens. This stems from the idea that only the self-interest of Athens matters and not the good of the community internationally. Pericles based his arguments on the self-interest of Athens. If the Athenians were to believe and support him, how long until they forget how to formulate arguments based on anything but self-interest? The Athenians used justice in arguments as the term suited their needs. Athens did not foster the idea of justice in her citizens. Soon, the result is citizens that lack a concern for justice themselves. The citizens of Athens then do what suits them best, not what is just. Alcibiades did only what is in his interest, disregarding the good of Athens completely. He betrayed his own polis multiple times and hoped to manipulate the Spartans and the Athenians so he may return and rule Athens. Alcibiades sought the type of glory that Pericles

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<sup>25</sup> Palmer, *Love of Glory*, 99.

described in his Funeral Oration.<sup>26</sup> This type of glory is unattainable to individuals, but the Athenians who heard this speech desired it. Pericles gave them the belief that by fighting for Athens, they might attain this glory. When men do try to gain such glory for themselves and ignore any notion of justice, a man like Alcibiades is the result.

According to Strauss, Pericles brought a balance between common and individual interest to the leaders of the domestic politics of Athens.<sup>27</sup> Without Pericles, the concern for private good trumped that of the public among the rulers. Pericles's measured rule moderated the Athenians, namely the rulers. Without this moderation, Athens was in a dire situation. When men who care only for private good are at the helm, the city is in trouble.

## CONCLUSION

The guiding forces for interaction between foreign nations are difficult to determine and decipher. This difficulty is due to the need to interpret what nations say and what they mean. There is a level of uncertainty in human affairs – human beings can conceal true thoughts from one another; they may even be unclear themselves of what their true motivations are. One may believe to know the positions of all parties, but this is always clouded with ambiguity because people can lie. Finding the truth beneath the statements and arguments proves to be more difficult. This guide is the impulse or motivation for action; at other times, it can be the case made by a nation to justify its actions. The true guide used by a nation – its true cause – is often hidden behind its cause in speech. The true cause is not always what nations claim to be their guide for action. There is often a funda-

mental difference between what a nation states as its guide and what it uses as a motivator. An important question arises in the narrative: can justice be the sole guide for nations in international relations? From the narrative, the answer that can be derived seems to be no, but this question is more complicated on its own terms and in terms of the narrative. In the *History*, the only people to truly believe in justice are the Melians. Justice was their only appeal when attempting to negotiate with Athens. The Melians appeal to justice was obviously futile. They appealed to their own possibility of future power. Athens should show mercy so that when they are weaker, the Melians will do the same. It really takes an idealist to make such a statement. As a nation of realists, Athens is not persuaded. Athens, the greater power, is successful. The weak Melos that took care for justice was destroyed. Thus on the face of it, the narrative seems to point to the idea that an appeal to justice is foolish. To have the powerful Athens on one side and the Melians appealing to justice on the other does not suggest a positive outcome. However, it proves to be more complicated as later in the narrative we see that such behavior leads to the downfall of Athens.

Following the narrative, we can see that other ideas may be appealed to as a pretext for justice. Upon examining Thucydides closely, one can recognize that this issue of 'true cause' and 'cause in speech' is more complicated than justice alone. Diodotus claimed to appeal to self-interest when speaking to the Athenian assembly.<sup>28</sup> However, he was really appealing to justice. Using the two ideas together he was able to sway the assembly to kill only the men responsible in the Mytilenian revolt, instead of killing all of the men and enslaving the women and children. This result is what Diodotus, and many others, would have

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<sup>26</sup> See Funeral Oration, pg. 40.

<sup>27</sup> Strauss, *City and Man*, 192.

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<sup>28</sup> See Mytilenian Debate, pg. 35.

considered the just decision. At the beginning of his speech, Diodotus even openly stated that men must deceive. He told them that he was about to lie to them, and it worked. If justice is the only guide for international relations, then why do men have to deceive in speech? Men could speak plainly, without pretexts, if justice was the sole guiding principle. It can be determined that justice is not the sole guide in international relations, but it relies on a second factor.

Glory emerges as a cause in speech or motivator as one continues along in the narrative. Glory has an immediate emotional appeal to nations of a certain character, such as Athens. It will drive them to great things, but it will not hold. It is easy to indulge in glory when a nation is sitting comfortably. However, in a state of war, the idea of glory soon fades, leaving the need for other motivators. Pericles tries to use glory in motivating the Athenians in war. He speaks of the immortal glory available to men in battle in the Funeral Oration.<sup>29</sup> This glory is obviously not attributable to the average soldier, but only to men of excellence (such as Pericles) and the city of Athens itself. They themselves are not glorious but they participate in the larger glory of the city. Nevertheless, the method of Pericles is effective in persuading the Athenians to wage war in the most prudent way possible. They remain behind their walls during Spartan sieges and they focus on their naval power to win the war. They do not attempt to further expand their empire. He used glory as a motivator to get them to do non-glorious things. To use glory for such an objective is like releasing a genie from a bottle. Glory can merely fizzle, or it can become very destructive. Once the idea of glory is released, it can easily spiral out of control – especially when the wise leader

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<sup>29</sup> See Funeral Oration, pg. 40.

dies. A quest for such glory can lead to a sort of destructive and dangerous *eros*. When Pericles appeals to glory, he is often appealing to expediency or self-interests. Lying beneath the claims to glory are fear, shame, and self-interest. He appeals to these emotions without directly saying that he is doing so, under the cloak of glory. His suggestions do not encourage glorious actions or strategies, but he gets the men to wage the war in the safest way available.<sup>30</sup> After tracing through all speeches of Pericles, it can be inferred that glory alone cannot be used as a driving principle either. In the end, the idea of glory runs out of strength, and one must appeal to fear and safety. An appeal to glory may work to motivate citizens quickly, but alone it will not last.

Self-interest is another alternative to justice. Athens is famous for appealing only to self-interest in international relations. They did, after all state that “right...is only in question between equals in power, while the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must” (5.89). They act in their own interests completely. It is only expedient to act as others would call “justly” when the other power is equal to their own. Of course, one must question that if this “justice” only exists among equals, is it really justice? Using this principle, those who lack the power to retaliate are not worth the pain of finding a just solution if Athens can force them into submission without compromising any objectives. However, when appealing to other nations, using their self-interest is not always capable of swaying the other nation in their favor.<sup>31</sup> While Corcyra tried to persuade Athens to act in their favor, the outcome was what Athens

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<sup>30</sup> See Second Meeting of the Peloponnesian League (pg. 17), Funeral Oration (pg. 40), and Third Speech of Pericles (pg. 47).

<sup>31</sup> See First Meeting of the Peloponnesian League.

found to be in her best interests. It seems ultimately up to the nation holding the most power to determine what it sees to be in its self-interest.

Through the narrative, we can also see that nations often appeal to religion when attempting to sway others in their favor. Corinth appealed to the gods while trying to persuade Sparta to wage war against Athens.<sup>32</sup> However, this was really a cover for their fear of Athenian tyranny. They claimed that the gods were in favor of their desire for war against Athens, when in reality they simply feared that the Athenian empire had gone too far and might threaten their well-being. The Melians also appealed to the gods; they claimed that if not Sparta, the gods would save them. The irreverent Athenian response was that the gods were merely an invention of man. Furthermore, if the gods were to exist, Athens would be in their favor because they rule over Greece as the gods rule over men.<sup>33</sup> The gods are often tied closely with the idea of justice. There is a need for divine support for justice because it does not seem that the world as it is supports justice. The fact that Athens could hold such a tyrannical empire shows that power often dominates what happens in the world – whether it is just or not. Because the actions of the world rarely reflect a support for the idea of justice, divine support is needed. If there is such a thing as justice, where does it come from? Justice cannot be the guide for international relations if it is merely a human device. If that were the case, the Athenians would be right in their thesis as well as in their actions. The moral reaction of the reader is contrary to this verdict. In which case, the Melians were correct in the Melian Dialogue. Justice is not just something that humans fabricated; it needs cosmic support from the divine. If there are no gods, there can be no justice

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<sup>32</sup> See Second Meeting of the Peloponnesian League.

<sup>33</sup> See Melian Dialogue.

with any meaning outside and above human will. So if there is such a thing as justice, there must be gods.

The devotion to justice proves to be destructive. The Melians believe in justice and are the only truly honest people in the *History*. They do not waste their breath with pretexts and hidden motives. However, the Melians seem to be lacking a fundamental element to pair with the idea of justice: strength. A nation acting by the doctrine of justice without strength is dangerous to its own well-being. It is practically naïve.

On the other hand, the Athenians are by far the most powerful nation in all of Greece, and still meet their destruction. The Athenian Thesis plainly stated is destructive. This fact implies that there is a need for a nod to the idea of justice on the part of the city. Strength without justice is equally destructive as the inverse. While individual events in the *History* may appear to prove the Athenian Thesis to be correct, when taken as a whole, the work calls into question the positive effect of their understanding. It may work in the beginning, but has terrible results in the end.

Since no one guide alone will suffice, multiple elements are needed in international relations. This is where deception comes into play. The true interest of a nation is often cloaked with one of the ideas above, the most acceptable being justice. Sparta was able to deceive all of Greece by holding a trial to judge Plataea.<sup>34</sup> Sparta listened to the appeals of Plataea and Thebes, and made a decision that was based on their self-interest. However, by following the protocol of what is considered just by other nations, they are not referred to as tyrants as the Athenians are.

The Athenian Thesis, openly stated, can yield destructive results upon the city of Athens and her people. Does human nature require a belief in justice as a means of

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<sup>34</sup> See Plataea, pg. 29.

restraint? The idea of justice persuades people and nations to act moderately. Athens, who does not appeal to justice in arguments, uses other means to restrain her citizens and policies. The Athenian Thesis is undermined by the narrative itself, as demonstrated in the balance between speech and deed. The fact that the strong did not prevail proves that in practice, such a policy leads to ruin. The Athenian Thesis could be rejected on humanitarian or prudential grounds – it actually will undermine the interests of the nation by following it as well as appear tremendously unjust. Are the Athenians only fooling themselves with their speech? How long can a city lie to itself? There are also psychological burdens that accompany such an international policy while claiming to be a democracy. Can the people truly believe the foreign policy of Athens while upholding the domestic order? This policy proves to be destructive to domestic politics because how can one believe that there is justice internally, but not in international affairs? In the end, Athens destroys herself with the thesis that there is no such thing as justice. Justice and moderation no longer are present in the domestic politics of Athens. The good of the whole is disregarded for personal interests.

One must be able to distinguish between what is said, what is meant, what is to be done, and what motives are used to justify the actions. The people of an assembly lack the information needed to make these distinctions when they hear speeches. It is often only in hindsight that these pretexts and true motives can be recognized. As can be seen in the speeches of Pericles, the promise of immortal glory is used to motivate the Athenians. However, is this an honest promise? Of course it is not. Pericles was well aware that the glory that he spoke of was not attainable by the individual citizens of Athens. Such glory was attainable by the city as a whole, which

can then reflect upon the individuals. Athens's name will be remembered, not the names of particular Athenians. The nature of the world, being unpredictable, makes it impossible to make reliable claims or promises for immortal glory. The essential uncertainty of human affairs undermines Pericles's claim. This glory is also greatly dependent upon poets, the need for whom Pericles rejected. Athens is only remembered because of those who documented it, such as Plato and Thucydides himself. When this is considered, the glory promised by Pericles looks even more like an illusion. The glory can only be immortal if humans continue to write about and remember individuals and events. If one of these works had been lost from ancient times, how would we know of the glory of any ancient polis?

One must be careful when using pretexts to cover true motives. Speeches can be misinterpreted and people can be led astray. After plague and Spartan invasions, the Athenians began to hang their heads. They lost faith in the war and were ready to give up. At this time, Pericles, their noble leader, was still with them. He restated this promise of immortal glory that gave them the encouragement to continue in their endeavor. Pericles held the best interests of Athens at heart. He was not leading Athens in his own interest. His combination of wisdom, patriotism, and skill made him capable of successfully leading Athens. However, how many men such as Pericles can a nation count on having as leaders?

Once he was gone, Athens was led astray. There was no one to remind the Athenians that they were fighting for a more noble cause than private interest. Alcibiades was the result of Athens as such. He was a man who placed his own interest above that of the interest of Athens as a whole. Where Pericles tried to emphasize that the common and private good were one and the same, Alcibiades believed that private good trumps

that of Athens. It is dangerous when men such as these are at the helm. They lead the city to ruin. The narrative proves that glory used as a motivator can become destructive. Alcibiades took the idea of the glory of Athens instead to be individual glory. He used the idea of glory to motivate the rest of the Athenians into reckless actions that led to their downfall.

Nations are motivated in many ways. Speakers in the *History of the Peloponnesian War* used myriad factors to appeal to bodies of people. Self-interest, glory, power, justice, expedience, fear, and the interests of the city were commonly used to sway assemblies. The motivating factor used varied based on the nature of the people. How is a nation motivated to act justly? It depends on the character of the people as well as the intent, character, and motives of the speaker. One can see the difference in approach used by Pericles as compared to Alcibiades.

In Pericles's third speech, he openly told the Athenians that their empire was a tyranny. He stated that it *may* have been wrong to take it, but now they must do everything possible to maintain it. Was it healthy for the Athenians to be aware that they hold a tyranny? Did it not subordinate the idea of justice to the interest of Athens in their minds? Now, why should they concern themselves with the just treatment of other nations? How long until this mantra would infiltrate the domestic action of Athens? Would not the Athenians be influenced by Athens' international policy in their daily lives? It would be easy now to justify self-interest over the interest of Athens as a whole. Athens placed her self-interest above those she ruled as a tyrant. This example could be taken to heart by Athenians such as Alcibiades and Nicias.

When Nicias spoke on the matter of the Sicilian Expedition, he spoke out of self-interest. He cloaked that interest before the

Athenians with practical limitations. Pericles's speeches had made the Athenians feel invincible – that nothing should be out of Athens' reach. No limit should be known to them. This led Nicias's speech to backfire on him. Instead of instilling fear or practical concerns into the minds of the Athenians, Nicias inspired them to undertake the expedition. Nicias was also a product of Pericles's oratory – he misunderstood what was to be acting in the best interest of Athens. Pericles made the interests of all of Athens and the private interest seem one and the same. He wanted to keep Athens from action for his own benefit, to preserve his own wealth and well being by avoiding risk to himself and Attica.

The effect of a nation not saying that justice is its guide can be seen in the case of Athens. Humans cannot live without the idea of justice. To deny justice is destructive upon the soul of the nation and its citizens. The nation will end up with leaders such as Nicias and Alcibiades in doing so, which did not lead to the best outcome for Athens. Granted, justice alone cannot be the guide in international relations, but it must play a part due to the fundamental human need for the idea of justice. To place self-interest over the whole can lead to poor results. Trust between people is dissolved when only self-interest is used as the guide. That trust is necessary for a society. Can fear work to bind a group of people together? Not domestically, trust must be the source of cohesion. A society based on the idea of injustice will divide into factional conflict, as we can see in the instance of Nicias and Alcibiades. When the ideas of justice or trust are not present, the solidarity of the nation is threatened. The polis depends upon the distinction of "us" versus "them" to make the society function. The Athenian Thesis, by removing justice from the picture, undermines the "us" part of the equation and chips away at what holds Athens together.

When reading the narrative, it is not always clear that justice should prevail. Thucydides did us a favor in writing the *History of the Peloponnesian War* as he did. The answers are not provided by the text. He wrote in a way to provoke our thought. We, as readers, must interpret the speeches and dialogue and think for ourselves to struggle for an answer. What we get in Thucydides are choices and alternatives as they are laid out. Thucydides did not explicitly say what or who is right or wrong in the situations he presented in his work. This is similar to international relations today. We do not have anyone to tell us who is right or wrong and why. We must take the information and

attempt to make sense of it. After reading the Melian Dialogue, readers may deny the possibility of justice in the world due to the outcome. However, the reader often has the impression that the Melians may not have achieved victory, but they deserved it because their appeal was actually just. Thucydides does not overtly teach the reader lessons in the *History*. Perhaps what Thucydides wanted us to learn was that, in the end, the greatest importance lies in struggling with the question of justice itself. Even if we do not come to a definitive answer, we are better off for having struggled with the question and trying to see what is right and wrong.