

The tragic reading of the Thucydidean tragedy

DAVID BEDFORD AND THOM WORKMAN

Abstract. The Greek intellectual Thucydides has been widely identified by scholars of international relations as prefiguring twentieth century Realist thought. This appropriation fails to locate particular aspects of Thucydides' writing within the overall narrative structure of *The Peloponnesian War*. The narrative structure is in the form of a tragedy. Thucydides was critical of the excessive and unrestrained nature of Athenian and Hellenic conduct during the war. By taking up specific themes including the dominance of reason by the passions, the eclipse of *logos* by *ergon*, and the decline of *nomos*, he expressed this critique in a tragic form. In the end, an unrestrained Athens reached for Sicily and suffered *Nemesian* retribution in the form of ignominious defeat. To claim Thucydides as a precursor to Realist thought, therefore, is peculiar, and has the character of enlisting a critique of excess and immoderation on behalf of an intellectual discourse altogether lacking in reasoned moderation.

Thucydides and International Relations

International Relations scholarship frequently appropriates pre-eminent intellectuals from the past.¹ Realism in particular has claimed a number of writers as proto-Realists, that is, as reflecting and analysing international relations in ways more or less consistent with the intellectual tenets of realism.² Perhaps more than any other writer from the past, the ancient Greek historian Thucydides is taken as a proto-Realist: 'Realism in ancient Greece is best exemplified by some of the sophists', writes one scholar, 'and of course, Thucydides'.³ Indeed, as Michael W. Doyle summarized, Thucydides is often identified as the parent of realism: 'To most scholars in international politics, to think like a Realist is to think as the philosophical historian Thucydides first thought. Realists invoke Thucydides in order to claim him as the founder of a tradition and to say that their world-view is coeval with the actual emergence of interstate politics more than 2,000 years ago'.⁴ In fact, Thucydides' Realist credentials are thought to be beyond doubt, and the only real outstanding issue among international relations scholars centres around the type of Realism that Thucydides embraced. In an article informed by the 'second debate', for example,

¹ Perhaps the most ambitious effort in this regard is Kenneth Waltz's *Man, the State and War* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1959) which argues that the first, second, and third 'images' of international politics were elaborated in the thinking of Spinoza, Kant and Rousseau respectively.

² Modern thinkers such as Hobbes, Machiavelli and Rousseau are regularly identified as articulating Realist understandings.

³ Steven Forde, 'International Realism and the Science of Politics: Thucydides, Machiavelli, and Neorealism', *International Studies Quarterly*, 39 (1995), p. 141.

⁴ Michael W. Doyle, 'Thucydidean Realism', *Review of International Studies*, 16 (1990), p. 223.

Richard Sears concluded that Thucydides' 'approach is distinctively classical and that a fuller understanding of it must proceed with that fact uppermost in our minds'.⁵

The identification of Thucydides as a Realist is based on a reading of the *History* that is hermeneutically inadequate. More particularly, the identification requires the consideration of specific ideas and accounts of events in isolation from the unifying intellectual structure of the *Peloponnesian War*. Isolated elements of the text are selected, in fact, merely on the basis of their consistency with one or more tenets of Realism. These abstracted ideas are reassembled into a Realist paradigm. Thucydides is manipulated into a perspective far removed from his narrative intention, in effect superimposing an alien, late modern view upon the *History* that bears little relation to the organic narrative developed by its author.

The *Peloponnesian War* must be studied on its own terms. Thucydides did not think in the manner of twentieth century Realists. Rather, the *Peloponnesian War* was written as a tragedy. Its integrated intellectual structure developed the story of Athenian excess and its subsequent fall. The master narrative of the *History* educed a sense of Athenian immoderation followed by its ignominious defeat at Syracuse and lapse into *stasis*. Indeed, the unifying tragic narrative reveals Thucydides' lament for the eclipse of reasoned moderation in Greek life generally, and in Athenian conduct in particular.

Recent criticism in international relations evinces an increasingly reluctant identification of Thucydides as a Realist. Laurie M. Johnson Bagby, for example, in an article entitled 'The Use and Abuse of Thucydides in International Relations', contends that both the Realist and the neo-Realist traditions are only partly reflected in the *History*.⁶ She argues that while there are overlaps between classical Realism and Thucydides, including its 'pessimistic stance toward human nature, its consideration for the role of statesmanship, and its recognition of the moral tragedy of international politics', there are numerous divergences, especially regarding the notion that states are the key actors in international affairs, or that they are power seeking.⁷ And although Thucydides was sensitive to the role of anarchic structures and thus comparable to neo-Realists, she argues that he does not disregard political and cultural differentiation among states.⁸ Bagby concludes, however, that the *Peloponnesian War* reveals attention to national character, individual character, the creative effects of political rhetoric, and a concern for moral conduct, which, when considered together, force us to move beyond the complacent claim that Thucydides is a Realist.⁹ The consonances with Realism must be tempered by the recognition that there is much more to the text. In keeping with her theoretical pluralism she argues that the Thucydidean perspective can take us beyond the trappings of Realism, especially to the extent that the latter causes us to underplay the importance of wise political leadership and modern statecraft.¹⁰

⁵ Richard D. Sears, 'Thucydides and the Scientific Approach to International Politics', *The Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 23:1 (April 1977), p. 40.

⁶ Laurie M. Johnson Bagby, 'The Use and Abuse of Thucydides in International Relations', *International Organization*, 48:1 (Winter 1994), p. 135.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 136–7.

⁹ *Ibid.*, discussion pp. 136–47.

¹⁰ As she writes: 'To obtain and inculcate true political wisdom we may have to abjure the notion that any one theory or formula will accurately predict human behaviour or solve human problems'. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

A second critique of the identification of Thucydides with Realism appears in Daniel Garst's 'Thucydides and Neorealism'.¹¹ Although Thucydides' study provides rich material for the debate between realist and critical approaches to international relations theory, he contends that a neorealist reading of Thucydides is inappropriate. In particular, neorealism's elevation of anarchic structures as timeless explanations of international conflict is inconsistent with Thucydides' grounding of the Peloponnesian War in the socio-historical dynamics of the Spartan and Athenian alliances, and with his attention to the personal traits of their leaders. He concludes that 'Thucydides reminds us that power and hegemony are above all bound to the existence of political and social structures and the intersubjective conventions associated with them. Nothing could be more foreign to Thucydides' way of thinking than neorealism's ahistorical treatment of these concepts. And nothing could be more pernicious to Thucydides than neorealism's insistence that the quest for power is an underlying and enduring systemic imperative that exists independently of social structures created and maintained by human agency'.¹² Although Garst rejects the idea that Thucydides is a neorealist, he is less explicit about Thucydides' accordance with Realism: 'In this interpretation, Thucydides is seen not as the father of realism and neorealism but as a contested terrain for realist and critical approaches to international relations theory'.¹³

The contributions of recent scholarship are valid as far as they go, but they do not go far enough. The insights of Thucydides and the narrative structure of the *History* call for an unqualified rejection of the notion that the *Peloponnesian War* prefigured any of the variants of Realist analysis. While the richness of the *History* may be used to augment our contemporary theoretical insights, as Bagby and Garst both discuss, it contains an integrated narrative structure that renders such usages partial and incomplete.¹⁴ Selected treatment of different aspects of the *History* lose their full weight when held apart from each other, and when analysed outside of the unifying narrative that they establish.

When Thucydides' narrative is considered as a whole, a different reading of the text emerges that has much to offer contemporary scholars and practitioners. Thucydides' treatment of the excess, intemperance and immoderation that spelled the decline of Athens provides straightforward and much needed counsel in an age that so easily lends itself to excess in the conduct of nations. Indeed, it is precisely this potential of the *History* that makes the Realist appropriation sadly ironic. Realist writers vary considerably with respect to their concerns about the need to temper state conduct. Stanley Hoffmann's elaboration of a state's obligations beyond its borders or Hedley Bull's identification of the *de facto* order that characterizes international life attest to the breadth of ethical considerations that attend international relations commentary.¹⁵ More general Realist debates that responded to Idealist challenges in the early part of the century or the more recent contri-

¹¹ Daniel Garst, 'Thucydides and Neorealism,' *International Studies Quarterly*, 33 (1989), pp. 3–27.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁴ Other scholars who are not addressing the question of Thucydides' realism have similarly used the *Peloponnesian War*. See Bruce Russett and William Antholis, 'Do Democracies Fight Each Other? Evidence from the Peloponnesian War', *Journal of Peace Research*, 29:4 (1992), pp. 415–34.

¹⁵ See Stanley Hoffmann, *Duties Beyond Borders: On the Limits and Possibilities of Ethical International Politics* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1981) and Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (London: Macmillan, 1977).

butions of Grotian-inspired regime theory reveal Realism's underlying concerns with norms and rules in the conduct of nations.¹⁶

Despite the diversity of the Realist analytical tradition, however, these writers are united by their failure to inlay reason with moderation. The temperance of state conduct stands apart from the strategic protection of a state's national interest. Expressed in a different manner, reasonable state conduct is not contingent upon moderate state practices. From the Realist standpoint, a state's foreign policy may be remarkably harsh on occasion and still be regarded as decisively reasonable. This characteristic of the Realist tradition is amply illustrated in the writings of Hans Morgenthau. Morgenthau laments the excesses of state conduct that follow when state leaders cloak particular aspirations as univernally shared goals or when they fail to understand that rival states are driven by identical imperatives regarding interests and power. Prudent state conduct that carefully assesses 'interests in terms of power' demands that leaders avoid the trappings of universalism or demonization. Nonetheless, even state leaders exercising 'prudence' will find it necessary to support conduct that is extraordinarily violent from time to time. Morgenthau's formulation captures the essence of the Realist reduction of reason to a purely instrumental calculation of costs and benefits, a formulation that permits altogether immoderate acts such as nuclear war or the carpet bombing of cities to be considered reasonable.¹⁷

Thucydides' lament for the eclipse of reasoned moderation in the conduct of nations is at odds, therefore, with the Realist understanding of reasonable state conduct. Indeed, Realist formulations that so easily lend themselves to excessive state policy would fall necessarily under the rubric of Thucydides' remonstrations. To the considerable extent that Realist understandings of international relations undergird much of the immoderation and excess of contemporary global life, the identification of Thucydides as a Realist is ironic. It involves enlisting a critique of state excess and immoderation on behalf of a discourse that easily identifies excessive and immoderate acts as reasonable. To enlist Thucydides in the service of statecraft that is excessive and immoderate is, in a striking sense, to enlist a classical tragedy in the service of an unfolding tragedy. The Realist appropriation of Thucydides could not miss the mark more thoroughly.¹⁸

¹⁶ See Stephen Krasner (ed.), *International Regimes* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983).

¹⁷ Morgenthau's thought is exemplary. As long as the requirement of prudence is satisfied any act, including absolutely immoderate ones, could be considered rational. Indeed, some criticism in the field of international relations surrounds the concern that contemporary statecraft is guided by purely instrumental rationality in the sense discussed by Max Horkheimer, *Eclipse of Reason* (New York: Continuum, 1974). Elements of this critique echo in the feminist writers who argue that rationality has lost its groundedness or has become 'decontextualized', and that any excessive act considered exclusively in terms of means and ends—including nuclear war—can be held out as rational. See, for example, Sarah Ruddick, *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace* (New York: Ballentine, 1989).

¹⁸ It is not clear to us that any Realist writer adequately breaks free from this immuring instrumental rationality that Thucydides would have regarded with great disdain. It is our hope, therefore, that our critique constitutes part of the deconstruction of the Realist conceptual edifice afoot in much postmodern and feminist commentary. For an elaboration of Realism as a 'backward discipline' characterized by unself-consciousness see Jim George, *Discourses of Global Politics: A Critical (Re)Introduction to International Relations* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1994), especially chs. 1–4.

The Peloponnesian War as tragedy

Thucydides narrated the decline of Athens as a tragedy. Greek tragedy was characterized by a number of themes. Most importantly, the tragic representation of the world presupposed the presence of natural limits which determine the boundaries for proper human conduct. These limits to behaviour are expressed as custom but were generally conceived as having an extra-mundane source.¹⁹ Tragic plots centre around the figure who disregards these bounding conditions of life and invariably suffers punishment, mythically expressed as the retribution from *Nemesis*. The definitive moments in a tragedy occur as punishment against those who have violated these limits, and the subsequent re-establishment of the natural order. Hence, the archetypical tragic plot begins with a challenge to the order of being manifested through excessive passions and appetites, excess that culminates in conduct outside properly ordered life, and is resolved through the destruction of the tragic protagonist. The tragic plot, therefore, involves a movement from growing imbalance to restoration that is outside exclusively human determinations.

Hence, the understanding of history and historical causality presupposed in Greek tragedy is far removed from modern notions. All sides of the contemporary debate about agency accept that the cause of events, whether the actions of subjects as Realists sometimes argue, or various historical tendencies or forces (often referred to as structures) as neo-Realists are inclined to argue, are immanent to the historical process itself. The idea of *Nemesis*, or of retribution for transgressing the proper bounds of conduct established by a transcendent order of being, places 'agency', in part, outside the historical process, thereby assigning human history both immanent and transcendent origins. Thucydides drew upon notions that were common in Greek mythical understanding. F.M. Cornford hinted at this in his argument that Thucydides did not explain fully the causes and outcomes of the Peloponnesian War.²⁰ While specific strategic considerations can be raised regarding Athens' defeat, the tragic structure of the narrative ultimately places the 'cause' in Athens' excesses, excesses that could not go unpunished. This helps explain the somewhat curious fact that the history of the war is written from the perspective of the losing side. So, while Sparta was also clearly guilty of excesses and transgressions, its policies and actions were, so far as the *History* goes, more moderate. The real excesses of the Spartans occur only after the *History* leaves off.

In sum, for Thucydides transgressions follow from the eclipse of the well-orderedness of the soul (understood as the soul in harmony with the order of being) and appear as the loss of reasoned moderation. The tragic qualities of the *Peloponnesian War* are most evident when the organic intellectual structure of the text is considered. We witness the overstepping of natural limits by Athens,

¹⁹ The plays of Sophocles, which Aristotle took to be the best examples of tragedy, are instructive here. Oedipus is destroyed for his prideful acts which had resulted in the well-known transgressions of transcendent laws. As Antigone says in the play that bears her name, these norms predate even the gods. They are part of the very fabric of being.

²⁰ F.M. Cornford, *Thucydides Mythistoricus* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1907). See especially ch. 1, 'Causes of the War'. This idea, that Thucydides often did not explain the origins of events fully, led Cornford to speculate that Thucydides was 'explaining' actions by reference to mythical types. Our argument builds on the basic insight of Cornford that Thucydides conceptualized his history in the idioms of Greek tragedy.

culminating in the mounting of the Sicilian expedition, and immediately followed by the swift retribution against Athens in the form of its defeat at Syracuse and its descent into *stasis*. Furthermore, through his use of paired characters (such as Archidamus and Sthenelaidas, Pericles and Cleon, or Nikias and Alcibiades), paired speeches (such as the famous Mytilenian Debate, the Spartan decision to go to war, or the launching of the Sicilian expedition), and events (the Athenian victory at Pylos, the Corcyrean revolution or the destruction of Melos), Thucydides unmistakably plaits the strands of the Peloponnesian War as a tragedy. Each of the incidents, speeches or characters, therefore, draw their significance and texture from the overall narrative structure, that is, by considering them in terms of their contribution to the overwhelming sense of decay and degeneration experienced throughout Hellas during the war.

We will address four critical instantiations of the degradation of Greek life that are thematically developed in Thucydides' *History* as a way of drawing out the tragic elements and themes of the narrative. These include: the tension between reason and passion and the eclipse of the former by the latter; the decline of *logos* (speech) and the concomitant ascendancy of *ergon* (action); the violation of *nomos* (convention and law) and the movement towards *physis* (unmediated natural impulse); and, the tendency to overreaching ambition (*pleonexia*) caused by excessive hope (*elpis*). In developing these themes, Thucydides was taking up concerns commonly addressed in Greek literary and philosophical texts, issues that also have informed and structured much modern commentary on the ancients. Although these particular elements of Thucydides' work are under-examined in analyses germane to the field of international relations, they are widely recognized as constituting a significant element of the *Peloponnesian War* in classical and philosophical scholarship.²¹

Reason and passion

The clearest confirmation of the loss of reasoned moderation in Hellenic conduct is the eclipse of reason by the passions. This theme is most manifest in the contrast between Pericles and Cleon, specifically in Pericles' ability to contain the 'passions' of the crowds, as against Cleon's propensity to inflame the crowd. Pericles is presented as the most able and competent ruler: 'For as long as he was at the head of the state during the peace, he pursued a moderate and conservative policy',

²¹ For example, see W. Robert Connor, *Thucydides* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984). This is not to say that those numerous scholars who recognize the salience of these themes necessarily conclude, as does F.M. Cornford, that the *History* must be understood as a tragedy. John Finley writes in *Three Essays on Thucydides* (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967) that 'it seems beyond question that Euripides and Thucydides are consciously attempting the same contrast [in *Hippolytus*, lines 939–1035 and the Mytilenian debate respectively] of impetuosity and reason, and it might therefore be argued that the historian is here adopting the methods of tragedy' (p. 31). H.D. Rankin in *Sophists, Socratic and Cynics* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1983) argues that the *History* is about conflict. Furthermore, the meanings of conflict 'are made manifest in Attic tragedy ... The ingredients of tragedy occur frequently in the vicissitudes of both sides in the *Peloponnesian War*. Even if they did not, it would be difficult to imagine that a writer of a major work in any literary genre in the fifth century BC could fail to be influenced by tragedy' (p. 102).

Thucydides wrote, 'and in his time its [Athen's] greatness was at its height'.²² (II, 65). Pericles recognized in Athens an ability to moderate and balance different human impulses and proclivities: 'We cultivate refinement', he boasted in an exemplary fashion, 'without extravagance ...'. (II, 40). However, this ability had to be carefully cultivated, especially as the growing personal costs of the war and its harmful effects elicited impassioned responses from the Athenians. As the 'crowds' became increasingly angered (ironically by Pericles' own policy) he was obliged to assemble the crowd expressly with the aim of 'restoring confidence and of leading them from these angry feelings to a calmer and more hopeful state of mind'. (II, 59).

In responding to the generalized disenchantment with his war policy Pericles explicitly attempted to moderate their groundless 'apprehension' (II, 62), to assuage their 'alarm of the moment' (II, 63) and to temper their 'hatred' of his policy (II, 64). And, as similarly evident in his funeral oration, Pericles set about to console the grief of families by emphasizing the noble nature of the losses they had suffered (see esp. II, 44). As Thucydides summarized, Pericles' efforts in the face of mounting opposition to his policy exemplified his basic tempering of the Athenians: 'Whenever he saw them unreasonably and insolently elated, he would with a word reduce them to alarm; on the other hand, if they fell victims to a panic, he could at once restore them to confidence'. (II, 65).²³

Thucydides extolled Pericles' exceptional ability to maintain an 'independent control over the multitude' (II, 65), and noted that this capacity was patently absent in later Athenian leaders. Cleon's immoderation stands out in contradistinction to the restraint and prudence of Pericles. In the debate over the fate of Mytilene, for example, Cleon, the 'most violent man in Athens', was responsible for the original decree condemning all adult men to death and forcing the women and children into slavery in the wake of their unsuccessful revolt from Athens. Cleon's motion played to 'the fury of the moment' and the 'wrath' of the Athenians. When 'the morrow brought repentance with it and reflection on the horrid cruelty of a decree, which condemned a whole city to the fate merited only by the guilty' (III, 36), the Athenians expressed a desire to reconsider more rationally their intemperate decree. The famous Mytilenian debate which followed, resulting in the rescinding of the first decree, underscored the unrestrained nature of Cleon's character.

In the contrast between Pericles and Cleon we see presented an understanding of human being as a tension between reason (understood as practical reason, that is, the contemplation of concrete matters for the purpose of action²⁴) and the passions

²² All quotes from Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War* (ed.), John H. Finley, Jr. (New York: The Modern Library, 1951).

²³ A valuable recent article by S. Sara Monoson and Michael Loriaux argues for a slightly different point in Thucydides' evaluation of Pericles. As does our article, they see the need to 'understand how the text works as a whole' (p. 285) and they emphasize Thucydides' use of 'antithesis'. However, they see the treatment of the character of Pericles himself as expressing the tensions in Thucydides' analysis. The scepticism about the capacity to control events leads the authors to conclude that the simple appropriation of Thucydides by some Realists is misplaced. Rather, if even Pericles can fall prey to *pleonexia* then we should be ever cautious of the need for respecting the moderating influence of 'social norms'. See 'The Illusion of Power and the Disruption of Moral Norms: Thucydides' Critique of Periclean Policy, *American Political Science Review*, 92:2 (June 1998).

²⁴ As the contemporary critiques of reason reveal, the notion of reason has different meanings. A similar plurality of meanings characterized Greek understandings of reason. The particular type of reason subordinated to the passions in Thucydides' analysis of the war points to Aristotle's later identification of practical reason as one of five species of reason. See *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1140a,124–1140b,130. Aristotle specifically refers to Pericles as a man of practical wisdom and moderation (*sophrosyne*).

(understood as impulses which are present potentially in humans, such as anger, greed, fear and so on).²⁵ We are intended to see in Pericles the preferred relationship between reason and the passions, that is, the subordination to, and control of, the latter by the former. Just as the consequences of the imbalance of this relationship is the subject of Greek tragedy, the proper ordering of reason and the passions is the subject of much Greek philosophy. If the proper relationship holds, then human conduct is tempered and moderate. To elaborate on the above balance between reason and passion and its links to immoderate state conduct, Thucydides employed the literary technique of the symbolic representation of the state by individual leaders. Hence, the deterioration of the Athenian *polis* is symbolized by the succession of increasingly impassioned post-Periclean leaders. This technique is complemented by representations of Athens as being susceptible to the same pathologies and etiologies of character degradation—Vogelinian pneumopathologies—that afflict individuals. In Thucydides, the ‘crowds’ invariably represent passion and excess, and they are either subjected to control by reason-guided leaders, or unloosed by the inflaming rhetoric of demagogues. Whether the intellectual representation is achieved through personification, analogy or isomorphism, the fall of Athens is accounted for by its increasing propensity to substitute impassioned action for reasoned deliberation. In other words, the rule of reason is the *sine qua non* of prudent state behaviour, and Athenian conduct increasingly fell short of this standard as the war progressed.

Thucydides’ juxtaposition of the excesses of Cleon with the reasoned moderation of Pericles demonstrates the political consequences of imbalance, namely, harsher conduct and more aggressive policies of imperial expansion.²⁶ From our example we see that the passions were subordinated to reason in Pericles, just as they were in the earlier stages of the war by Athens. In the Mytilenian debate there is a palpable deterioration from the moderate policies of Pericles, even though the original decree is rescinded by the rhetoric of the thoughtful and temperate Diodotus. In subsequent events, however, leaders with the capacity to contain the temper of the Athenian crowd become increasingly rare. The narrative structure of the *Peloponnesian War* culminates in the harshness of Melos and the *hubris* of Sicily, two events altogether lacking in the virtues of reasoned temperance and restraint. As Thucydides summarized in his assessment of Pericles: ‘When the war broke out, here also he seems to have rightly gauged the power of his country ... With his successors it was different. More on a level with one another, and each grasping at supremacy, *they ended by committing even the conduct of state affairs to the whims of the multitude*. This, as

²⁵ Plato’s ontological understanding regarding the inbetweenness of human existence is paralleled at the level of human psychology in the common Greek view that human being is marked by a tension between capacities to reason and a propensity to impassioned conduct. This conception of human being contrasts sharply with many modern notions that reduce human being to a singular defining trait, such as the model of the survival-seeking individual that informs much Realist international relations thought, or the profit-maximizing individual of classical economics. The tragic quality of this Greek understanding arguably is truer to the fullness of human life than conceptions that reduce human being to a causally primary aspect.

²⁶ Jacqueline de Romilly’s well-known work *Thucydides and Athenian Imperialism* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1963) argues that the Athenian imperial drive was the real cause of the war and the extremes to which the Athenians went during its course (p. 13–21). Furthermore, once begun, Athenian imperial policy required ever increasing force and brutality. However, in contradistinction to our argument de Romilly writes: ‘In the work of Thucydides, Athenian imperialism is presented purely and simply as the practical policy pursued by Athens’ (p. 59).

might have been expected, in a great and sovereign state produced a host of blunders, and amongst them the Sicilian expedition ...' (our emphasis) (II, 65–66).

The decline of *logos* and rise of *ergon*

Consistent with the increasing imbalance between reason and passion is a second theme: the eclipse of *logos* by *ergon*. In this theme *logos* is understood as speech specifically and contemplative discussion more generally. *Logos* contrasts with *ergon* which is understood as spiritedness and decisiveness in action. In Greek life, the decline of *logos* would be understood as creating (or signalling) the likely deterioration of an individual. While *ergon* is an essential element of a well-rounded personality, when it crowds out *logos* it produces a particular one-sidedness that forecloses the possibility of containing the passions, producing impulsive action or visceral responses to an event or situation. In keeping with the tendency common in Greek thought to elide from the individual to the *polis* (discussed above), the imbalance of *logos* and *ergon* ramifies socially. In part, therefore, the political consequences of this imbalance include the supplanting of public discourse as intellectually expansive and open by discourse that is paradoxically disrespectful of speech itself. That is, it is supplanted by speech that attacks its interlocutors, trivializes intellectual considerations, and mocks deliberation as an 'indecisive' alternative to action. The cumulative social and political effect of the excessive propensity towards unmediated action is the diminution of thoughtful consideration and the appearance of a sort of rashness in the formulation of public policy. Indeed, in Greek tragedy the flaw of tragic heroes frequently revolves around impulsive action that leads to their destruction. Insofar as Thucydides juxtaposed *logos* and *ergon* as a literary technique he is portending the ruin of Athens. Even more than this, however, the eclipse of *logos* was a part of, and contributed to, errors of Athenian policy. This balance, in fact, was explicitly celebrated by Pericles in his famous funeral oration: 'instead of looking on discussion as a stumbling-block in the way of action, we think it an indispensable preliminary to any wise action at all. Again, in our enterprises we present the singular spectacle of daring and deliberation, each carried to its highest point, and both united in the same persons; although usually decision is the fruit of ignorance, hesitation of reflection'. (II, 40).

The Mytilenian debate provides the clearest account of the interplay of *logos* and *ergon*. It is noteworthy that this debate about the rescinding of the Mytilenian decree occupies an important place in Thucydidean scholarship.²⁷ In international relations

²⁷ Straussian scholars, like Realist analysts, have also focused on the idea of the necessity of imperial preservation and expansion rooted in the natural human passions of fear, greed, and honour, ineluctable drives undergirding the so-called Athenian thesis. That is, that Athens acted according to drives so powerful that its excesses are excusable, and its unhypocritical appeal to self-interest can be the basis for 'rational' interest harmonization between powers. Therein lies the basis for the argument put forward by Clifford Orwin in his text *The Humanity of Thucydides* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994) that Thucydides' 'humanity' stems from him taking justice seriously while not overlooking the fact that human being is more contradictory and multiple than standards of justice require. Prudent politics involves more than simply identifying the good. Arlene Saxonhouse in *Athenian Democracy: Modern Mythmakers and Ancient Theorists* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996) argues in the same spirit that Pericles can be faulted for requiring his fellow citizens to sacrifice for the *polis* without regard to self-interest. Politics involves the body as much as the mind and prudent statescraft combines the good with self-interest.

writing, in particular, considerable focus has been placed upon the debate in view of its emphasis on state interests and imperial preservation.²⁸

In response to the decision to reconsider the decree, Cleon revealingly inveighed against the Athenian people for their excessive deliberation of policy: ‘The persons to blame are you who are so foolish as to institute these contests; who go to see an oration as you would to see a sight, take your facts on hearsay, judge of the practicability of a project by the wit of its advocates, and trust for the truth as to past events not to the fact which you saw more than to the clever strictures which you heard; the easy victims of new-fangled arguments, unwilling to follow received conclusions; slaves to every new paradox ...’. (III, 38). More to the point, it is unmediated action that is expressly championed by Cleon: ‘For myself, I adhere to my former opinion, and wonder at those who have proposed to reopen the case of the Mytilenians, and who are thus causing a delay which is all in favour of the guilty, by making the sufferer proceed against the offender with the edge of his anger blunted; although where vengeance follows most closely upon the wrong, it best equals it and most amply requites it’. (III, 38).

The dramatic contrast with Diodotus in the Mytilenian debate is abrupt. In his address to the assembly Diodotus stressed that contemplatively mediated responses are critical to the formulation of wise policies.²⁹ Diodotus is unyielding on the importance of not ‘rush[ing] madly into strong action’. (III, 48). He directly admonished the Athenians about the dangers of demagoguery: ‘As for the argument that speech ought not to be the exponent of action, the man who uses it must be either senseless or interested: senseless if he believes it possible to treat of the uncertain future through any other medium; interested if wishing to carry a disgraceful measure and doubting his ability to speak well in a bad cause, he thinks to frighten opponents and hearers by well-aimed calumny’. (III, 42). For Diodotus, demagoguery is coterminous with the decline of ‘fair’ argumentation (III, 42), meaning that speechmakers will knowingly abandon the truth, that they will pander by resorting to ‘flattery’, and that every argument is cynically reduced to the self-interests of the orator: ‘Plain good advice has thus come to be no less suspected than bad; and the advocate of the most monstrous measures is no more obliged to use deceit to gain the people, than the best counselor is to lie in order to be believed’. (III, 43). Thucydides’ concern over the collapse of the meaning of words expressed through Diodotus is most clearly reflected in the chapter on the Corcyraean revolution, where the cheapening of language constitutes a significant element in the breakdown of social life throughout the Greek world: ‘Words had to change their ordinary meaning and to take that which was now given them. Reckless audacity came to be considered the courage of a loyal ally ... ability to see all sides of a

²⁸ See Clifford Orwin, ‘The Just and the Advantageous in Thucydides: The Case of the Mytilenian Debate,’ *The American Political Science Review*, 78 (1984).

²⁹ The Straussian reading of the Athenian thesis naturalizes Athenian imperial aggression and expansionism. Thus, we are admonished to avoid criticizing the Athenians too harshly for their policies of imperial aggression, which are, after all, all too human. As revealed in the Mytilenian debate, however, a sufficient cause of Athenian imperialist aggression, and the foundation for intemperate conduct more generally, is the overpowering of *logos* by *ergon*. By revealing the rootedness of Athenian aggression in the ascendancy of the passions and the imbalance of *logos* and *ergon*, however, it is clear that the so-called Athenian thesis is akin to a pathological condition. It must be stressed that to embrace the Athenian thesis as testimony to the struggle for power after power in interstate relations, that is, as expressive of Realist verities, is tantamount to appropriating an anomalous pathology as an eternal truth.

question inaptness to act on any'. (III, 82). For Thucydides the substantive effect of the deterioration of language is revealed through the letting loose of *ergon* from the constraints of prudent deliberation. With respect to state policy, therefore, disrespect for speech meant that 'prudent hesitation' was taken to be 'specious cowardice' and 'moderation was held to be a cloak for unmanliness'. (III, 82).

Throughout the *Peloponnesian War* Thucydides further counterposed rationally deliberative speech with speech that is merely instrumental to action. For example, he paired the speeches of Archidamus and Sthenelaidas on the Corinthian petition. In Archidamus' response to the Corinthian criticism that the Spartans are too slow to act, he argued that '... the quality which they condemn is really nothing but wise moderation; thanks to its possession, we alone do not become insolent in success and give way less than others in misfortune; we are not carried away by the pleasure of hearing ourselves cheered onto risks which our judgment condemns'. (I, 83). To this Sthenelaidas replied: 'And let us not be told that it is fitting for us to deliberate under injustice; long deliberation is rather fitting for those who have injustice in contemplation. Vote therefore, Lacedaemonians, for war, as the honour of Sparta demands'. (I, 87). It is noteworthy that the Spartans followed the advice of Sthenelaidas despite the brevity and unrefined nature of his counsel. Over the course of the war speeches wanting in the contemplative richness of Archidamus and Pericles become increasingly prominent.

Decline of *nomos* and the movement towards *physis*

The Greeks had an appreciation of the importance of customary behaviour and appropriate norms of conduct. This sensitivity had two aspects. The first was a respect for the received traditions of life that bound human conduct *qua* the tradition itself. The second was a developed recognition of the instrumental importance of customs for the cohesion of life within the polis and beyond. This sensitivity was evident in Greek tragedy. Sophocles' *Antigone*, for example, revolves around the paramount importance of social customs, in this case the obligation to bury the dead, for the continuance of the *polis*. The inviolability of the social customs that express the eternal order of being is reflected in Antigone's admonition to Creon:

For me it was not Zeus who made that order.
Nor did that justice who lives with the Gods below mark out such laws to hold among mankind.
Nor did I think your orders were so strong that you, a mortal man, could overrun the gods unwritten and unfailing laws.
Not now, nor yesterday's, they always live, and no one knows their origin in time (ll450–458)

Here, Sophocles was capturing the idea that the political order was grounded in the customary practices that are framed by the 'unwritten and unfailing laws'. In day-to-day life this sensitivity meant that a special importance was attached to received traditions. These customs and traditions constituted the ethical ground of political life, and were treated as inviolable. That is, the failure to abide by these customs would have been understood as severe transgressions of propriety, and as a sign of the lack of restraint in life. The obligation to observe entrenched customs, typified

by those regarding the burial of the dead, was expressed by Pericles in his funeral oration: ‘... since our ancestors have stamped this custom with their approval, it becomes my duty to obey the law and to try to satisfy your several wishes and opinions as best I may’. (II, 35). Therefore, just as Creon’s decree that Polyneices not be buried prefigures the demise of Thebes, so the violation of the received traditions would be seen as portending the demise of the political order. This boundedness of political and social life in the transcendent order, and the consequences of overstepping these bounds, inform the tragic plot.

It is only with this sensitivity in mind that the significance of Thucydides’ analyses of the Corcyraean revolution, his recounting of the plague, his reproach of the Thracian massacre, the Delian episode, and the frequent noting of auspices can be understood. The Corcyraean revolution, far from being an isolated event in the course of the war, was for Thucydides merely the ‘first example’ of the decay into which the Hellenic world was falling. The breakdown of social and political life in Corcyra, described by Thucydides in terms of its ‘savage and pitiless excesses’, amounted to *stasis* in its most brutal and violent form: ‘Death thus raged in every shape; and, as usually happens at such times, there was no length to which violence did not go; sons were killed by their fathers, and suppliants dragged from the altar or slain upon it; while some were even walled up in the temple of Dionysus and died there’. (III, 81). The effects of this disrespect for the ancient and sacrosanct norms spread throughout Hellas with expanding heartlessness: ‘Revolution thus ran its course from city to city, and the places which it arrived at last, from having heard what had been done before, carried to a still greater excess the refinement of their inventions, as manifested in the cunning of their enterprises and the atrocity of their reprisals’. (III, 82). It was precisely this violation of social customs that rendered the practice of normal politics impossible. ‘The ancient simplicity into which honour so largely entered was laughed down and disappeared; and society became divided into camps in which no man trusted his fellow. To put an end to this, there was neither promise to be depended upon, nor oath that could command respect; but all parties dwelling rather in their calculation upon the hopelessness of a permanent state of things, were more intent upon self defence than capable of confidence’. (III, 83).

This deterioration reflected the transgressions of social practices and customs that infused Greek life. Thucydides frequently noted other violations during the war. Two examples stand out. In book IV, Thucydides described the Athenian occupation of the Temple at Delium. The Athenians had been beaten in battle and had sought refuge in the temple at Delium. The Athenians sent out a herald requesting their dead, but were rebuffed by the Bœotians who emphasized that the Athenians were ‘transgressing the law of the Hellenes’. As summarized by Thucydides, the Bœotians argued: ‘Of what use was the universal custom protecting the temples in an invaded country, if the Athenians were to fortify Delium and live there, acting exactly as if they were on unconsecrated ground, and drawing and using for their purposes the water which they, the Bœotians, never touched except for sacred uses? Accordingly for the god as well as for themselves, in the name of the deities concerned, and of Apollo, the Bœotians invited them first to evacuate the temple, if they wished to take up the dead that belonged to them’. (IV, 98). The Athenians explained away their violation in terms of the pressure of necessity: ‘The water they had disturbed under the impulsion of a necessity which they had not wantonly incurred, having been forced to use it in defending themselves against the Bœotians who had first invaded

Attica. Besides, anything done under the pressure of war and danger might reasonably claim indulgence even in the eye of the god'. (IV, 98). Indeed, later in the war, the Athenians had become so confident that the gods would tolerate their various transgressions that, in their *hubris*, they justified their imperial expansion by citing a law that they presumed bound both divine and human nature: 'Of the gods we believe, and of men we know', arrogated the Athenian delegation at Melos, 'that by a necessary law of their nature they rule wherever they can'. (V, 104).

No discussion of the decline of customs is clearer than that of the plague in Athens. In his account of the plague which hit Athens early in the war Thucydides drew out the critical themes regarding the decline of *nomos* and the rise of *physis*. The overwhelming presence of the plague created a sweeping sense of vulnerability and hopelessness: 'For as the disaster passed all bounds, men, not knowing what was to become of them, became utterly careless of everything, whether sacred or profane'. (II, 53). The sense of the susceptibility of life to the random and inescapable forces of nature under the plague was so great that Athens sunk inexorably into lawlessness and chaos: 'Fear of gods or law of man there was none to restrain them. As for the first, they judged it to be just the same whether they worshipped them or not, as they saw all alike perishing; as for the last, no one expected to live to be brought to trial for his offenses'. (II, 54) As in the case of Corcyra, the customs pertaining to the burial of the dead were ignored under the pressures of fear, necessity, and despair. 'All the burial rites before in use were entirely upset', noted Thucydides, 'and they buried the bodies as best they could'. (II, 54).

For Thucydides the plague was the most powerful, if naturally induced, example of a condition that caused customs to be abandoned *en masse*. One of the three notable philosophical insights of Thucydides into the nature of war was that, as a 'rough master' (III, 82), it also released humans from their restraining customs. Indeed, both his other insights are tied to his analysis of the decline of *nomos*. In the first case, Thucydides concluded that the class nature of the struggle between Athens and its democratic allies and Sparta and its oligarchic allies exacerbated the class fissures within each *polis*, with Corcyra functioning as an illustrative example. Thucydides' treatment of the Corcyraean *stasis* as an event driven by the war between the Hellenes threw the broader relationship between war and the transgression of social customs into sharper relief. Indeed, Thucydides' analysis conveys a powerful image of the general ignoble character of the Peloponnesian war as it created the conditions that led to the repeated violations of embedded social conventions, violations that continued despite the signs of impending retribution:

The Median war, the greatest achievement of past times, yet found a speedy decision in two actions by sea and two by land. The Peloponnesian war was prolonged to an immense length, and long as it was it was short without parallel for the misfortunes that it brought upon Hellas. Never had so many cities been taken and laid desolate, here by the barbarians, here by the parties contending (the old inhabitants being sometimes removed to make room for others); never was there so much banishing and blood shedding, now on the field of battle, now in the strife of action. Old stories of occurrences handed down by tradition, but scantily confirmed by experience, suddenly ceased to be incredible; there were earthquakes of unparalleled extent and violence; eclipses of the sun occurred with a frequency unrecorded in previous history; there were great droughts in sundry places and consequent famines, and that most calamitous and awfully fatal visitation, the plague. All this came upon them with the late war ... (I, 24).

Thucydides clearly thought that this war was different in degree, if not in kind, from the previous wars discussed at the opening of the *History*.

Thucydides' other philosophical insight into war surrounded his appreciation of its unpredictable nature, a quality that again made war more likely to lead to transgressions of social customs. This sensitivity appears at numerous points in the *History*, and is illustrated in the speech of Archidamus, the Spartan King who 'had at once the reputation of being a wise and a moderate man', at the outset of the war. Archidamus opposed war with Athens, and urged the Spartans to act with greater care and caution. One of his reasons for admonishing against war was that there are 'freaks of chance [that] are not determinable by calculation'. (I, 84).³⁰ For Thucydides, the Plague, more than anything else, was an example of an unpredictable element in war that encouraged the transgressions of inviolable social customs. Even the thorough calculations of Pericles fell victim to the contagions of unpredictability: '... and although besides what we counted for, the Plague has come upon us—the only point indeed at which our calculation has been at fault'. (II, 65)

***Pleonexia* manifest**

The structure of the tragic plot, as Aristotle summarized, is comprised of complication—which proceeds from the outset of the story to the change in the fortunes of the protagonist—and dénouement—from the change through to the end of the tragedy.³¹ Complication is made up of events and situations driven by the flawed character of the protagonist. The plot culminates in a crisis which precipitates the dénouement, that is, the downfall of the hero. The critical moment in the tragedy is the event that makes manifest the full consequences of the protagonist's excessive behaviours. The consequences usually take the form of retribution against the protagonist for having exceeded the behavioural limits prescribed by the natural order. Hence, punishment is the sign of the restoration of the proper limits of being, a restoration necessitated by the immoderate and unbounded behaviour of the protagonist.

The critical moment in the *Peloponnesian War* is the Sicilian expedition. As Thucydides summarized at the outset of Book VI: 'The same winter the Athenians resolved to sail against Sicily, with a greater armament than that under Laches and Eurymedon, and, if possible, to conquer the island; most of them being ignorant of its size, and of the number of its inhabitants, Hellenic and barbarian, and of the fact that they were undertaking a war not much inferior to that against the Peloponnesians'. (VI, 1). Thucydides interpreted the decision to invade Sicily as the cumulative effect of the growing character flaws manifest in the Athenian *polis*. The cautious policies of Pericles had been abandoned in favour of the extravagant ambition of Alcibiades. No longer was the aim of the war the preservation of Athens and its empire; rather the invasion of Sicily was undertaken to insure Athenian dominance wherever its ships could sail. As Alcibiades implored the

³⁰ Machiavelli, of course, offers profound insights into this aspect of war. *Fortuna* juxtaposed to the careful yet bold preparations of the virtuous prince, is omnipresent. See, for example, Fabrizio's advice in Book Three of *The Art of War*.

³¹ Aristotle, *Poetics*, ch. 18.

Athenians during his debate with Nicias over the wisdom of invading Sicily: ‘... we cannot fix the exact point at which our empire shall stop; we have reached a position in which we must not be content with retaining but must scheme to extend it’. (VI, 18).

Pleonexia, this overreaching ambition displayed by the Athenians in their decision to invade Sicily, was the culmination of the passion of excessive hope (*elpis*).³² In contrast to the Christian notion of hope as a virtue, the Greeks saw hope as involving an abandonment of the caution that attends the reasoned deliberation of one’s circumstances. Hope, like an exclusive reliance upon *fortuna* in Machiavelli’s thought, is opposed to preparation and the prudent evaluation of courses of action. It substitutes a trust in the fates for the careful contemplation of options. In terms of the themes maintained by Thucydides throughout the *History*, hope is a passion that sublates reason. To demonstrate the succumbing of the Athenians to excessive hope, Thucydides employed the irony of Nicias’s famous remonstrance to the Athenian assembly: ‘We must not disguise from ourselves that we go to found a city among strangers and enemies, and that he who undertakes such an enterprise should be prepared to become master of the country the first day he lands, or failing in this to find everything hostile to him. Fearing this, and knowing that we shall have need of much good counsel and more good fortune—a hard matter for mortal men to aspire to—I wish as far as may be to make myself independent of fortune before sailing, and when I do sail, to be as safe as a strong force can make me’. (VI, 24). Nicias opposed the decision to invade Sicily, and his strategy of stressing the enormity of the undertaking backfired when the crowd mistook his ironic emphasis on the impossibility of the task as sage counsel. Held in spell by the ambitions of Alcibiades ‘... [t]he Athenians, however, far from having their taste for the voyage taken away by the burdensomeness of the preparations, became more eager for it than ever; and just the contrary took place of what Nicias had thought, as it was held that he had given good advice, and that the expedition would be the safest in the world. All alike fell in love with the enterprise’. (VI, 24).

At previous points in the *History*, Thucydides provided examples of a growing reliance upon hope that anticipated the launching of the Sicilian expedition—especially the Athenian rejection of Spartan peace overtures in the aftermath of the victory at Pylos, and the conquest of Melos. The Athenians, after an accidental landing at Pylos, scored an unanticipated victory over the Spartans, who then sued for peace. In the course of negotiating for the return of their captured soldiers, the Lacedæmonians admonished the Athenians against expecting their run of good luck to continue: ‘You can now, if you choose, employ your present success to advantage, so as to keep what you have got and gain honour and reputation besides, and you can avoid the mistake of those who meet with an extraordinary piece of good fortune, and are led on by hope to grasp continually at something further, through having already succeeded without expecting it. While those who have known vicissitudes of good and bad, have also justly least faith in their prosperity’. (IV, 17). Inspired by Cleon, the Athenians brushed aside the peace offerings of the Spartans, and, with the faith ‘that the treaty would be ready for them whenever they chose to make it,’ the Athenians cavalierly ‘grasped at something further’. (IV, 21). For

³² Cornford described the capacity of *elpis* to delude humankind. *Thucydides Mythistoricus.*, pp. 167–8.

Thucydides, the Peloponnesian war could have ended in this year, its seventh, were it not for the over-reaching ambition of the Athenians and by their un-Periclean faith in continued good fortune.

Elpis was most evident in the ironic remonstrations of the Athenians at Melos. The Melians faced the overwhelming strength of the Athenians who demanded tribute. When given the opportunity to surrender peacefully, they refused, and claimed that 'the fortune of war is sometimes more impartial than the disproportion of numbers might lead one to suppose'. (V, 102). The Athenians warned the Melians against an excessive reliance upon hope: 'Hope, danger's comforter, may be indulged in by those who have abundant resources, if not without loss at all events without ruin; but its nature is to be extravagant, and those who go so far as to put their all upon the venture see it in its true colors only when they are ruined ...'. (V, 103). The Melians were undeterred by the Athenian cautions: '... we trust that the gods may grant us fortune as good as yours, since we are just men fighting against unjust'. (V, 104). To readers who know the outcome of the war, the irony of the present Athenian advice is not lost, especially in view of their having staked all upon *elpis* in launching the devastating Sicilian expedition.

The reliance upon *elpis* is a logical consequence of the eclipse of *logos* by *ergon*. Hope is the only ground for action taken when there is no adequate consideration of the possible consequences of decisions. Indeed, the debate between Alcibiades and Nicias is permeated with the *logos/ergon* leitmotif. In response to Nicias' admonitions against the invasion of Sicily, Alcibiades inveighed against his advice: 'And do not let the *do-nothing policy* which Nicias advocates, or his setting of the young against the old, turn you from your purpose, but in the good old fashion by which our fathers, old and young together, by their united counsels brought our affairs to their present height, do you endeavour still to advance them; understanding that neither youth nor old age can do anything the one without the other, but that levity, sobriety, and deliberate judgment are strongest when united, and that, by sinking into inaction, the city, like everything else, will wear itself out, and its skill in everything decay; while each fresh struggle will give it fresh experience, and make it more used *to defend itself not in word but in deed*. In short, my conviction is that a city not inactive by nature, could not choose a quicker way to ruin itself than by suddenly adopting such a policy ...'. (our emphasis VI, 20). *Elpis* is, in effect, the middle term or mediating link between *ergon* and *pleonexia*, and is a kind of self-conscious understanding of the world that links the inclination to unrestrained action with over-reaching ambition.

And so the Athenians sailed for Sicily. Thucydides highlights the *hubris* of the expedition by inviting the reader to witness the spectacle:

As for the foreigners and the rest of the crowd, they simply went to see a sight worth looking at and passing all belief. Indeed this armament that first sailed out was by far the most costly and splendid Hellenic force that had ever been sent out by a single city up till that time. ... The present expedition was formed in contemplation of a long term of service by land and sea alike ... The fleet had been elaborately equipped at great cost to the captains and the state ... besides spending lavishly upon figure-heads and equipments, and one and all making the utmost exertions to enable their own ships to excel in beauty and fast sailing. ... From this resulted not only a rivalry among themselves and their different departments, but an idea among the rest of the Hellenes that it was more a display of power and resources than an armament against an enemy ... Indeed, the expedition became not less famous for its

wonderful boldness and for the splendour of its appearance, than for its overwhelming strength as compared with the peoples against whom it was directed, and for the fact that this was the longest passage from home hitherto attempted, and the most ambitious in its objects considering the resources of those who undertook it. (VI, 32).

As every student of Thucydides is aware, the result of this overreaching ambition was the ignominious defeat of the Athenians at Syracuse, and their subsequent lapse into *stasis* so elegantly captured in *The Oligarchic Coup*.

Conclusion

We live in an age of excess. It is not the first such age. The era of the war between the Lacedæmonian and Delian leagues was a time when the behaviour of states was driven by an unbounded rationality. Thucydides recognized this failing and presented his critique using the logic of the tragic narrative. As argued here, within this narrative structure Thucydides developed an account of Athens' loss by revealing the dominance of the passions over reason, the eclipse of *logos* by *ergon*, and the decline of *nomos* and the rise of *physis* in post-Periclean leaders. In the end, an unbounded Athens, guided only by hope, ambitiously grasped for Sicily. The moderate and reflective policies of Pericles were lost to the excessive and impulsive policies of Alcibiades. *Nemesian* retribution followed swiftly in the form of a resounding defeat at Syracuse and the outbreak of protracted civil war at home. Immoderation had failed Athens.

Recognizing that similar notions of unbounded rationality inform the contemporary thought/practice nexus on international relations, Thucydides' critique is especially instructive to the formulations of an international relations' orientation at variance with Realist dogma. It is ironic that Realists take the practices that Thucydides held as a pathology as the norm of proper international conduct. In effect, the Realist appropriation of Thucydides means that a critique of a pathological condition is claimed by a pathological standpoint. Of course, Thucydides would have understood neither pathology to be inevitable.