1990

Pawns, Potentates, and Parasites: Thucydides on Faction and Civil War

John Patrick Coby
Smith College, pcoby@smith.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.smith.edu/gov_facpubs

Part of the Political Science Commons

Recommended Citation
https://scholarworks.smith.edu/gov_facpubs/38

This Conference Proceeding has been accepted for inclusion in Government: Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Smith ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@smith.edu
PAWNS, POTENTATES, AND PARASITES: THUCYDIES ON FACTION AND CIVIL WAR

John Patrick Coby
Professor of Government
Smith College
Northampton, MA

pcoby@smith.edu
Pawns, Potentates, and Parasites: 
Thucydides on Faction and Civil War

Abstract

Thucydides offers two sustained accounts of cities torn by domestic strife, Corecyra and Athens. His analysis suggests that faction arises either from weakness or from strength. Corecyra was a dependent city, and its civil war was a function of foreign intervention; Athens was an imperial city, and its faction resulted from its own exorbitant desires and from the wear and tear of maintaining dominion. Thucydides has no easy solution to propose, but his ambivalence toward empire and his rejection of democracy point in the direction of moderation abroad and mixed government at home.
Pawns, Potentates, and Parasites: Thucydides on Faction and Civil War

It is the proud boast of representative democracy that with its institution the problem of faction has been forever solved. Alexander Hamilton in Federalist 9 contends that without representation and other improvements in the science of politics, republican government would be the same futility for the moderns as it proved to be for the ancients. "It is impossible to read the history of the petty republics of Greece and Italy without feeling sensations of horror and disgust at the distractions with which they were continually agitated, and at the rapid succession of revolutions by which they were kept in a state of perpetual vibration between the extremes of tyranny and anarchy." The historical record, he continues, has lamentably served the advocates of despotism well in their campaign against free government, so much so that "if it had been found impracticable to have devised models of a more perfect structure, the enlightened friends to liberty would have been obliged to abandon the cause of that species of government as indefensible."

The opinion that ancient republicanism was critically defective is shared by Thomas Hobbes, whose own study of the ancient world, in the form of a translation of Thucydides' History, leads him to conclude "how silly is democracy" and that Thucydides "least of all liked the democracy." What Hobbes learns from Thucydides, and hopes to communicate to his contemporaries, is that popular rule means the triumph of demagogues and the removal of sensible men from political life. A democratic city, successful in its enterprises, will brook no criticism and endure no restraint; and any man who dares to offer "temperate and discreet advice" will be judged a coward. Hobbes' description of the democracy in Athens bears a marked resemblance to Thucydides' account of the revolution at Corecyra, a city which, disintegrating from internal warfare, also would accept only the most extreme advice. The resemblance suggests that democratic politics is but a peacetime variant of civil war. Indeed, it is this very inference which sends both Hobbes and Hamilton away from ancient republicanism—in opposite directions, to be sure, but each in search of remedies for the illness of faction. If their negative assessment of the ancients is correct, then what we should expect from Thucydides
is a statement of the problem rather than a proposal for its resolution. Still, there are hints in Thucydides of what is to be done, hints which Hamilton, with his interest in leadership, would find particularly agreeable.

I. Corcyra

Thucydides' most detailed examination of the nature and progress of faction (stasis) is offered on the occasion of the Corcyrean revolution. Faction broke out on Corcyra in 427, but the source of Corcyra's troubles lay nine years in the past, in a war involving Epidamnus, Corcyra, Corinth, and Athens. This "Epidamnian War" was one of the "avowed causes" (es to phaneron legomenai aitiae: 1.23.6)\(^4\) of the Peloponnesian War.

The events at Epidamnus were these: A war with its barbarian neighbors caused factious strife to erupt. The people expelled the nobles, the dunatoi, who retaliated by joining forces with the enemy. When the pressure of their combined assault proved too much to bear, the Epidamnian demos sought assistance from the outside. First they appealed to Corcyra, Epidamnus' mother-city. But Corcyra rejected their supplication, and so they turned to Corinth, the mother-city of Corcyra and the home of Epidamnus's founder, Phalius. Corinth was more receptive, indeed happy to oblige, and sent colonists to take over the city. But jealous about its prerogatives, Corcyra matched Corinthian assistance to the demos with a fleet sent in support of the nobles. Some attempt was made to arbitrate the dispute, but the Corinthians were disingenuous negotiators, stalling the proceedings until a second and larger band of colonists could be assembled. This second contingent, however, suffered a naval defeat at the hands of the Corcyreans, whose siege forces also captured Epidamnus that very same day. Undeterred, and no less sensitive about their own city's dignity, the Corinthians went back to work, building an even larger fleet and enlisting even more recruits. Their efforts raised the stakes to dangerous new levels and so frightened the Corcyreans that they dispatched an embassy to Athens to ask for an alliance. Athens heard their case, noting in particular the impressive size of their fleet, and granted them a defensive alliance over the stern objections of Corinthian ambassadors who
warned Athens not to interfere. Shortly afterward a major sea battle was fought, the battle of Sybota, in which tepid Athenian assistance could not prevent a Corcyrean defeat; but the arrival of reinforcements from Athens persuaded the Corinthians to leave the scene before having completed Corcyra’s subjugation. They took with them some one thousand prisoners, two hundred and fifty of whom were Corcyrean nobility. These they kept and cared for with the intent of returning them to Corcyra as agents provocateurs. Six years later they carried out their plan, precipitating thereby the Corcyrean revolution (3.70.1).

It would seem a fair inference from the particulars related that the theme of the Epidamnian war is escalation. Epidamnus was like a tornado drawing into its whirl ever greater pairs of antagonists. First, the democrats and oligarchs of Epidamnus set to fighting with each other in consequence of a war against their neighbors. Second, the dominant party called in an ally whose assistance provoked a response from a power equal to its own. Third, the new combatants stymied or threatened one another and called in powers that were bigger still. In the meantime the cause of the original conflict was forgotten, and the Epidamnian factions found themselves swallowed whole by their larger protectors—Corinth took charge of the city, and Corcyra captured it.

On first hearing, the lesson communicated here seems simple indeed, that small states should stay apart, cultivate obscurity, and avoid attracting the attention of the great. The precondition of a policy of inconspicuous neutrality, however, is a society that can live peacefully and justly with itself, for the trouble started at Epidamnus when the classes turned from fighting with foreigners to fighting with themselves. Domestic politics would then take on considerable importance, and one could even imagine a Platonic lawgiver, an Athenian Stranger, entering the conversation at this juncture.

But Thucydides is perhaps pointing us in another direction altogether, for he presents Epidamnus, not as a small state, but as a "great and a populous power" (dunamis megale kai poluanthrōpos; 1.24.3) that was weakened by faction and war. Moreover, there is oracular involvement noted, for the Epidamnians were commanded by the Delphic oracle to deliver their city to Corinthian protection (1.25.1-2), and it was partly this surrendering of the city that
unnerved the Corcyreans and provoked them to act (1.26.3). As for Corcyra, its ambassadors at Athens articulate the rationale for neutrality, that alliances undertaken oblige cities to assume risks of other people’s choosing, but they do so only to renounce the policy as ill-counseled, weak, and an error in judgment (1.32.4-5). They further contend that Panhellenic war is unavoidable and on the horizon and that Corcyra’s conquest by Corinth is a necessary preparation for the larger struggle against Athens. Their analysis seems fully supported by Thucydides who just nine paragraphs before delivered his trenchant pronouncement that the Peloponnesian War was forced upon the Spartans by the fear they felt of rising Athenian power. But a similar relationship obtained between Corinth and Corcyra, and their conflict might well be viewed as a dress rehearsal for the conflict between the empires, since the emergence of Corcyrean power was the chief motive for Corinth’s decision to take sides in the Epidamnian civil war. Finally, the geographical location of Corcyra, as a convenient way station for navies sailing to Italy and Sicily, guaranteed that with or without its fleet Corcyra would not be allowed to sit the great war out (1.36.2). Prudence therefore dictated not isolation but engagement, even if alliance with a stronger power meant loss of autonomy and the chance that one’s own best interests would be sacrificed for the interests of others.

Six years later the bill came due for Corcyra’s alliance with Athens. Again, the facts were these: In 427 Corinth returned to Corcyra the prisoners taken in the sea battle of Sybota. Corinth claimed that it had been paid a rich ransom for the prisoners’ release, but in truth its purpose was to destabilize Corcyra’s democratic regime, to weaken its attachment to Athens, and, if possible, to bring Corcyra into the Peloponnesian camp. Once back, these oligarchic returnees canvassed their fellow citizens and successfully persuaded Corcyra to restore friendly relations with Sparta. But when they brought an indictment of treason against Peithias, a leader of the democrats, a counter-claim of impiety was lodged and won against them. Steep penalties were imposed and their immediate payment demanded, but the oligarchs, unable to make restitution and learning that closer ties with Athens were under consideration, staged a coup d’état, bursting in on the council chamber and killing Peithias and sixty others. Additional attacks followed against the population at large, but they were indecisive, and a counter-attack by
the democrats was contained only by setting fire to the suburbs bordering the marketplace. On the next day a small detachment of Athenian ships arrived from the south. Its commander, Nicostratus, endeavored to make peace between the factions, while at the same time establishing an offensive and defensive alliance between Corcyra and Athens. Before he could leave, and with tensions still at a fever pitch, a much larger Spartan fleet presented itself and was victorious in the naval battle that ensued. Expecting the Spartans to assault the city, the democrats were conciliatory toward their oligarchic foe. But the Spartans were slow to act, and when word came of an approaching Athenian fleet, the Spartans left the area altogether. Now the democrats were emboldened. With external dangers removed and with the fleet’s commander, Eurymedon, sitting idly by, the democrats indulged themselves in a week-long orgy of slaughter. All those deemed opponents of the democracy were summarily executed. Ordinary citizens fell victim to private vendettas. Creditors were murdered by debtors. Fathers killed sons, and sacrilegious mobs butchered suppliants at altars or entombed them in the temple where they sought refuge. The killing frenzy respected neither law, nor kinship, nor piety.

The civil war at Corcyra lends itself to three sorts of analysis: material, moral-legal, and political. It also calls attention to the influence of chance and to the fact that as a dependent city Corcyra had little hope of controlling its fate. Whatever domestic forces were at work in Corcyra preparing it for stasis, they paled by comparison to the interference of outside powers. Corcyra was hurled into the malestrom of civil war because Corinth returned the oligarchic prisoners and because Athens and Sparta each sent a fleet. Corcyra then does not show us how faction can start from within, but perhaps that is Thucydides’ point, that faction frequently starts from a chance external shock that disturbs settled patterns of behavior. Working backwards we might propose that domestic tranquility comes about more or less of itself, an unplanned consequence of the routine of living. Easy to attain when times are peaceful and orderly, it is quickly lost when times are mean and uncertain (Orwin, 1988, p. 834).

This conclusion points to the material cause of faction. In one of his more memorable phrases, Thucydides states that war is a "violent teacher" (biaios didaskalos) because it deprives men of the ready supply of their daily wants (3.82.2). The disposition of people, he observes,
corresponds to their physical circumstances, and both cities and individuals are of better minds (ameinous tas gnōmas) in periods of peace and prosperity (eirēnēi kai agathois pragmasin). That the city is a military and economic unit responsible for the body’s safety and well-being is a view suggested by the "Archeology," the early chapters of Book 1 in which Thucydides investigates the ancient things. About ancient history Thucydides says that frequent migrations prevented the development of agriculture, commerce, and communication; that cities emerged, when they emerged, in places whose poverty of soil made them undesirable to the migrating tribes; and that these cities grew in population because their stability was a magnet for those displaced by war and faction elsewhere (1.2).6 One of the achievements of the city, distinguishing civilization from barbarism, was that individuals no longer carried weapons on their persons because the city protected them from the predations of strangers (1.5-6). The impression left by the Archeology generally is that the city is a great fortress erected against the violent motions of nature. And the Corcyrean revolution adds to this impression that as long as the city is at peace and the needs of its people supplied, civic concord is an expected and unremarkable feature of everyday living.

The material foundation is thus crucially important in saving a city from faction, and a part of this foundation is the power to guard against chance, including the chance intrusions of other cities. But bread and brawn are not the only elements in Thucydides’ analysis of stasis. There is the moral factor, which if not as causative as the material is nonetheless revelatory of Thucydides’ basic understanding. In a passage unmatched for its horror (3.82.3-8), Thucydides explains how at Corcyra, and at cities like it, humanity’s moral bearings inverted, and right became wrong and virtue became vice.7 In the charged atmosphere of lawless intrigue, impetuosity born of distrust was the accepted meaning of courage, and prudence, deliberateness, and conciliation were disparaged as cowardice. Piety, too, was the weakness of simpletons.8 Reason had a role to play in the contriving of betrayals and conspiracies, and to conquer by treachery was for a time more praiseworthy than direct action--for a time this human faculty stood apart from animal force. But once the violence was underway, reason could not restrain the passion for revenge, which supplanted all other desires including the desire for self-preservation. In the end, those most clever at the game of deceit were undone by the "mea
intellects" (hoi phauloteroi gnōmen; 3.83.3) who acted quickly in their own defense, doubting their capacity for matching wits and detecting the schemes of their betters. And citizens in the middle were destroyed by partisans on both sides.

Even in the above, abbreviated account of the Corcyrean revolution, it seems evident that a true moral order is acknowledged and accepted by Thucydides. This order consists roughly of the four cardinal virtues of Greek ethics: reason's pursuit of truth and its use of language for honest communication; the moderation of appetite and the control of passion, both as a means to practical wisdom and in recognition of the soul's natural constitution; a just distribution of goods which balances the claims of equality and merit; and a responsible courage resistant to reckless excess. In addition to these four, devotion to the gods, family loyalty, and communal trust are also affirmed.

While the goodness of these virtues is made clear by the consequences of their loss, is it correct to say that for Thucydides these virtues are natural, in the sense of an original potential nurtured to its full development, and that the city is natural as the place where this development occurs and as the true home of man? Can Aristotelian teleology be detected in Thucydides? To be sure, there is another nature that is violent and random and altogether inattentive to human well-being. This is the nature of the Archeology, and the city, to repeat, is constructed to hold back its destructive motions. But the artificiality of the city in its primitive beginnings need not detract from the naturalness of the city in its "civilized" perfection--no more for Thucydides than for Aristotle.9 Thucydides is sometimes associated with those sophists who devalue nomos, law, by separating it from phusis, nature, or more likely with those sophists who appreciate law as a useful fiction necessary for preserving the peace (Neumann, 1969, p. 242)10 But the soul-shattering horror of the Corcyrean revolution is inexplicable in terms of utilitarianism neglected and gone awry. What Thucydides feels and invites his readers to feel is moral revulsion at a sin against nature, not Hobbesian fear of violent death. People die violently throughout the History, but the Corcyreans lose their humanity; this is the horror.

Although it is during war that "simplicity, the greatest part of a noble nature" (to euêthes, hou to gennaion pleiston metechei; 3.83.1), is despised and ridiculed, war is not the only
occassion in which corruption occurs. In normal times, too, Thucydides implies, there are
defections from the moral consensus, for "the many are more readily called clever when knaves
than honest when ignorant" (rhoion d' hoi polloi kakourgoi ontes dexeoi keklêntai e amatheis
agathoi; 3.82.7). Moral virtue is a hard sell because one side of people applauds villainy and the
flouting of custom. He later adds (although in paragraph 84, which some scholars think
spurious)\textsuperscript{11} that human nature is habitually rebellious (eiôthuia kai para tous nomous adikein;
3.84.2) and during the dislocations of civil war is victorious over law.

In light of these remarks it seems insufficient to argue that social harmony arises simply
from the inertia of undisturbed traditions. Social harmony reflects the orderly nature of the soul.
But since orderly nature is contested by disorderly nature, social harmony requires for its defense
the active agency of law. The operation of law on behalf of civic concord confirms in part the
sophistic separation of nomos and phusis, but in an unexpected way that does credit to law. Law
is a restraint upon one nature of the soul, appetite, in order to supply another nature of the soul,
virtue, with the proper environment in which to develop and function. Law is against appetite,
and law is in league with virtue. Nevertheless, law is a poor defender of the virtue and harmony
it works to create, and so the inertia of daily life represents a valuable support.

Thucydides does not trace the origin of civil war to political misrule as such, even though
he accuses the oligarchs of insolence and the democrats of envy (again in paragraph 84). But
when stasis erupts from other causes, the passions of men turn in a decidedly political direction.
Says Thucydides: "The cause of all these events was the desire to rule [archê] on account of
pleonexian and ambition [philotimian], and from these things the zeal [prothumon] of
those once engaged in striving for victory [philonikein]" (3.82.8). Politics became the arena
where ordinary desires met and did battle. What gave these passions their political focus and
their zealous ferocity was the prospect of radical change, of a future undetermined by and wholly
disconnected from the past. Corecyra was an isolated city until the Peloponnesian War placed it
along a thoroughfare of Athenian imperialism. Because the involvement of the great powers
threatened to change relations in Corecyra drastically, nothing from the past could be expected to
endure simply on the strength of its always having been that way. When politics is vital,
touching matters of life, liberty, and property, politics is war. 12 People become intensely serious about political power when the stakes are high, and they resort to extraordinary measures to avoid losing. To forestall just this kind of revolutionary politics, Athens passed a law that forbade the mere proposing of constitutional change (8.67.2). 13 But Corcyra was already in a revolutionary situation. In the minds of Corcyra’s democrats and oligarchs, the people with whom they had settled down by the accidents of time and place, their fellow citizens, might conceivably not be their fellow citizens in the future. The numerous compromises that had made coexistence possible, under current conditions, would likely not be honored and might not be necessary. On those rare occasions when it is possible to imagine a wholly new order, the actions that facilitate communal peace—getting along, tolerating others, making oneself useful and trustworthy—are replaced by the talents of war—deceit, cruelty, fanaticism, haste. Old necessities and established patterns give way to new opportunities and fears, and the rule of the day is not to live with one’s opponents but to destroy them.

Added to the prospect of radical political change was the perception that the resources were at hand to accomplish party objectives. Each faction became more daring and intransigent when ships from a friendly power were in the city’s harbor. The oligarchs launched their attack on the commons following the arrival of a Corinthian galley carrying Spartan envoys, and the democrats turned murderous under the protection of the Athenian fleet. Conversely, the democrats parleyed with supplicant oligarchs when the Spartans seemed ready to lay siege to the city. The expectation of victory made people violent and uncompromising; the fear of defeat calmed their emotions and restored their senses. 14

But there is another side to this story and an odd twist on the theme that rough times make for rough people. It is also reported in the Archeology that some early cities suffered from faction precisely because they were well-to-do, their fertile soil allowing a few to prosper beyond the mean (1.2.3-4). 15 Abundance created a distinction between rich and poor, which at Corcyra, and in all developed cities, translated into the rivalry of oligarchs and democrats. In order for civil war to have descended upon Corcyra, there first had to be diversification within the city, differentiated groups with competing interests capable of seeing one another as enemies. Had
Corcyra been poor, backward, and equal, there would have been no fractures in the body politic vulnerable to outside manipulation. Wealth then is a mixed blessing, for the dispositions of people do not continue to improve in tandem with their material fortunes. Although the Corinthians say plaintively that "it is not right that what was gained in poverty be lost in plenty" (1.123.1), Thucydides seems to be of a different mind, for he commends the skill of Sparta and Chios in maintaining their moderation despite prolonged periods of peace and prosperity (8.24.4); and he traces the beginnings of stasis in Athens not to the plague or the military disasters at Sicily and Euboea (its three greatest setbacks suffered during the war), but to events surrounding the Sicilian Expedition of 415 when Athens was at the height of its power (2.65.11). Along with the lesson from Corcyra that war is a violent teacher is the lesson from the work as a whole that success spawns self-indulgence and ends in corruption.

II. Athens

Athens was a metropolis and empire, and the causes of faction for it were not quite the same as they were for Corcyra, a dependent city. Corcyra lacked the power to control its destiny; Athens lacked the moderation to control its power. Athenian imperialism was expansionary, and Athenians were driven by a conception of virtue not fully in evidence at Corcyra; Athenians sought glory, magnificence, and beauty. Because Athens was forever at war, its citizens, suffering prolonged exposure to the "state of nature," so called, provided a receptive audience for the corrosive subjectivism of sophistry. And because Athens was a primary political actor, its domestic politics were as important as its foreign politics. These are all factors that enter into Thucydides' analysis of Athenian stasis, of faction among the great.

What though is meant by Athenian greatness and the greatness of Greece? Size, magnitude, resources, and power--these constitute part of the answer, and Thucydides recounts the history of how this power was amassed. But quantity is not the whole of the answer, for the Greeks were few in number and meager in might when compared with the Persians, their twin defeats at the start of the century notwithstanding. Size is important to the notion of Greek
greatness, but so too is proportion. Thucydides observes that the Greek cities, as they emerged from their primitive beginnings, and following the example of Sparta, adopted a measured style of dress, assimilated the habits of the rich to the poor, and exercised without clothing (1.6.3-5). Simplicity and self-control were modern ideas, ostentation and self-indulgence the vulgar remnants of barbarism. Even Athens set aside its easy, luxurious life for one more austere and virtuous. And the latter-day Athens of the Funeral Oration ascribes its greatness, in part, to the well-balanced lives of its citizens—that they are egalitarian and aristocratic, libertarian and law-abiding, relaxed and serious, refined and manly, private and public, and deliberate and daring.

The Funeral Oration, it might be said, is an ode to Athens the Beautiful. Pericles honors the city that by the beauty of its people and the daring of its deeds has earned the admiration of all the Greek world. The difficulty he faces is this: how to combine magnificence with restraint, magnitude with order; how to protect the serene greatness of due measure from the gaudy greatness of mere size (Connor, 1984, p. 73; Forde, 1989, pp. 50-56). For Athens is a city in love with glory, and glory is a competitive endeavor requiring of its pursuers ever greater exertions and achievements. Pericles himself supplies the proof of progress, bringing forward in his address a procession of generations each superior to its predecessor. First he praises the work of distant ancestors who during the great migrations stayed put, prospered, and handed on the country free. For this, says Pericles, they are honored, but not so highly as the heroes of the Persian and Hellenic wars who acquired the empire. The present generation though is superior still, or arguably so, for in completing the work of their fathers they have rendered the city wholly self-sufficient (autarkestatēn; 2.36.3) in war and in peace. Pericles even implies his personal superiority to earlier Athenian leaders: for he begins his speech, a decorous and venerable affair, complaining of the custom by which the war dead are eulogized.

What of the future? In light of Pericles’ progressive predilection and his city’s love of glory, the future can be expected to surpass the accomplishments and dim the fame of the present as well as the past. More expansion, more conquests, more sempiternal monuments of evil and of good. In his final address, Pericles allows how the navy is a limitless power and how the Athenians can go with it wherever they see fit. A city which chases after glory and which looks
to the future more than it revers the past is likely to reject all sense of limits and thus to lose appreciation for measure as an essential requirement of beauty. It is likely also to see its power decline from an empire commanding the respect of the defeated (2.41.3) to a mere tyranny governing by fear. This too Pericles says in his last speech (2.63.2). And his optimism is blunted further by the reflection that progress at some point must come to a halt, that growth turns to decay, and that empires weaken and fall; he even supposes that the end may be near rather than far. But the prospect of imminent decline does not cause him to husband his resources for a final defense; instead he saviors the glory already won and abuses the timid who opposed the attempt (2.64.3-4).

It is not exactly clear, however, that glory-seeking is centrifugal in its effects, or that armies conquering abroad cause factions to fester at home. After all, the extension of the city’s power is typically a source of pride and solidarity, and the distribution of booty or the colonizing of new conquests are common means of assuaging domestic animosities and releasing pent-up pressures. But there is this drawback, that when armies are victorious and the city expands, the cosmopolitanism that comes with empire relaxes the bonds of patriotism. Athenian identity is weakened to the degree that Athenians are all over the world and all the world spills into Athens (2.38). Pericles boasts of the fact that the versatile Athenian is famous beyond the borders of his country (2.43.2-3), and the History features two Athenians, Themistocles and Alcibiades, who derive more benefit from their native talent than from their native land. Moreover, when the armies are victorious, other problems arise, since a fat and safe city can with difficulty call for sacrifice or suppress the individual’s desire for private advantage at cost to the common good.

Mostly, though, these are dangers that lie in the future to be encountered by an overreaching, post-Periclean Athens. For the Athens of the Funeral Oration is to all appearances a united city, a single democratic people not divided by class and not embittered by faction. There is no conservative party visible here, no Spartanophiles who oppose the war and the imperialistic policies that brought it on. 18 Athens is a seamless whole. Pericles does not explain how it came to be that way, even though a recitation of Athenian history is one of his promises (2.35.4). Instead he turns to his second announced topic, the government of Athens, which he
proudly attests is a copy of no one else's. Athenian democracy confers power upon the many, and public life is open to everyone, social position notwithstanding. There is mention of the few (oligous) but no hint of their alienation from the democratic regime. Respect for law and the rights of individuals, plus private enterprise and inequalities of wealth presumably help to secure the loyalty of hoi oligoi, if not to make friends of all (de Ste. Croix, 1981, p. 290). As a commercial society, Athens, it seems, ignores a favored maxim of ancient republicanism--public wealth and private poverty.\textsuperscript{19} Pericles stresses the elegance of private Athenian homes (2.38).

But there are fissures in the foundation of Athens the Beautiful; all is not harmony and unity. Why does Pericles praise Athens? Because he dare not praise its fallen soldiers. Their friends will take umbrage if he stints his praise in any degree; but strangers will turn envious if he suggests that the deeds of the dead exceed the abilities of the living (2.35.2). Rather than one and whole, the city is divided between strangers and friends, and even the solemn occasion of a state funeral is not enough to unite them in a common interest.

Athens is further disjoined by the exclusion of its women from the collective aims of the city. Pericles' advice to the women of Athens, which he grudgingly proffers (ei de me dei kai gunaikeias ti aretēs . . . mnēsthēnai; 2.45.2), is that they not make themselves the talk of men whether for blame or for praise (aretēs peri e psogou en tois arsesi kleos eī). Obscurity is their virtue. But the virtue of Athens is fame, and fame for deeds which are indifferently good or bad (mnēmeia kakōn te kagathōn aidia; 2.41.4).\textsuperscript{20} Athenians want to be talked about; they travel across land and sea in order to force the world to take notice, and they care little for whether that notice is applause or censure. But what they want for themselves, they deny to their women. One half of the citizen population is forbidden any role in this communal quest for notoriety.

There is a final division in the social structure detectable in the Funeral Oration. Mourning relatives are detached from the rest of society by the personal suffering they bear. Athens is initially described as a city of free individuals, its patriotism not purchased by regimentation and the obliteration of the private. But when loved ones die, survivors are constrained from continuing the pretense of "free spirited patriotism." A choice must be made between the dutiful patriot and the expressive individual, and the bereaved are commanded by
their leader to behave as patriots. Pericles tells grieving parents to have more children, in part to compensate for their loss, but also to furnish the city with a steady supply of soldiers. Men are told that their opinions will not be trusted unless they bring to the deliberations the apprehensions of a father (2.44.3). Women, again, are instructed to keep quiet. And sons and brothers are admonished to compete for honor against the hallowed memories of the dead. The emphasis upon duty is so striking that Spartan conformity seems to have replaced Athenian diversity as the better means of dealing with death.

Thus the romanticized Athens of the Funeral Oration is not without its cracks and cleavages. Minor though they may be, when the city was visited by the plague, these divisions opened wide, and an integrated community disintegrated into a random collection of autonomous beings. At Corcyra the meddling of foreigners turned fellow citizens into fanatic partisans; at Athens the arrival of the plague changed public-spirited citizens into apolitical hedonists (Orwin. 1988. p. 843).

Thucydides mentions that the severity of the plague, its resistance to all remedy, and the indiscriminate manner in which it chose its victims combined to set loose upon the city a spirit of lawlessness (2.53). Divine law ceased operating as an effective restraint since the plague, in afflicting the pious and the impious alike, undermined belief in providential deities. And human law held no terror since those stricken felt themselves condemned without cause and consigned already to a crueler and swifter punishment. With the death toll mounting, property underwent a rapid redistribution, and those born to poverty found themselves in possession of great fortunes. Rather like a lottery, wealth became a thing of chance. This no doubt aggravated the lawless climate since respect for property and the willingness to suffer unequal distributions depends essentially on the opinion that wealth is the consequence of past labors and deserts, and on the hope that the future holds open the possibility of improvement of one’s lot. But the plague imprisoned people in an unnatural present, with no legacy from or responsibilities to the past and no dreams about the life ahead. Moral discipline fell apart because, like Corcyra, people were placed in too close a contact with present necessities.

Not everyone succumbed; some behaved splendidly in attending to the sick, and the congratulations they received suggests that the community’s moral compass continued to
function, albeit erratically. More importantly, the city endured, and except for a fitful attempt to blame Pericles for the people’s travails, the political life of Athens was unaffected.

Thucydides gives credit to Pericles, who, he says, knew just when to uplift or deflate the spirits of his fellow citizens (2.65.9). He applauds Pericles’ war policy of staying home and waiting out the Spartans and counts it a strategy certain of success (2.65.6-7, 13). He honors Pericles’ character, offering it as the chief reason for his standing with the people. That standing, he maintains, was tantamount to monarchical rule, or rule by the first man, for with Pericles as general Athens was a democracy in name only (ἐγίγνετο τὸ λογοί μεν δημοκρατία, ἐργοί δὲ ἑποτο ρῶι πρῶτου ανδρῶι αρχή; 2.65.9). After his death, says Thucydides, no one of comparable ability came forward to fill the void, as a series of lesser leaders competed for the support of the demos and pursued policies known to be detrimental to the common good.

It seems then that Periclean Athens represents a peak, indeed an embodiment of that restrained magnificence which was the hallmark of Greek greatness and Greek beauty. Thucydides seems genuinely to admire this beauty, just as he admires the more humble virtues lost and missed at Corcyra. But if Athenian democracy depended less on its institutions than on the abilities of its leaders, why was nothing done to prepare for a successor to Pericles? The sudden descent from peak to pit, from Pericles and imperium to Cleon, Nicias, and the quarries of Sicily, causes one to question whether Pericles and others should have trained a replacement? Who was this replacement to be? Thucydides observes elsewhere that Alcibiades’ management of the affairs of war was "most excellent" (κραστίστα; 6.15.4), but that the people distrusted him, committed these affairs to others, and brought the city to ruin. If anyone in charge but Alcibiades meant the ruin of Athens, then Alcibiades was the rightful, if eventual, heir to Pericles.21 Unfortunately, Alcibiades lacked Pericles’ character. Of the four attributes of statecraft named by Pericles--prudence, eloquence, patriotism, and integrity (2.60.5-6)--Alcibiades was plainly deficient in the latter two. What then to do? The education of Alcibiades is a subject much discussed in the works of Xenophon and Plato,22 and it is known that Alcibiades was for a time under the guardianship of Pericles.23 Thucydides adds that Alcibiades’ spendthrift ways were not the least cause of the destruction of the Athenian state.
(hoper kai katheilen husteron tēn tōn Athenaiōn polin ouch hēkista; 6.15.3). In other words, the fate of Athens was greatly affected by the moral training of one young man. Is this Thucydides speaking or Socrates!

As important as this question may seem, it makes no practical difference to Thucydides if in his judgment a corrupted Alcibiades was the natural product of Periclean Athens. Pericles warned his fellow citizens not to undertake new imperial adventures during the war; and the Sicilian Expedition, to be sure, was a new imperial adventure, although in 415 Athens technically was not at war. But if the expedition could have succeeded, was there anything in Pericles’ understanding to argue against it?\(^{24}\) Pericles was a progressive, an architect of empire, and an intellectual descendent of Theseus and Themistocles, leaders who made Athens powerful by removing Athenians from their ancestral homes (the Peloponnesian War occasioned a third removal.) He typified the daring, innovative Athenian described so ominously by the Corinthians. Now Thucydides’ conclusion is that victory in Sicily was probable but that the outbreak of faction and of private ambition spelled its doom. He also implies that what distinguished Pericles most from Alcibiades was the public spiritedness of the former and the private selfishness of the latter. Hence we are invited to think not that Pericles would have opposed the expedition (2.41.4, 62.2, 63.3, 64.4-5; cf. 6.18.6-7), but that he alone could have made it work, because he alone kept Athens united and strong.\(^{25}\)

But was it simply an accident that after Pericles Athens was beset by private men pursing private agendas and involving the city in private quarrels? Not likely, for the triumph of the private is a predictable outcome of a public interest devoted to the pursuit of boundless glory. Why? Because glory-seeking is a public concern only to the extent that it is morally constrained by the **good** opinion of others. But glory-seeking, frequently, is "beyond good and evil," in quest of sempiternal monuments of evil and of good.\(^{26}\) Posterity is the arbiter of one’s glory. Far removed from the consequences of past deeds, posterity takes aesthetic delight in their sound and their fury, particularly when poetry embellishes the record.\(^{27}\) Thus those seeking glory come to realize that they will be measured more by the length of their reach than by the worth of their purpose.\(^{28}\) And if power is without purpose and the power-holder without obligation, then there
is little cause for the individual to be obligated to the community or to be satisfied to share in the community’s fame. Alcibiades carries this individualism to the furthest extreme, reversing the normal relationship between citizen and city; for it is Athens which shares in the fame of Alcibiades, he avers, rather than Alcibiades who shares in the fame of Athens (6.16.2-3).29

Glory is not the only ambition with privatizing effects, nor is it the only motive named by Athenians to explain their conduct. They declare that they became imperialists and remain imperialists also for fear and for profit. Their empire is a tyranny, both Pericles and Cleon admit, but it is hugely profitable to them (the financial underpinnings of Athens the Beautiful), and they dare not relax their hold for worry that angry subjects will take their revenge. As with glory-seeking, fear and profit can be sources of solidarity: an enemy without causes unity within; and shared plunder binds even pirates together. But all of these excuses as to why a city need not be just add up to a teaching that there is no justice, no obligation, no common good—only selfish individuals free to pursue their interests; egoism as the rock bottom reality ignored at one’s peril (Orwin, 1986, pp. 82-83).

The Athenians speak of a law which their own experience has taught them but which possibly has been taught them too by the sophists who visit their city. This law ordains that the strong take what they want and the weak yield what they must, that the strong rule over the weak. According to this law, human behavior is essentially self-interested, and anyone who is able to climb to the top is right to try. At the first Peloponnesian Congress, at Melos, and at the Camarinean Conference, Athenians can be heard giving voice to this conception of human nature (1.76.2; 5.105.2; 6.85.1). Euphemus, for example, explains to the Camarineans that alliances rest on interest alone: "nothing is unreasonable which is profitable nor kindred which is without trust; in each case one must be enemy or friend as the occasion demands" (6.85.1). Loyalty, gratitude, and promises, he instructs, are as nothing compared with changing calculations of national interest. This is the enlightened mentality of the sophists, the realism of the powerful in a competitive and hazardous world. But what is to prevent the use of this realism by an individual, either against other individuals (criminality) or against his own city (treason)?30 It is a short step indeed from the raison d’etat articulated by Euphemus to the defection and treason of
Alcibiades, and from Alcibiades’ treason to faction and sedition inside Athens. With the ubiquity of self-interest increasingly referenced as an excuse for men to behave at their worst, the dissolution of the city into warring partisans and conspiring individuals is hardly a cause for wonder.

We give now a quick look to the incident which Thucydides says first brought faction to Athens. This was the desecration of the Hermae on the eve of the Sicilian Expedition. The mutilation of these statues sent tremors of pious hysteria through the populace, but the event was soon interpreted as an attack upon the democracy, and rumors of other impieties were taken as evidence of a longstanding and widespread conspiracy. The switch from religion to politics seems to have been the work of prominent men who saw an opportunity to undermine Alcibiades, their chief rival for high office; for the testimony of informants implicated Alcibiades in the earlier impieties, the profanation of the mysteries. Since the enemies of Alcibiades were manipulating public opinion, a fact twice mentioned by Thucydides (6.28.2, 61.1), the suggestion is present that a hidden few were the de facto movers and shakers. But it is Thucydides’ more notable contention that after Pericles the politicians of Athens, being all equal, were forced to cater to the pleasures of the multitude (2.65.10). Who manipulated whom, therefore, is a matter somewhat hard to decide. Either way though, the democratic regime was secure enough that popular support was the only recognized avenue to power. It was some years later before the democracy was truly challenged, when Alcibiades set dissidents into motion with his promise of Persian war assistance in exchange for installation of an oligarchic regime.

Thucydides reports that the climate of suspicion was aggravated and the pace of investigation accelerated by the people’s hearsay knowledge (epistamenos gar ho dēmos akoēi; 6.53.3) of the Pisistradid tyranny and of the fact that Spartan intervention was finally needed to bring it to an end. Fearing the fall of their own government, the democrats remembered the circumstances of its coming to power. Thucydides uses this connecting link to repeat the story of Aristogiton and Harmodius. When first mentioned in Book 1, this love affair is taken to prove that people hold their traditions uncritically, for the Athenians believe that Hipparchus was tyrant and that his assassination was heroic tyrannicide. The Athenians are wrong; Hippias was tyrant,
and Hipparchus was killed because of injured love. But upon repeating the story, Thucydides notes that the Athenians are right in thinking that the tyranny became violent in its closing years and that their ancestors did not overthrow it alone. Their knowledge of these events, he explains, caused them to trust the word of unreliable informants, to imprison many important persons, and to convict the accused on the strength of "plea-bargained" testimony. Thucydides adds that the convictions and executions which followed were a great emotional relief to the city, but that the people, confident of having determined the truth of the Hermae, concluded that the profanation of the mysteries was a related plot and that Alcibiades was surely guilty.

Thucydides tells us that his History is written for those who wish to see clearly the events of the past and to interpret the events of the future, which in the course of human things will often resemble the past (1.22.4). He suggests to us through numerous details that the affair of the Hermae resembles the Aristogiton-Harmodius-Hipparchus affair of a century earlier: (1) an incident, more private than public in motive, or possibly so, taken as an attack upon the government; (2) a popular government (one liked by the people or one composed of the people) which turned oppressive in self-defense, and which was overthrown by the Spartans or was fearful of the same; and (3) former leaders who, ousted from power, went over to the side of the enemy (Hippias to the Persians and Alcibiades to the Spartans). There are these similarities, but the point most salient throughout the parallel is the unsuitability of the people for instruction by Thucydides. For in the first example the people do not care about knowledge (who was the tyrant and why was he killed); in the second they do not profit from the little knowledge they have (the paranoia resulting from knowledge of past Spartan intervention); and in the third they think they have knowledge when they don’t (the who and the why of the Hermae mutilation and the who and the why of the mysteries profanation). Knowledge then is not what the people bring to democratic government, and they are in need of leaders who do.

Heretofore, the analysis of Athenian faction has located its roots in Athenian imperialism, in the motives of glory, fear, and profit as experienced by a state devoted to the increase and maintenance of dominion. But since Athens was an independent power, a primary political actor, the domestic politics of Athens are also relevant to the issue of faction. And after
Pericles, at least, Athenian politics were democratic, meaning the equality of citizens competing for office—this in addition to public accountability and the sovereignty of the people, for Athens was always democratic in these latter senses. Now the picture which Thucydides paints of democratic Athens is not a pretty one. Equality is the strength of democracy; but equality in the leadership is also its ruin. Lacking the near-monarchic stature of Pericles, his successors were unable to lead the demos without placating its desires. And those desires, Thucydides frequently observes, were as inconstant as they were vehement: Pericles is removed from office, Pericles is restored; the Mytilenians are condemned to die, the Mytilenians are spared; Alcibiades is commissioned to sail against Sicily, Alcibiades is accused of plotting to topple the regime.\textsuperscript{32} Turn up the heat on Athenian politics, and what one has cooking is revolution in Corcyra—this seems to be Thucydides’ judgment. It is reason enough for him to dislike politics in general and democratic politics in particular.\textsuperscript{33} As an example of the democratic ethos, Pericles in the Funeral Oration chastizes as useless (αχρεὸν) the Athenian who takes no part in public affairs (2.40.2); and Solon, as recorded by Aristotle,\textsuperscript{34} drafted a law which disfranchized citizens who failed to choose sides in a civil war—the democratic ethos at its extreme. Of course the Corcyreans chose sides, most of them, and the result was murder and mayhem for all, the brutalization of partisans and the destruction of neutrals. Thucydides then seems distrusting of the virtues of political participation and shares perhaps the opinion of Aristotle that in bad regimes—and post-Periclean Athens was a bad regime—it is best if political activity is held to a minimum.\textsuperscript{35} Hobbes goes this one better, concluding that Thucydides was a monarchist (1959, p. xvii).

There is though some salvation to be found in politics from the problems created by politics. Not all regimes are bad regimes. Thucydides praises the Spartan constitution and credits it with providing 400 years of political life free of faction (1.18.1). And he echoes the view of Archidamus that the Spartans are a moderate people, for he identifies Sparta as one of two cities not to have been corrupted by its own prosperity (8.24.4).\textsuperscript{36} The Spartan constitution was a mixed regime, although Thucydides does not define it as such. Athens, too, had a mixed regime, that of the Five Thousand adopted in 411. Thucydides states that it was the best regime
to rule there in his lifetime, better presumably than the democracy under Pericles, and better than
the oligarchy of the Four Hundred (8.89.3). He describes it simply as a measured blend of the
few and the many (metria gar ἢ te es tous oligous kai tous pollous zugkrasis egeneto; 8.97.2). It
did not last long, a mere nine months, perhaps because it lacked real support from the democratic
navy and the tyrannically-minded Alcibiades. It is though the regime in power when the History
comes to an end. Little else does Thucydides report about the Five Thousand, but his
commendation might be taken as a challenge to writers after him to explore the possibilities and
develop the institutions of a more durable mixed regime. And if Thucydides’ reflections on
democracy and oligarchy are to serve as a guide, then something more is needed for lasting
political success than institutional reform and balanced representation of the social classes.37
Leaders are needed who want to see clearly the past and who to that end have absorbed the
lessons of the History respecting empire and faction.
1 The quotation is from Hobbes’ verse autobiography; it is cited by de Jouvenel (1959, p. xii).


3 "Republic" is a Latin term meaning "the public business"; "democracy" is a Greek term meaning "people-power," or "rule by the people." There was no accepted and consistent use of these expressions by early modern writers—even by collaborators on the same project: for Madison calls republican any government in which there is representation (Federalist 10), whereas Hamilton calls republican the free governments of the ancients in which representation was missing (Federalist 9). If we stay just with the words, however, "republic" is the generic to "democracy" the specific: democracy is an acute form of republican government involving all the people in the public business. The language of republicanism ill-suits Hobbes, it is true, but his attack upon Athenian democracy is roughly equivalent to Hamilton’s attack upon ancient republicanism.

4 Citations are given by book, paragraph, and sentence. Translations from the Greek are my own.


6 Ehrenberg (1969, p. 22) explains that the Greeks produced two types of state, an ethnos and a polis, distinguished respectively by the absence or the presence of an urban center. Poleis arose in areas where the influence of Mycenaean settlements was great and the impact of the migrations small.

7 Thucydides’ sympathy for Spartan moderation is shown by Edmunds (1975, pp. 73-82) in his study of the ethical terminology describing the Corcyrean revolution. Athens, conversely, is associated with the vices triumphant at Corcyra. See Orwin (1988, pp. 839-40).

8 See Plato, Republic 560a-e; and Montesquieu, The Spirit of the Laws, 3.3, where the revolutionary politics of Greek cities are described in remarkably similar terms.

9 Politics 1.2.15; see de Romilly (1977, p. 55); for a contrasting view see Brown (1987,
10 Antiphon is an example of the first type of sophist (Freeman, 1978, pp. 144-53), perhaps also Hippias (Protagoras 337c-d); Protagoras is an example of the second (Protagoras 316c-317c, 320c-328c). For discussions of Thucydides' relation to the sophists, see J.H. Finley (1942, pp. 44-68), Jaeger (1945, p. 402), and Grundy (1948, pp. 7-8, 16-17, 22).

11 See Gomme (1956, pp. 382-83); also Fuks (1971, pp. 53-54).

12 By lifting life, liberty, and property to the level of individual rights, modern liberal politics removes from consideration those issues most likely to disturb the public peace. The same rationale underwrites J. C. Calhoun's proposal for a concurrent majority (A Disquisition on Government, pp. 36-40, 53).

13 M. I. Finley (1983, p. 109) cites official documents from all over the Hellenic world proscribing cancellation of debts and the redistribution of land. He concludes that "such programmatic statements, supported by oaths and maledictions, are unlikely to have been adopted on the basis of purely imaginary fears." See Plato, Republic 565e-566a; Laws 684d, 736c-d.

14 It is a maxim of Hobbesian political science that fear is the emotion most attuned to reason. Thucydides seems generally to agree (8.1.4; 8.97.1-2), but the reaction of the Athenian populace to the mutilation of the Hermae represents an important qualification.

15 In this same passage, Thucydides remarks that Athens, a poor city free of faction, received refugees from rich cities torn by faction. Athens thus grew in size and wealth and presumably became vulnerable to faction itself. Its remedy for what was evidently a systemic problem was colonization. See Macleod (1979, p. 54), Pouncey (1980, p. 37), and M.I. Finley (1983, p. 110).

16 See also 3.39.4. Cleon states that considerate treatment by Athens has made the allies arrogant and unruly, and he concludes therefore that adversity (kakopragian) is more easily repelled than is prosperity (eudaimonian) preserved.

17 The Corcyreans were a prideful people, too, but Thucydides seems to emphasize the pettiness of motive that impelled both Corcyra and Corinth to war. Corinth could not abide the thought that a former colony would not pay it the homage due, and Corcyra was moved by a
desire to put down and show up its mother-city (1.25.3-4, 34, 38).

18 Grundy (1948, pp. 157-66) identifies three classes and two parties operating in Athens from the early decades of the fifth century. They were: large landowners and wealthy traders; prosperous freeholders listed on the hoplite census; and sailors, landless men of the coast (paralii), and the urban unemployed. After the reforms of Cleisthenes, the oligarchs ceased to be a viable ruling class and joined with the moderate democrats to make up the Middle Party. The poor majority formed the Ultra-Democratic Party. Aristotle provides a list of the democratic and oligarchic leaders of the period (Constitution of Athens 28.2-3).

19 See Xenophon, Constitution of the Lacedaemonians 7; Aristotle, Politics 2.9.36-37; Demosthenes, On Organization, 28-31; Sallust, Catiline, 52.22; Plutarch, Lycurgus, 9-10, 13.3-5; Machiavelli, Discourses, 1.37, 2.19, 3.16, 3.25; Montesquieu, Considerations on the Causes of the Greatness of the Romans and Their Decline, ch. 8, and The Spirit of the Laws, 5.2-3; A. Zimmern (1961, pp. 291-92).

20 It is this direct contrast between what is allowed to women and what is allowed to men which suggests, if only vaguely, some reservations on Thucydides’ part regarding Athenian (and Greek) treatment of women. Pericles, who makes the statement about women’s obscenity, had the celebrated Aspasia as his mistress. Is Thucydides unaware of the irony?

21 Alcibiades was too young to succeed Pericles directly.

22 Xenophon, Memorabilia 1.2.12-47; Plato, Symposium 215a-222b; Alcibiades I.

23 Xenophon, Memorabilia 1.2.40; Plutarch, Alcibiades I.

24 McGregor detects a change in Pericles from a radical, aggressive democrat before 446 to a moderate, conservative democrat after 446 (1956, p. 100). Thucydides himself mentions that in time of peace (presumably the fifteen years following the treaty of 446) Pericles pursued measured policies that kept the city safe (2.65.5). I would state the matter thus: the career of Pericles was directed by the hope that moderation could be forever a part of Athenian greatness, but the imperial city he helped to build could not be restrained in its appetites indefinitely, nor was the attempt consistent with its character or with Pericles’ own rhetoric. For a similar view see Strauss (1964, p. 152), Palmer (1982, pp. 834-35), and Forde (1986, p. 440).

MacIntyre (1984, p. 136) attempts to reconcile the contrasting qualities of sophrosuné
( moderation) and polupragmosunē (busyness). How can Pericles, he asks, be the leader of the Athenians, when he is described as sōphrōn by Isocrates, and when the Athenians are described as polupragmones by Thucydides? The answer, he says, is that the boundlessness of polupragmosunē is applied to the selection of goals and the self-restraint of sōphrosunē to the attainment of goals. This is true enough if it is understood that Sicily was a goal.

25 Thucydides offers the Sicilian Expedition as an example of a policy mistake made by the successors of Pericles; he then proceeds to explain why its failure was unnecessary (2.65.11), intimating thereby his approval of the same operation properly managed. But in point of fact he gives no such approval. For his statement that the expedition "was not so much a mistake in judgment [gnōmēs hamartēma], considering the enemy against whom it was sent" is not a full retraction of his previous statement that the expedition was a mistake. Thucydides refrains from saying that what could have been done should have been done.

26 Bruell (1981, pp. 27-29) argues that for the Athenians the nobility of empire was closely tied to its limitless extension. He further contends that the Athenians had not reflected adequately on the meaning of the noble and the good.

27 Thucydides speaks a different message to a different posterity (1.22.4).

28 Alcibiades states clearly the ambition and predicament of the glory-seeker, that he is offensive to his contemporaries, his putative equals especially, but that people everywhere like cozying up to greatness, and that his fatherland in future years is proud to call him one of its own (6.16.5). See Machiavelli, The Prince, 18 and Florentine Histories, Preface.

29 For a different interpretation see Forde (1989, pp. 176-210), who argues that Alcibiades’ ambition to rule is idealistic, public-minded, and universal, devoted to honor and restrained by consent.

30 See Strauss (1964, pp. 193-94, 196) and Pouncey (1980, pp. 39, 42-44, 139-44). Grene (1965, p. 32) argues that direct democracy in imperial Athens was corrupting in its effects because it provided no buffer between the individual and the realities of power politics.

31 Athens was most like a dependent state, and thus looked most like Corcyra, in 411, when Alcibiades was negotiating for Persian war assistance and when returning oligarchs, through force and through fraud, effected a change of constitution. Rawlings (1981, pp. 213-14)
compares the two revolutions but mistakenly supposes that the one at Athens fits the Corcyrean paradigm and is thus an example of how revolutions became worse as the war became long. The factional split at Athens never did issue into a full-blown civil war.


33 It is perhaps not unimportant that Thucydides was himself a victim of democratic politics, exiled for twenty years as a result of a failed operation in Thrace (5.26.5).

34 The Athenian Constitution 8.5.

35 Politics 4.6.2; 6.4.1-2.

36 Strauss observes, quite rightly, that Spartan moderation was partly a function of Spartan fear, fear of a Helot uprising. He also notes that Sparta, like Athens, was an empire, but an empire that caused no alarm and gave no offense since it had been established many years earlier and had reached its natural limit (1966, pp. 191-92). Nevertheless, there remains a difference between the two cities. Athens had uprisings of allies to fear when it decided on the Sicilian Expedition. And it is not obvious that Sparta had a "natural limit" that kept it in place, for conquest would bring new resources, and the regime could always be changed in order to manage better the expansion (Cleomenes effected just such a change; Polybius, II.47). On the other hand, if a natural limit did keep Sparta stationary, there was still some merit in Sparta’s having recognized it.

37 There was a rough balance of power before the start of the war. But Spartan fear that the balance was shifting did more to provoke war than the balance itself did to prevent it. On the question of parity and bipolarity, see Fliess (1966, pp. 66-72).
REFERENCES


-28-


-29-