

**MODELS OF DEMAGOGIC RHETORIC IN
THUCYDIDES:
FROM ARCHIDAMUS TO ALCIBIADES**

by

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CONTENTS

1. Introduction	1
2. The first congress at Sparta	14
Introduction	14
The Corinthian speech	16
The Athenian speech	19
Archidamus' speech	23
Sthenelaidas' speech	31
3. The Mytilenean debate	36
Introduction	36
Cleon	40
Diodotus	53
4. The Sicilian debate	74
Introduction	74
Nicias	81
Alcibiades	97
Alcibades' speech at Sparta	112
5. Comparison between Pericles' third speech and Alcibiades' speech in the Sicilian debate	117
6. Conclusion	134
Annexures	140
Bibliography	142

GREEK TEXT

The dissertation “Models of Demagogic Rhetoric in Thucydides: From Archidamus to Alcibiades” has been done on Word. The Greek text was done by using “Insert” and “Symbol”.

Only acute accents appear in this electronic version. All other markings were inserted by hand in the printed version.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1. RHETORIC AND HUMAN NATURE

“απλως τε αδύνατον και πολλης ευθεσίας, όστις οίεται της ανθρωπείας φύσεως ορμωμένης προθύμως τι πραξαι αποτροπήν τινα έχειν η νόμων ισχύι η άλλω τω δεινω.”

“In short, it is impossible and very simple-minded to suppose that when human nature is powerfully driven to do something, it can be deterred by the strength of laws or by any other danger.” (Diodotus’ speech in the Mytilenean Debate, Thucydides, 3.45.7)

This remark concludes Diodotus’ effort to explain to the Athenian Assembly how the Mytileneans might have been impelled by desire and hope to rebel against the power of Athens. His audience was however also acting under emotional compulsion. On the previous day they had passed a savage and extreme decree (ωμον το βούλευμα και μέγα) (3.36.4) in high anger against the Mytileneans. When their anger had cooled, they decided to reconsider, but then Cleon’s rhetoric caused almost half of them to revert to their fury of the day before and his proposal was defeated by the narrowest of margins (3.49.1).

Using this as a paradigmatic example, a preliminary description of demagogic rhetoric in Thucydides may be ventured as speech in which the speaker tries to arouse these powerful emotional drives in his audience, for his own selfish purposes, by appealing to the human passions such as fear, anger, desire or greed, or in the case of communities, to the desire for freedom or rule over others.

An understanding of *the nature of the Thucydidean audience*, their composition, emotional state, fears and expectations, is therefore central to the identification and analysis of the rhetoric to which they responded.

Diodotus’ remark concluded the explanation (3.45.1 – 6) of how men’s emotions can delude them into taking risks, even with inferior resources, and drive them into action in defiance of law or danger or reason. His explanation is taken as an expression of Thucydides’ own opinion about human nature¹, which is repeated elsewhere:

¹ This assumption is explained and discussed more fully in Chapter 3, under the analysis of Diodotus’ speech.

Regarding the cities subject to Athens: "... their decisions were based more on vague wishes than secure foresight, following the human habit of entrusting desires to heedless hopes, while using arbitrary reasons to dismiss what is unacceptable" (4.108.4).

The point is that there is normally a precarious balance between emotion and reason in human nature, in which emotion (οργη) is the stronger, so that when the emotions are engaged, they can impel men to act irrationally. Human opinion (γνωμη), the decision-making part of the human psyche, is dominated by the emotions, making it susceptible to events (1.140.1; 2.59.1 – 3) and also susceptible to the kind of rhetoric which can lead men into delusion and error.² They consult their hopes and act recklessly when they desire something, rejecting whatever interferes with their desires (cf. Luginbill 1999, 27).

The demagogic orator uses devices which are specifically aimed at these aspects of human nature. In other words, he exploits, manipulates and steers his audience by means of their emotions. In the extreme case he can even turn them into a mob (όχλος) entirely dominated by emotion, which is what happened to the Athenian Assembly in the Sicilian debate (6.24) and at the end of the first debate preceding the recorded Mytilenean debate. Demagogic rhetoric mobilises the emotional drives which Thucydides regards as crucially determining human agents.³

Demagogic rhetoric can be recognised in the motives as well as in the methods of the ρήτωρ:

Thucydides usually indicates what a ρήτωρ intends with his speech, either in the preamble to the speech, as he does for Alcibiades (6.15.2), Cleon (3.36.6), Archidamus (1.79.2) and Pericles (2.59.3), or in the subsequent action as in the case of Sthenelaidas (1.87.2). In these descriptions Thucydides clearly identifies the demagogic orators in that they ***do not aim at the good of the community*** but have some other ideas in mind which will either benefit themselves (eg Alcibiades) or satisfy their own passions (eg Cleon and Sthenelaidas) at the expense of the community and the wider collective interests.

In his analysis of the psychology of civil war and its devastating effects on moral standards, Thucydides describes the effects of the Corcyrean stasis upon speech (3.82). A major part of this

² See Luginbill's extensive analysis of the reason/passion antithesis in human nature. (Luginbill 1999, 25 – 30; 53 – 60; 65 – 75).

³ "That side of human nature not accessible to reason, has a strong influence on politico-historical events" (Stahl 1973, 63).

passage describes the political semantics of the situation which can be equated to manipulation and distortion of the facts to suit the purposes of the speakers.

Distortion of the facts is one of the *methods* used in demagogic speech and so are the other techniques which take liberties with the truth, such as disinformation, dishonesty and outright lies (eg 6.17.1 – 2).

The other aspects of demagogic rhetoric include flattery and ingratiating oratory (eg 3.37.3 and Sthenelaidas' speech - 1.86 - phrased specifically to appeal to a Spartan audience), personal attacks (eg 6.12.2), false accusations (eg 3.38.2), emotional speech (eg 3.39.2), irrationality (eg 6.11.4), spurious arguments, crowd manipulation (eg 6.18.6) and contradictions (eg between 6.17.2 and 6.18.2). The demagogic orator does not caution or restrain his audience, but pushes for action⁴, he exploits the passions of the moment (3.39.1 - 6; 6.18.4) and may also try to create polarity in his audience (3.37.3).

Throughout the History the desire for freedom appears to be as powerful as the other human emotions and linked with that, the desire for domination over others. "It is man's nature to rule those who yield, just as it is to resist those who encroach" (4.61.5). A further example of this innate desire for freedom is described in 8.64.5 where the subjected cities who had a certain degree of independence, soon attempted to acquire "outright freedom". In the first congress at Sparta the final decision of the Lacedaemonian audience was not based on reason, but prompted by this particular emotional impetus, namely the fear of being ruled by the Athenians, a fear which had been aroused deliberately by the Corinthians and by Sthenelaidas (1.88).

In this regard it is necessary to mention Alcibiades' use of the Athenians' fear of domination, when he told them that if they did not expand their empire, they were running the risk of losing it altogether and falling under the power of others (6.18.7). This argument was the most powerful persuasive tool in his whole speech and may have been decisive in their decision to undertake the Sicilian expedition. Alcibiades was echoing Pericles to a certain extent although Pericles had exhorted the Athenians not to relinquish the Empire even though it was a tyranny, because if they did so, they would be at risk (2.63.2). Once again the implied threat to their freedom may have been a significant impetus which moved the Athenians to pursue the war with greater vigour.

⁴ For the sake of gaining power, the *πίπτω* encourages the improvident desires of the people, rather than curbing them. Both Cleon and Alcibiades did their best to remove the restraints which would have kept the Athenians from acting. Cleon especially, urged haste before they forgot the injuries they had suffered at the hands of the Mytileneans. Sthenelaidas exaggerated the threat from Athens to persuade the Lacedaemonians to abandon their traditional restraint and slowness to act.

Assembly rhetoric per se is an attempt to exercise *control* over an audience.

Thucydides attributed Pericles' control of the Athenian *δημος* to his personal qualities and outstanding statesmanship and made it clear that Pericles acted for the benefit of the community by restraining them and avoiding extremes (2.65.8 – 9).⁵

The demagogue, in contrast, applies his control over his audience for his own purposes (*ιδία*) and not for the sake of the state or the wider community (*δημοσία*), which leads to extremes.

The situation during the stasis in Corcyra, for example, was the direct opposite of the situation in Pericles' Athens. This was a society which had disintegrated completely because the various groups vied with each other for overall control while no single individual or group was strong enough to prevail. Thucydides felt that such chaos was potentially present in all human societies. He said that the actions of the people were “such as have occurred and will always occur as long as human nature remains the same” (3.82) and he blamed the leaders in Corcyra for their greed and ambition which had caused the chaos and violence.

This comparison illustrates, first, that in Thucydides' opinion, the masses need to be restrained, because without restraint they are bound to err. It also reiterates, by implication, the description of demagogic rhetoric as speech which does not restrain the emotions of the *δημος* but rather incites it to irrational and harmful action because of the leader's use of those emotions for his own purposes.

In order to describe and evaluate demagogic rhetoric in Thucydides, it is therefore necessary, in each example, to identify three aspects namely,
the emotional and psychological state of the audience,
the objectives of the orator, and
the methods used to manipulate the audience's emotions .

2. IDENTIFYING DEMAGOGIC RHETORIC

This study is *first* an attempt to identify and describe demagogic rhetoric in three different debates recorded by Thucydides.

The texts were chosen as examples of three different types of demagogic rhetoric: Sthenelaidas, at the first congress in Sparta, was terse and abrupt and added physical action to his persuasive methods; Cleon used emotion in the form of anger and fear as well as slander to promote his case

⁵ Edmunds' description of Pericles' control of the Athenian *δημος* as “...a harmonious expression of a unified rational will” (Edmunds 1975, 56) does not seem to recognise the difference between Pericles and the people, which Thucydides emphasises in the Encomium and which is also apparent in Pericles' first and third speeches.

against his opponents who had requested the Assembly to rescind the decree against the Mytileneans; Alcibiades was the suave consummate demagogue who whipped up hysterical enthusiasm for the expedition to Sicily, manipulating the prevailing mood of the Athenians to suit his own interests.

The other speeches in each of the debates are also considered in detail, as background and contrast. In the first congress at Sparta irrationalism and emotionalism prevail over reason. The debate is in essence a contest between Archidamus, the voice of reason, and Sthenelaidas, the advocate of unreason and war who uses fear of the Athenians as his main persuasive instrument. In the other two speeches, the Corinthians and Athenians respectively, speak for and against war. Both speeches have distinct demagogic features. The main item of the Athenian speech consists of a number of indirect references to the power of Athens, calculated to instil fear in the audience and to intimidate them by what is left unsaid but clearly implied.

The Corinthian speech also uses emotion as a lever, but for the opposite purpose. By invective they try to rouse the national pride of the Lacedaemonians and shame them into declaring war on Athens. By implying that if they do not change their traditional conservative behaviour, they will be overrun by Athens, the Corinthians play on the subliminal fears of the Lacedaemonian audience which are an even greater incentive to action.

The demagogic rhetoric in the three different debates shows a number of *similarities* and parallels, for instance in the use of certain phrases, which will be identified and discussed in context. As mentioned above, the main target of the demagogic speeches in Thucydides, is human nature and its vulnerability to exploitation, which will be identified in each of the debates.

Instructive rhetoric and the emotions of the audience

Since Pericles' ascendancy and control over the Athenian *δημος* was due to his personal qualities, it means that they followed him out of respect, admiration and because of the perception that he was the best person to lead the City (cf 2.65.4; 10). It is doubtful whether his instructive rhetoric ever really instructed his audiences, because it did not seem to change them at all. Pericles even admitted as much, when he told the Athenians that he had been expecting their anger and discontent. (2.60.1 cf 1.140.1).

This raises a point which affects the interpretation of the speeches, namely that the *δημος* appears to be stupid and ineducable⁶ and so a “good” speech, based on logic and rational instruction, serves no purpose, except to demonstrate the virtue of the *ρήτωρ* because the audience is unable to react to logic, but only to the personality of the *ρήτωρ* or to the use he makes of their emotions (but see below, Deliberative Rhetoric). ***The successful *ρήτωρ* is the speaker who appeals most successfully to that emotion in his audience, which is uppermost at the time of his speech.***

Pericles is the only person in the History for whom his audience had so much respect that it (their respect) superseded their other emotions (cf 2.65.8 – 9). Even Archidamus, the upright and honest Spartan leader could not command such respect, so he was defeated by the Spartans’ love of brevity, their suspicion of sophisticated speeches and their habit of conformity, which Sthenelaidas exploited in making his audience separate physically into two groups (cf 1.86.1 – 87.3).

Deliberative rhetoric

The nature of the *δημος* does not invalidate the importance of deliberative rhetoric in Thucydides’ view. According to the text there is a difference between the *δημος* which has to be persuaded and the *ρήτορες* who put forward proposals for consideration. “On the questions of greatest importance and in the present circumstances, we speakers should claim to think further ahead than you who consider what is immediately in front of you, especially since we who give the advice can be called to account but you who listen cannot” (*ἄλλως τε και υπεύθυνον την παραίνεσιν έχοντας προς ανεύθυνον την υμετέραν ακρόασιν*) (3.43.4).

Thucydides regards deliberation before action as essential (2.40.2; 3.42.1 – 2; 6.8.4), so it must be concluded that the first two qualities of a good statesman, namely, an understanding of the current political situation and the ability to persuade his audience to his point of view (2.60.5) applied to the orators as well and that the other two qualities, namely patriotism and integrity, determined whether their influence on the incorrigible *δημος* would benefit the community⁷ or not.

The demagogic rhetoric in the three debates shows a number of *similarities* and parallels, for instance in the use of certain phrases, which will be identified and discussed in context. As

⁶ See 1.20.3 and 6.54 for confirmation of Thucydides’ contempt for “the uncritical minds of the common people” (Crane 1996, 250).

⁷ This applies equally to the Lacedaemonian and the Athenian communities.

mentioned above, the main objective of the demagogic speeches in Thucydides, is human nature and its vulnerability to exploitation, which will be identified in each of the debates.

3. POST-PERICLEAN RHETORIC

In a parallel exercise, the study *secondly* tries to show that post-Periclean rhetoric, especially in the Mytilenean and Sicilian debates, is symptomatic of the decline in the calibre of the Athenian leadership. In Thucydides' opinion, Athens fell from the height of her greatness to catastrophe in Sicily (2.65.5; 11) and defeat by Lacedaemon because of her leaders. In the encomium on Pericles (2.65.8 – 11) he lauds Pericles and criticises the “successors”, motivating his statements by a description of Pericles' good governance and the successors' failings. At the same time he furnishes enough detail about Pericles' rhetorical style to infer the demagogic rhetoric used by the successors. The process of deterioration in the leadership can therefore be traced through the way in which they address and control the *δημος* and through the purposes behind their rhetoric.

The *character of the Athenian δημος*, the target of the rhetoric, remains the same throughout, both during Pericles' lifetime and after his death. According to Thucydides' view of human nature, they were always prey to their emotions and vulnerable to adverse circumstances and emotional manipulation.

The Athenian *δημος* who entered the war against Lacedaemon (2.13) was as susceptible to emotion as those who were going to butcher the Mytileneans (3.36.2). The Athenians who decided to sail to Sicily under the compulsion of deluded enthusiasm (6.24), were no different from those who wanted to rush out and defend their lands against the marauding Lacedaemonians (2.21.2 – 3) and these were the same people who became so despondent because of the plague and the second Lacedaemonian invasion, that they wanted to sue for peace (2.59.1 - 2).

The *δημος* with whom Pericles had to deal, was fickle, irrational and unreasonable.⁸ They were angry with Pericles, when they were suffering because of the plague and the second Lacedaemonian invasion (2.59), blaming him for the loss of their possessions and for their other difficulties during the war (2.65.1 - 2), despite the fact that they themselves had voted for war.⁹

⁸ “During Pericles' tenure at the beginning of the war, the events show that below the picture of ostensible orderliness, human nature hides itself, which always remains the same, but is so precarious that it is shattered at each unfavourable occurrence” (Flashar 1969, 50).

⁹ cf. 1.140.1; 2.14.1; 2.60.7; 2.61.2; 3.43.5

They deposed Pericles but “as the multitude is apt to behave” (2.65.4) i.e. inconsistently, impulsively and emotionally, they relented and reinstated him soon afterwards.

They were susceptible to flattery (2.65.8) and their moods often varied between arrogant confidence and unreasonable fear (2.65.9).

The Epitaphios

“Both the first and last speeches are saturated with the contrast between Pericles and the fickle multitude which is incompatible with the Epitaphios” (Flashar 1969, 36).

The picture of the Athenian *δημος* which emerges from Thucydides’ narrative, differs completely from Pericles’ description in the Epitaphios. There is one aspect which is relevant here, namely Pericles’ claim that the Athenians valued discussion and instruction before they undertook anything (2.40.2 – 3). *This claim is contradicted by Pericles’ own actions.* Earlier in the same year he had refrained from calling an Assembly “lest they make mistakes by coming together in a passionate rather than a reasonable state” (2.22.1). Their emotions had been aroused by the invasion of Attica and by Pericles’ refusal to attack the invaders. They felt rage against him, abused him and considered him responsible for their troubles. By preventing discussion, he was able to keep them from making themselves vulnerable to the Lacedaemonians.

The discrepancy between the reality and the ideal picture in the Epitaphios has been explained in various ways¹⁰. A likely possibility is that in the Epitaphios Thucydides makes Pericles describe his own characteristics and not those of the *δημος*, in which case the Epitaphios could be regarded as a further encomium on Pericles.

Pericles whose personality, objectives and rhetoric form the standards against which all the other orators are measured, could exercise control over the Athenians because of his statesmanship and his status in the city as the result of his outstanding personal qualities (2.60.5 – 6 ; 2.65.8 – 9). He restrained the *δημος* for the good of the City by keeping them from extremes (2.65.8), he exercised moderation, he never flattered his audiences but had enough influence over them to go against them, even to the point of anger.

The most important aspect of Pericles’ rhetoric, as described and evaluated by Thucydides, is that he always spoke *δημοσίᾳ* and never *ἰδίᾳ* . The City always took precedence and he used all his considerable rhetorical skills to this end.

¹⁰ See Flashar 1969, 23, 36, 43 and Crane 1996, 223.

Thucydides' view of the objectives and methods of the *post-Periclean politicians* in Athens and the demagogic rhetoric which they employed to influence the *δημος* can be inferred from the encomium on Pericles, either through the praise of Pericles' qualities or by direct criticism of the successors. Their policies were *not based on moderation or the safety of Athens* (cf.2.65.5). They followed policies *injurious to the City because of private ambition and greed, lacking foresight* (in disregarding Pericles' advice to maintain a defensive policy and not to place the City at risk by expansionist schemes) (2.65.6 – 7). Instead of restraining the *δημος*, they led it to *extremes* (2.65.8 - 9). An important aspect of their techniques was to *flatter the audience, seeking power by dishonest means* (2.65.8), which meant that they were being led by the audience instead of leading themselves, eventually turning over public affairs to the people's whims (2.65.10).

These points as well as the other aspects of demagogic rhetoric previously mentioned, are identified and discussed in the speeches in the Mytilenean and Sicilian Debates.

In the Mytilenean Debate, Cleon is shown to be a violent and emotional speaker who is the complete antithesis of Pericles. Diodotus, his opponent, follows Pericles in most respects but he also uses invective, like Cleon, and devious methods which resemble those of Alcibiades, the smooth amoral demagogue who presents a distorted image of Pericles. Alcibiades differs from the other "successors" in that he resembles Pericles in his exceptional ability to control the multitude, but he uses this skill, not to restrain them but to whip up their emotions through manipulation (See below).

Nicias, his opponent, is caught up in the Sicilian scheme against his will but he has no rhetorical ability and is dishonest to boot. He puts forward the right arguments for the wrong reasons, he lapses into abuse and because he does not understand human nature as well as his adversary does, he is unable to engage the Athenians' emotions. He not only fails to persuade them but his efforts end in a result which is the direct opposite of what he wanted.

Alcibiades

Alcibiades stands out from Pericles' other successors as much as Pericles stands out from his contemporaries. He is a second Pericles in that he resembles Pericles in his oratorical and leadership skills and like Pericles he was able to bend the Athenian *δημος* to his will, unlike the others who did not lead, but were led (cf. 2.65.10). He shared Pericles' leadership qualities and was an excellent military commander (6.15.4). One of the most serious mistakes the Athenians

made (cf. 2.65.11), was to relieve him of his command. What happened was that he talked them into an enormous and risky enterprise (cf. 6.1.1) in which only he could have succeeded, so without him it was doomed to failure.

The Encomium on Pericles in 2.65 is sometimes read as a comparison between Pericles and a homogeneous group of successors, but a different reading is suggested here. In 2.65.7 Thucydides accuses the Athenians of not following Pericles' advice but placing the City at risk for the sake of personal ambition and greed. It is suggested that this is a pointed reference to Alcibiades who is not included among the other "successors" described in 2.65.10. In addition to being Pericles' successors they are also the successors of Alcibiades. The conclusion is that the Athenian leadership deteriorated after Alcibiades as it had deteriorated after Pericles

The tragedy of Athens as Thucydides describes it, is that this man who had it in him to be a second Pericles and could have led the City back to the same pre-eminence it had enjoyed in the time of Pericles (cf. 2.65.5), set her on the course to destruction because of a fatal flaw in his nature. Alcibiades was excessively ambitious and also led a dissolute life, so the Athenians distrusted him as much as they had trusted Pericles. They suspected that Alcibiades was aiming at a tyranny and besides, his immoral practices had offended them all (cf. 6.15.4), so at the breath of scandal, he was deposed (cf. 6.27 – 29; 53; 60 - 61). The *δημος* made its worst mistake (cf. 2.65.11) by not distinguishing between Alcibiades the man and Alcibiades the useful and talented military commander.

Alcibiades' speech in the Sicilian Debate (6.14 – 18) echoes Pericles' third speech (2.60 – 64) in several respects, there are a number of parallels between them and of course strong contrasts. The two speeches are compared as a fitting conclusion to the investigation into the rhetoric which typified the decline in the calibre of the Athenian leadership after Pericles.

4. INTERPRETATION AND SECONDARY LITERATURE

"In all that concerns expression, the speeches are essentially the oratorical essays of the historian himself..." (Jebb 1907, 284).

"A Thucydidean speech is a skilful and psychologically realistic representation of a man trying to persuade his hearers and when necessary to deceive them..." (Dover 1970, xii).

In this study Thucydides is used as authority on Thucydides, i.e. the criteria for judging the speeches are drawn from the text itself.¹¹

Thucydides' key to the speeches in the much-debated passage 1.22.1 is taken as the point of departure:

“And regarding the speeches, those made before the war as well as after the war had started, *it was difficult to remember the exact words* both of those I heard myself and of those conveyed to me from other sources.

I have recorded - *in the way I thought each would have said*
-what was especially required in the given situation
-with the closest possible fidelity on my part to the overall sense (or intention)
of what was actually said.”

This explanation seems necessary because Thucydides could not report the speeches verbatim:

(χαλεπον την ακριβειαν αυτην των λεχθέντων διαμνημονευσαι)

It has three components, namely,

- one – what Thucydides thought, i.e. his *opinion* of the speaker (ως δ' αν εδόκουν εμοι έκαστοι ... ειπειν);
- two – what was suitable to the situation, i.e. the *background and outcome* of the speech (... περι των αιει παρόντων τα δέοντα μάλιστ' ...);
- three – the sense or intent (γνώμη) of the speech, i.e. the *purpose* of the speaker (της ξυμπάσης γνώμης των αληθως λεχθέντων).

All three components are considered for every speech, in order to give a “Thucydidean” analysis.¹²

Because Thucydides' *opinion* of the speaker is central to the interpretation, it is essential, in order to avoid speculation, to verify this opinion from a point or points in the text outside each speech (Stahl 1973, 60), preferably where he speaks in his own voice, such as the preamble to the speech, his direct authorial comments elsewhere or the narrative.

¹¹ The approach follows that of Cogan, although this study addresses only a subsection of his topic. “No attempt is here made to determine the veracity of Thucydides' account...and the resulting limitation of the scope of this inquiry is accepted deliberately” (Cogan 1981, ix – x).

¹² Macleod has given a definitive interpretation of Alcibiades' speech (6.16 – 18), in which the argument is based on his interpretation of this passage (Macleod 1983, 68 – 87). Because the purpose is different, the principles applied by Macleod (1983, 68 – 70), are not used here.

For Thucydides the *background and outcome* of the speeches do not admit of any subjective interpretation since they are the fixed points of the framework within which he had to operate.

The *purpose* of the speech usually has two aspects, namely the action the speaker requires from the audience and his underlying motivation. The first is obvious and overt while the second is open to interpretation, which, for Thucydides, introduces another subjective element into the construction of the speech.

The **debate** about this passage, 1.22.1 is concerned to a considerable extent with the balance between Thucydides' interpretations and what was actually said, and also in a wider sense, with the general correctness of Thucydides' record.¹³ Here the speeches are treated neither as "plausible fiction" (Yunis 1996, 62) nor as fact, adapted to suit Thucydides' own purposes (cf Westlake 1968, 220), but as vehicles for the expression of Thucydides' opinion. "The speeches ... are often used to express points of view with which Thucydides agrees, to expose the weaknesses in positions with which he disagrees, to set forth the character and ideas of major actors in the historical drama" (Kagan 1975, 77 – 8).

The identification and examination of the different kinds of demagogic rhetoric in the selected debates and the investigation into the decline of statesmanship in Athens after Pericles, are based strictly on the text alone.

The literature dealing with the speeches in Thucydides, is extensive, although there seems to be no discussion based on a rigorous application of the text alone to the speeches, especially concerning the rhetorical techniques. In the commentaries and interpretative treatises, the authors deal with Thucydides' motives or the political milieu or Athenian tradition when they analyse the speeches. I have treated these with respect, as instruction, but as has been explained, I have tried to use only Thucydides as authority for my analysis and conclusions.

Athenian democracy and its operation, which is the background for the Mytilenean and Sicilian debates, is pertinent to the study. Cleon refers to democracy in his speech, as an unsuitable system for governing an empire (3.37.1). The literature examining Thucydides' own attitude to democracy, which is generally regarded as critical, agrees that it influenced his versions of the

¹³ e.g. Finley 1963; Wilson 1982; Rusten 1986; Hornblower 1987, 45 – 72; Cole 1991; Rood 1998, 46 – 48; Lattimore 1998, 13, quoting Cole 1991.

speeches.¹⁴ Once again it must be stressed that these opinions are noted, as background, but not as the basis on which the study is built.

Topics such as the arrangement of the speeches, Thucydides' political theory, the parallels in Homer and in Greek drama, the echoes of the sophists, the connection with fourth century rhetorical theory and other such aspects have not been taken into account.¹⁵

¹⁴ See especially Wassermann 1956, 41; Yunis 1996, *passim*; Crane 1998, 38, 313; Rood 1998, 149, 293 n 3; Stein-Hölkeskamp 2000, *passim*.

¹⁵ Among the later authors Hornblower has also discussed many of these aspects in detail (Hornblower 2003, 45 – 72) and so have Macleod (1983, 68 - 87), Crane (1998, *passim*), Luginbill (1999, *passim*) and Stahl (2003, 21 – 30).

CHAPTER 2

THE FIRST CONGRESS AT SPARTA

INTRODUCTION

The four speeches recorded by Thucydides may have been heard by the author himself if he was a member of the Athenian delegation. However, according to 1.1, he started his record at the beginning of the War, i.e. at the earliest, some time after the Congress. Scholarly opinion seems to indicate that these four speeches were ‘late’¹ which places their recording at an even greater remove. The actual date of the record of the speeches at the Congress is not relevant here, except as a basis for the assumption that they were written some time after the event. In terms of his policy statement (1.22.1), it seems reasonable to assume that Thucydides included a considerable amount of interpretation within the framework of the facts, which were as follows:

The Corinthians urged Lacedaemon to go to war; the Athenians warned them against it;

King Archidamus opposed war; Sthenelaidas the Ephor, spoke briefly and then forced a division which resulted in Lacedaemon’s decision that Athens had broken the treaty and that they would convene their allies and propose that they go to war against Athens.

It is assumed that Thucydides’ own opinions are reflected in the details of the debate, especially his opinion that the war was set in motion by irrational forces opposed to reason.

“την μὲν γὰρ ἀληθεστάτην πρόφασιν, ἀφανεστάτην δὲ λόγῳ τοὺς Ἀθηναίους ἡγούμαι μεγάλους γιγνομένους καὶ φόβον παρέχοντας Λακεδαιμονίοις ἀναγκασαὶ εἰς τὸ πολεμεῖν” (For I consider the truest cause, the one least openly expressed, was that increasing Athenian greatness and the resulting fear among the Lacedaemonians made war inevitable) (1.23.6); and “the vote of the Lacedaemonians that the treaty had been broken and that they must go to war, was determined, not so much by the speeches of their allies, as by the fear of the Athenians, lest they become too powerful, seeing that the greater part of Hellas was already subject to them” (1.88).

So the definitive factor which governed the rhetoric in this debate, was the Lacedaemonians’ unspoken *fear* of the Athenians and of the expansionism of Athens, although nobody admitted

¹ “The composition and chronology of the four speeches form a major issue of the “Thucydidean question” (Wassermann 1956, 194). “. . . he did not necessarily write any speeches until much later” (Westlake 1968, 90). See also Lattimore 1998, 32 n 1.

openly that they were afraid of Athens. An emotion which is present but not mentioned openly is often more powerful in deciding events than reasonable explanations.² In this case it was so strong that the warning speech of Archidamus, containing a carefully reasoned argument against war, and the speech of the Athenians with its veiled threats against Lacedaemon, were easily overcome by the speeches of the Corinthians and Sthenelaidas who traded on the Lacedaemonians' fear.

At this critical point in the pre-history of the War when the balance of power was so much in Athens' favour that the Lacedaemonian decision was obviously rash and premature (cf Stahl 1973, 60 - 1), they nevertheless voted for war. This is a clear illustration of Thucydides' view of human nature (cf 3.45.3 - 7) viz. that no force or law or any other threat can deter men labouring under strong emotional compulsion, from undertaking hazardous enterprises.

The investigation into demagogic rhetoric in this debate will therefore have to take note of the ways in which the Corinthians and Sthenelaidas, who advocated war, made use of the Lacedaemonians' fear to achieve their purposes. The demagogic techniques used by the Athenians will also be noted. They first wanted to show that there was no reason for the war because Athens had fair title to her empire and then tried to intimidate the Lacedaemonians by discussing the exploits and power of the Athenian navy. Archidamus is placed in the special position of the "warner" who tries to dissuade the audience from their foolishness. He loses the day against Sthenelaidas who adds a clever physical manoeuvre to his fiery speech which is a model of demagogic rhetoric, couched in terms which would appeal to the Lacedaemonians. By using the never-failing combination of demagogic cleverness and the appeal to the urge for action, Sthenelaidas prevails against Archidamus who stands for reason and moderation (cf Wassermann 1953, 194).

The defeat of the statesman by the demagogue emphasises Thucydides' opinion that the Peloponnesian war was caused by irrationality and emotion.

² "That side of human nature not accessible to reason, has a strong influence on politico-historical events" (Stahl 1973, 63)

THE CORINTHIAN SPEECH (1.68.1 - 1.71.7)

1. INTRODUCTION

Thucydides' preamble to the speech reveals his critical attitude towards the Corinthians: Corinth had loudly accused Athens of breaking the treaty (κατεβόων...των Αθηναίων) and of aggression against the rights of the Peloponnese (1.67.1). καταβοάω is an emotional term and immediately points to an emotional rather than a reasoned approach.

The Corinthians first allowed other league members to present their grievances against Athens, skilfully arranging to take the floor last. In this way they could avoid the impression that they were in favour of the war merely for private motives involving their own city rather than the interests of the League as a whole (cf Stahl 2003, 41 – 2). The text adds a further reason namely that they had allowed others to exasperate/anger/irritate/inflame (παροξύναι) the Lacedaemonians (1.67.5) before they began to speak. They therefore also made use of the emotion which the other speakers had already evoked in the audience.

The speech is constructed along two parallel lines: along the first line the Lacedaemonian tradition is unfavourably compared with the Athenian qualities and it is shown that it places the Lacedaemonians at a disadvantage in comparison with the Athenians.³

The second line is not mentioned at all but because of the Lacedaemonian fear of Athenian expansionism (cf 1.24.3) the (unspoken) conclusion is reached that if Lacedaemon does not change her traditional behaviour, she will be overrun by Athens (cf 1.88).

The Corinthians bluntly tell the Lacedaemonians that although their native caution and scepticism about the motives of other states may give them prudence (σωφροσύνη), it creates a lack of understanding (αμαθία) about foreign affairs (1.68.1). They then proceed to enlighten the Lacedaemonians about the international situation as regards Athens. They argue that Lacedaemon's inaction is tantamount to betrayal of their allies, particularly in view of the innovative adventurous spirit of the Athenians. Lacedaemon must act immediately (κατα τάχος) otherwise Corinth and others will seek help elsewhere (1.71.4).

The centre of gravity of the speech lies in the Corinthians' comparison of the national characteristics of the Athenians and the Lacedaemonians; the Athenians' restless innovative character makes them a danger to others, especially the Peloponnesians; the Lacedaemonians'

³ Thucydides himself confirms the correctness of the comparison (1.118; 8.96.5) but in this discussion the accuracy of the description is less important than the Corinthians' purpose.

cautious conservative character makes them shortsighted and dilatory. They fail to see that if they do not change their old-fashioned habits, they will lose the peace they prize. Innovation and speedy action are essential, which is a drastic change of tradition for Lacedaemon.

2. CRITICISM OF LACEDAEMON

A picture of the Lacedaemonian tradition which is traduced here by the Corinthians, can be built up from what they say and from Archidamus' response later on:

- The practices bequeathed to them by the πατέρες (1.85.1) include an *orderly temper* (το εύκοσμον) which manifests itself in their sobriety and phlegmatic temperament. They are neither carried away by flattery, nor provoked by invective into hazardous undertakings (1.84.2). The reckless brilliance of the Athenians, as described by the Corinthians, forms a strong contrast : they are adventurous beyond their power (παρα δύναμιν), daring beyond their judgment (παρα γνώμην) and sanguine in danger (1.70.3).

- The Corinthians taunt the Lacedaemonians: *their caution, conservatism and slowness to act* make them do less than their strength warrants and even make them distrust what their judgment has confirmed, because they think that there will be no end to danger (1.70.3). According to Archidamus the Lacedaemonians' slowness and dilatoriness were great advantages and resulted in “ελευθέραν και ευδοξοτάτην πόλιν δια παντος νεμόμεθα” (we have always inhabited a city, both free and of the highest fame) (1.84.1a).

This quality may well be “μάλιστα σωφροσύνη έμφρων” (real intelligent self-restraint) (1.84.1b), which made them brave in war and wise in counsel (1.84.3). The Corinthians nevertheless decry these traits as *betrayal* of their allies (1.69.1), which is a clever statement touching the Lacedaemonians' national pride because they regarded themselves as the liberators of Hellas.

- The Lacedaemonians' *practical nature* which Archidamus describes as preparation by deeds (1.84.4), is derided by the Corinthians as a lack of invention, which they contrast with the Athenians' innovation and swift execution of plans (1.70.2).

- The Lacedaemonian *respect for tradition* and for the practices bequeathed by the πατέρες, which Archidamus defended as being profitable (1.85.1), the Corinthians called αρχαιοτροπα (old-fashioned) (1.71.2). They contrast these practices unfavourably with those of the Athenians who απο της πολυπειρίας (from doing many things) (1.71.3) have experienced many changes, and argue that in politics as in art, the new must always prevail over the old.

- Liberators of Hellas

This was a point of pride with the Lacedaemonians but the Corinthians maintain that their inaction and complaisance in the face of the Athenians' expansionism makes them unworthy of the title (1.69.1-3).

The comparison between Athens and Lacedaemon has a double effect:

first the Corinthians hope to provoke the Lacedaemonians into action by invective (cf Archidamus 1.84.2). The unfavourable comparison with Athens is supposed to sting their national pride and shame them into declaring war.

The second effect is actually more potent, because through their picture of the Athenians, restless, innovative, acquisitive and forever on the move, they depicted a threat to Lacedaemon and played on the Lacedaemonian fear of Athens, without actually putting that fear into words (a very effective rhetorical ploy). Lacedaemon must agree to innovation, otherwise she will lose her prestige and, more than that, she will lose her freedom.

3. RHETORICAL TECHNIQUES

Every point of tradition is shown to be negated by the characteristics of the Athenians to the detriment of Lacedaemon (see above). The qualities on which the Lacedaemonians had prided themselves, are shown to be disadvantages in the face of the Athenian characteristics. It is a rhetorical technique which would have had a strong impact on the Lacedaemonian audience: if the Lacedaemonian tradition of cautious conservatism is shown to work in favour of Athenian expansionism, the very thing that the Lacedaemonians feared, the demonstration would bring about a feeling of insecurity. If tradition cannot be relied upon, what then? The logical implication is that the Lacedaemonians should act contrary to tradition and out of character, not with deliberation and delay but innovatively and quickly. In order to counter the Athenian threat, they must act like the Athenians. This is the main thrust of the Corinthian speech. The innovation and daring of the Athenians may have been deliberately exaggerated and the description of the Athenian character may not be entirely factual, but it is used entirely as a means of persuasion through fear. The speech ends with a threat: "help us or we seek help elsewhere" (1.71.4 -5). Although it is couched in seemingly reasonable terms, the Corinthian speech has a strong emotional impact⁴.

⁴ "Using the catchword of the liberation of the Greeks without considering the real distribution of power" (Stahl 2003, 53).

THE ATHENIAN SPEECH (1.73.1- 78.5)

1. INTRODUCTION

The Athenians conveyed the greatness of their power through their speech, while they actually used arguments based on their virtue and moderation.

On the surface the Athenian speech is not a direct refutation of the accusations against Athens but a demonstration that these are unjustified, that Athens has fair title to her empire and governs it with more moderation than others. “We are worthy to rule and we rule worthily” (Raubitschek 1973, 34). The Athenians maintain that they are more moderate than especially Lacedaemon would have been. They complain that their moderation itself gives rise to accusations. Less moderation and more force would have been acceptable as the right of the stronger over the weaker. The speech ends with a warning that Lacedaemon must be aware of the vicissitudes of war and that Athens will defend herself if attacked.

As with the Corinthian speech, Thucydides introduces the speech with his own comments:

“They deemed it advisable to appear before the Lacedaemonians, not to make any defence on the charges . . . but to make clear . . . that the Lacedaemonians should not decide it hastily but should take more time to consider it. At the same time they wished to show how great was the power of their own city, reminding the older men of what they knew already and recounting to the younger, things of which they were ignorant, in the belief that under the influence of their arguments the Lacedaemonians would be inclined to peace rather than war” (1.72.1).

The Athenians do not overtly threaten the Lacedaemonians and their allies but concentrate on their own moderation, while speaking about the natural law of the power of the stronger over the weaker and describing how they had obtained their power. This conveyed the message that Athens was powerful and that war could be to the detriment of Lacedaemon, although on the surface the Athenians were all moderation (cf Raubitschek 1973, 35 – 36; 48).

2. DEMAGOGIC RHETORIC

The speech is an arrogant expression of the security of Athens’ position of power. The Athenians told their audience that efforts to liberate Greece would have no chance of success unless they were coupled with power (Stahl 2003, 53), ending on an arrogant note implying that the principle “might is right” was generally accepted and because Athens had the might, the Lacedaemonians should consider and beware.

The speech has a rational and moderate tone, which is simply the veneer over the threat underneath. The Athenians used all possible means to show that Athens was blameless and had acted in a fair and reasonable manner but behind the reasonable manner there was the fact of the naval power of Athens, a fact of which the Lacedaemonians were perfectly aware and which was the basis of their fear of Athens (cf 1.88).⁵

The Athenians' argument ran as follows:

- they made pointed reference to *naval matters* and to the Athenian navy which formed the basis of her power

“ή τε πόλις ημων αξία λόγου εστιν” (our city is worthy of consideration) (1.73.1);

“εσβάντες ες τας ναυς πανδημει εν Σαλαμινι” (We embarked in a body on our ships at Salamis) (1.73.4a). “Their reference to the perseverance of the Athenians who boarded their ships after their city had been taken, and fought on to victory, is nothing more than a veiled threat: should Sparta go to war, the Athenians will once again fight to the last” (Stahl 2003, 46).

They added that if it had not been for the Athenian navy, the Peloponnesians would not have prevailed against the large Persian fleet at Salamis (cf 1.73.4b) because Athens had contributed the largest number of ships, the shrewdest general and the most unfaltering zeal (cf 1.74.1).

Although the Athenians were speaking about events which had happened half a century earlier, and did not mention their current naval power, the inference was clear: because the Athenian naval power was greater than that of the Peloponnesians and their allies, they should take this power into consideration before they acted.

- they presented Athens in a favourable light by *justifying the acquisition of the Empire* and complaining that the resentment against them was unfair.

“και άμα βουλόμενοι περι του παντος λόγου του ες ημας καθεστωτος δηλωσαι ως ούτε απεικότως έχομεν ά κεκτήμεθα” (and at the same time as regards the whole outcry which has been raised against us, we wish to show that we are rightfully in possession of what we have acquired) (1.73.1).

“ημιν δε προσελθόντων των ξυμμάχων και αυτων δεηθέντων ηγεμόνας καταστηναι” (and the allies came to us and of their own accord asked us to assume the leadership) (1.75.2).

⁵ “Fear and self-interest are basic elements in the exercise of power. These forces are here presented as irrational, for the Athenians declare themselves defeated by them - νικηθέντες (1.76.2) since they are related to the natural law that the stronger must rule the weaker” (Immerwahr 1973, 24).

“ἐξ αὐτοῦ δὲ τοῦ ἔργου κατηναγκάσθημεν τὸ πρῶτον προσάγειν αὐτὴν ἐς τόδε” (It was under the compulsion of circumstances that we were first compelled to advance our empire to its present state) (1.75.3).

The Athenians argue that they could not do anything but accept and extend the Empire – they accepted it because it was offered to them and kept and extended it because it would have been dangerous and unwise not to do so. It was in any case only natural to retain their possessions. “No man is to be blamed for making the most of his advantages when it is a question of the gravest dangers.”(1.75.5). They mention the revolts and subjugation of the subject states in a very casual fashion, thus cleverly avoiding a reply to the specific complaints against them.

- they claim that their *rule is more lenient* than that of others and denigrate the complaints as nothing more than the normal reaction to hegemony (1.76.1; 1.77.3; 6).
- they articulate the principles regarding *human nature* about the acquisition and defence of power and the normal response to moderate rule (1.77.4). Here the Athenians’ speech has a hint of the perversion of language which Thucydides describes in 3.82.8, “Those who managed to accomplish something hateful by using honourable arguments, were more highly regarded”. The Athenians maintain that they had simply done what was right in acquiring their empire, glossing over the reasons why they had incurred the hatred of their allies.
- “At any rate, they submitted to more grievous wrongs than these at the hands of the Persians, while our rule is hard to bear, as they think” (1.77.5). This is an admission that the Athenians now regard themselves as rulers⁶ which is the height of arrogance because, at one stroke they demoted the free Greeks in the Empire to the status of slaves.
- they infer *unstated conclusions*: Athens is in the right so Lacedaemon should disregard the complaints and refrain from action.
- they warn Lacedaemon that action equals a breach of the treaty which will be a serious mistake because *Athens will defend herself if attacked* (1.78.1-5).

3. TECHNIQUES

All possible means are used to show that Athens is blameless and has acted in a fair and reasonable manner and in accordance with human nature. The argument is so structured that it points to the conclusion that the complaints against Athens are groundless and are in fact no more

⁶ They have actually arrogated to themselves, the role which the Persians had before.

than the usual expressions of dissatisfaction from disgruntled ungrateful subjects who complain but do not appreciate their good fortune in being ruled by such benevolent masters.

The complaints are thus nullified, without answering them and the Lacedaemonians are told that they would be foolish if they took them seriously. Furthermore, since Athens is blameless, action by Lacedaemon would contravene the terms of the treaty, *which means that they have turned the accusations around and have put the Lacedaemonians in the wrong.*

The Athenians then self-righteously invoke the gods as witnesses that they would be justified in retaliating against those “who lead the way” (1.78.5) *which effectively makes Lacedaemon the aggressor and justifies the Athenians.*

The harangue is underpinned by hints about Athens’ superiority at sea and the risks to which Lacedaemon would be exposed if she should act against Athens, *which is a veiled threat intended to discourage the Lacedaemonians and keep them from initiating hostilities against Athens.*

Although the Athenians’ spokesman is not identified, Thucydides depicts him as a consummate demagogue who is as skilled as Alcibiades. Part of this speech parallels the first part of Alcibiades’ speech in the Sicilian debate: in both cases the accusations against the speaker (city) are deflected and it is shown that the points of complaint are actually virtues (cf.6.16).

ARCHIDAMUS' SPEECH (1.80 - 85)

1. INTRODUCTION

Archidamus rose to address the Spartan assembly when the decision for a speedy war against Athens had already been taken. The majority had agreed that “ἀδικεῖν τε τοὺς Ἀθηναίους ἤδη καὶ πολεμητέα εἶναι ἐν τάχει ... παρελθὼν **δε Ἀρχίδαμος**” (that the Athenians had already done wrong and that they must go to war without delay ...*but Archidamus came forward...*) (1.79.2). Archidamus' speech forms a contrast with the other speeches. He speaks against the popular feeling and tries to persuade the Spartan assembly to change its mind, unsuccessfully as it appears. When Sthenelaidas speaks in accordance with the general mood of the assembly and confirms his speech by some brisk action, with the result that “καὶ πολλῶ πλείους ἐγένοντο οἱ ἐδόκουν αἰ σπονδαὶ λελύσθαι” (those who thought that the treaty had been broken were in a large majority) (1.87.4).

The upshot of the debate was that in the opinion of the Lacedaemonian assembly the Athenians were doing wrong and therefore the war would be undertaken after further consultation with the whole body of the Peloponnesian allies (1.87.4), that is, not immediately, but in any case much sooner than Archidamus had advised.

Thucydides adds the comment (1.88) that the decision of the Spartan assembly was determined mostly by fear of the power of the Athenians who had already subjected most of Hellas to themselves. Archidamus' speech was an effort to stop this current of fear. He was speaking before an emotionally charged meeting and remonstrated with them, trying by means of rational argument to persuade them to postpone any belligerent action against Athens, which he deemed unwise.

Thucydides introduces Archidamus as:

“... Ἀρχίδαμος ὁ βασιλεὺς αὐτῶν ἀνηρ καὶ ζῦνετος δοκῶν εἶναι καὶ σώφρων...” (...Archidamus their king, a man reputed to be both sagacious and prudent...) (1.79.2).

In his interpretation of “τὰ δέοντα” i.e. of what he thought Archidamus would have said under the circumstances (cf 1.22.1), it is therefore to be expected that Thucydides will emphasise Archidamus' ζῦνεσις and his σωφροσύνη. His perceptive and prudent advice to the Lacedaemonians recorded in the speech, confirms Thucydides' description.

There is some divergence in scholarly opinion about Archidamus' statesmanship and his role in the Peloponnesian war⁷. One position taken is that Archidamus' second speech (2.11) and his subsequent actions in the Archidamian war do not tally with the picture of "statesmanship of an almost Periclean quality" which emerges from the first speech (cf Westlake 1968, 125). On the other hand it is held that the text demonstrates an integration between Archidamus' character and his station in life (cf Wassermann 1953, 194).

I have also noted the opinion that because the Lacedaemonians were meeting in conclave (1.79.1), Thucydides might have had some difficulty in obtaining information about the speeches and might have used interpretation more freely than in other cases (Westlake 1968, 124).⁸

In a less extreme interpretation, the following is suggested: "The clear-cut and distinct words ... bear the imprint of Thucydides' sophistic and Athenian mind and, as with most of Thucydides' speeches, words really spoken are blended with those which in the historian's opinion the King might have said to give the most impressive picture of his character and attitude" (Wassermann 1953, 195).

The reason for these opinions and probably for most of the debate about Archidamus is the anomaly between his speech and the Lacedaemonians' reaction to the speech. It is surprising that they voted for hostile action against Athens after hearing such a well-reasoned and statesmanlike speech in which their conservative and prudent qualities were explained and praised. The real difficulty however, is not created by the *outcome* of the speech, which is historical fact, but *by the speech itself*.

For this investigation into rhetoric and the identification of demagogic rhetoric in the History, it is postulated that Archidamus' speech has a *specific function in the debate at Sparta* and that Thucydides used it to *make a very important point about the war* and so he included a great deal of "interpretation" in the speech. It is this aspect which will be investigated here, excluding the other arguments about the "Thucydidean question"⁹ and Archidamus' subsequent actions.

Before defining the function and purpose of the speech, it is however necessary to consider the speech itself.

⁷ cf Wassermann 1953, 193 – 7; 1964, 289 – 91; Westlake 1968, 122 – 5; Bloedow 1981, 129 – 143; 1983, 27 – 49; Stahl 2003, *passim*.

⁸ Westlake gives a detailed argument corroborating his assumption with an analysis of the speech. (Westlake 1968, 122 – 125).

⁹ The "Thucydidean question" deals with the composition and chronology of the four speeches.

2. CONTENTS OF THE SPEECH

Archidamus' speech has two main parts:

In the first part (1.80.1 – 83.3) he discusses the logistical inferiority of Lacedaemon in comparison with Athens. He proposes that they should avoid an immediate confrontation and rather lay complaints before the Athenians on behalf of the Lacedaemonian allies. He suggests that in the interim, Lacedaemon should strengthen her own position through winning more allies, both Greek and barbarian and obtain additional resources from outside, while developing her resources at home.

In the second part of the speech (1.84 - 85) Archidamus discusses the character of Lacedaemon, answering the accusations and criticism of the Corinthians (see discussion under the Corinthian speech, pp 17 - 18).

He concludes the speech by reiterating his proposal (1.85.2), which says in essence, “send envoys but still prepare for war”.

In the first part of the speech Archidamus puts forward a carefully reasoned and logical argument based on an acute analysis of the current military situation in Lacedaemon and Athens. His analysis is echoed in Pericles' first speech (1.140 -144) where Pericles discusses the resources of both sides, pointing out Athens' advantages.¹⁰ The parallels with Pericles' speech are certainly deliberate, showing that Archidamus' assessment of the situation was correct and that the Lacedaemonians would be undertaking a war against overwhelming odds. The impression is that he hoped to bring them to their senses by showing them the true situation. He is the typical “wise warner”, whose warnings always go unheeded, and yet, with such a cogent argument, which was so well presented, there seems to be no logical reason why it should have failed.

3. THE ANOMALY

The quality of Archidamus' speech shows that he can be regarded as Pericles' counterpart in Lacedaemon. He represents the voice of reason, in a delivery which is free of emotion and comes to a logical conclusion, opposing war.

Despite this the Lacedaemonians go against his counsels, in a decision which seems completely illogical, and more so in the light of the second part of his speech. Here he not only answered the Corinthians' criticism but also praised the Lacedaemonian character, emphasising their orderly

¹⁰ See Bloedow's detailed comparison of the two speeches. (Bloedow 1981, 131 – 135)

nature, prudence and wisdom. “πολεμικοί τε και εὐβουλοὶ δια το εὐκοσμον γιγνόμεθα” (we are both warlike and wise because of our orderly temper) (1.84.3)¹¹.

It is strange that this reminder and appreciation of their character still did not deter the Lacedaemonians from going ahead with the hostile move against Athens, without any further attempt at arbitration and that they disregarded Archidamus’ speech so completely, acting out of character.

Thucydides gives the reason for their uncharacteristic behaviour in his comment (1.88): they decided to go to war, not so much because the allies had convinced them, and (my interpretation) neither were they deterred by Archidamus’ warnings, but they went to war because of fear. They were afraid of the Athenians because of the threat posed by Athenian expansionism. “φοβούμενοι τοὺς Ἀθηναίους μη ἐπι μείζον δυνήθωσιν” (because they feared the Athenians lest they become still more powerful) and this fear was the deciding factor in their decision. They were simply acting in accordance with human nature. Thucydides held that when human nature is powerfully driven to do something, it is not deterred by any danger (cf 3.45.7), which explains the Lacedaemonians’ irrational behaviour.

This brings us back to Archidamus’ speech and to its function, first in the debate and then as an indication of Thucydides’ view about the war. Why was it presented as a masterpiece of reasonable rhetoric in this particular debate? The last section of this chapter will attempt to formulate an explanation.

4. SOME OTHER RELEVANT ASPECTS OF ARCHIDAMUS’ SPEECH

4.1 Demagogic rhetoric

Archidamus identifies demagogic rhetoric by using the term “ἐπαρῆν” (to carry away).

He exhorts the Lacedaemonians not to be carried away by the eloquence of their allies (1.83.3) and then claims afterwards that their outstanding characteristic is σωφροσύνη ἔμφρων (intelligent self-control) which makes them impervious to emotional manipulation. According to Archidamus they are not carried away by flattery if men are trying to goad them through praise into dangerous enterprises against their better judgment and neither are they provoked to action by invective (1.84.2). Archidamus is primarily reacting against the provocation by the Corinthians but in the process he defines two demagogic techniques, namely flattery and invective.

¹¹ The description of the Lacedaemonian character complements Pericles’ description of the Athenians in the Epitaphios (2.36 - 41).

It is ironic that the Lacedaemonians *were carried away* to act irrationally, not by the speeches of their allies however, but by one of their ephors. They were not, after all, impervious to emotional manipulation and consequently acted out of character.

4.2 Old and young

Archidamus opens his speech by arguing against war, in the form of an appeal to his peers, i.e. the older men who were not eager for war, unlike the younger men who had had no experience of war (1.80.1).

They should know – unlike most men – that war was not good and safe.¹² By appealing to the older experienced men in his audience, Archidamus differentiates between old and young, which would not have sat well with the younger members of his audience. He spoke to the older generation, while it was the younger generation who needed to take his advice (cf Wassermann 1953, 195). He does not identify with the whole audience and makes no appeal here at the outset to their common identity, the “we” which is exploited in Sthenelaidas’ speech. Sthenelaidas spoke for both old and young.

We have a parallel here with the Sicilian debate where Nicias, who was also opposing war, took a much stronger line against young men, both in alleging that Alcibiades was too young to command and by opposing the younger men directly.

The distinction between old and young is important for the interpretation of Archidamus’ speech and also as a possible explanation why he was not successful in persuading the Lacedaemonians to avoid war.

Bloedow suggests that the νεώτεροι were in the majority in the Lacedaemonian assembly and attributes the irrational decision of the Lacedaemonians to their enthusiasm about war because they had had no experience of it (Bloedow 1981, 140 - 3). This is possible but by no means certain, and does not affect the irrationality of the assembly’s decision, which is the factor pertinent to the role of demagogic rhetoric in the debate.

4.3 Devastation of Attica

Archidamus warned the Lacedaemonians that the war would not end speedily if they ravaged Athenian territory because of the Athenians’ high-spirited nature (1.81.6). He further argues that if the Lacedaemonians proceed with both diplomacy and military preparation over two or three

¹² Note the echo in Pericles’ third speech, “...και γαρ ος μεν αίρεσις γεγένηται...πολλη άνοια πολεμησαι...” (for to those who have a choice, going to war is a great folly...) (2.61.1).

years, the Athenians would be more inclined to yield because they would be deliberating about unravaged land (1.82.3). In that sense Lacedaemon could use the Athenian land as hostage, which would be worth more if it was not damaged.

He points out that devastation of Athenian land would drive the Athenians to desperation (ἐξ ἀπόνοιαν) and make them more intractable (ἀληπτοτέρους) as enemies (1.82.4).

There is a thematic echo in Diodotus' speech in the Mytilenean debate. He claimed that extreme punishment of the Mytileneans would have a negative effect on the other Athenian allies (ἀνέλπιστον καταστήσαι τοὺς ἀποστασίῳ) (place the rebels in a hopeless position) because it would be useless for rebels to repent if they were going to be subjected to the death sentence in any case and so they would hold out to the last, which would not benefit Athens at all (3.46.1).

Both these statements refer to the dominance of emotion over reason in human nature and where in Diodotus' case the extreme measures were averted, Archidamus could not prevail, because the emotional compulsion which affected the Lacedaemonians, was stronger than the reason in his arguments.

4.4 Practical realism

In his character sketch of the Lacedaemonians, Archidamus described them as “πολεμικοὶ τε καὶ εὐβουλοὶ” (brave in war and wise in counsel) (1.84.3). He said that the Lacedaemonians were wise in counsel because of their education, equating wisdom with respect for the laws. They were not given excess knowledge which leads to contempt for the laws and their education was so severe that it made them σωφρονέστερους (too prudent) to disobey the laws. He continued by saying that they were not too knowledgeable about useless matters, that theoretical knowledge leads to specious criticism of enemy plans, which in turn leads to failure in practice. In these statements he disparaged the Athenians' theoretical learning and particularly their taste for elegant rhetoric.

Cleon echoes this approach in his speech in the Mytilenean debate, which was intended to appeal to the emotions, when he praises the ἀμαθία (ignorance) of the unsophisticated common people combined with σωφροσύνη (prudence) as the mainstay of a stable community. He compares this favourably with δεξιότης (cleverness) which he identifies with ἀκολασία (intemperance) (3.37.3). So both Archidamus and Cleon express suspicion of intellectualism, which, in their respective opinions leads to lack of respect for the laws.

The verbal echo seems to have no discernible purpose other than possibly indicating that the Athenian φαυλότεροι resembled the Lacedaemonians in their feelings about intellectuals and intellectualism.

There is a parallel irony between the two speeches: Cleon the outspoken anti-intellectual and opponent of fine rhetoric used highly sophisticated rhetorical methods. Archidamus praised the Lacedaemonians' lack of intellectual education, which he equated with wisdom in counsel, while delivering a speech which is a model of logical argument and elegant rhetoric, structured on the very pattern for which he criticised the Athenians.

5. THE FUNCTION OF ARCHIDAMUS' SPEECH IN THE DEBATE AND IN THE HISTORY AS A WHOLE

When Archidamus addressed them, the majority of the Lacedaemonians were already of the opinion that the Athenians were guilty of injustice and that they must go to war without delay (1.79.2). He stands for the voice of reason and moderation in contrast to the other speakers at the congress who all used emotion in order to gain their points.

His speech is not only a model of good rhetoric¹³ but it also demonstrates his statesmanship: he understood Lacedaemon's position vis a vis Athens very well, knowing that they were *απαράσκευοι* (unprepared) (1.80.3; 84.1), he clearly explained this understanding in his speech, which also exemplifies his patriotism and integrity (cf 2.60.5 - 6).

In spite of all this, his arguments were demolished by Sthenelaidas' brusque action. I postulate that the contrast between the quality of Archidamus' speech and the outcome of the debate is deliberate because Thucydides wanted to make the point that no reason or danger can deter people who are under emotional compulsion. The compulsion at this debate was fear of the Athenians, which was emphasised by Sthenelaidas, "do not permit the Athenians to become too great" (1.86.5).

The function of Archidamus' speech in the debate is to show how completely reason was defeated by passion.

The speech goes further however, and plays a role in the History as a whole. Archidamus upholds the ideal of responsible leadership but he is faced with the danger of the defeat of

¹³ "The good citizen ought not to frighten away opposing speakers but should be seen on an impartial basis to be the better speaker" (Diodotus's speech in the Mytilenean debate) (3.42.5).

political reason by mass emotions (cf Wassermann 1953, 199, quoting J de Romilly, *Thucydide et l'imperialisme Athenien*, 1947, 272 – 7).

The defeat of Archidamus, despite his lucid exposition of Lacedaemon's situation and of the potential results of precipitate action can be construed as Thucydides' statement that activism and emotionalism would lead to the rise of the demagogue over the statesman, which is one of the tragic main themes of the History.

The structure and content of this speech, whether genuine or not, seem to emphasise that the war “notable beyond all previous wars ” (1.1.) was the result of irrational decisions by the parties involved. Archidamus the prudent advisor was finally simply outmanoeuvred by the speakers who had excited emotion.

The main function of Archidamus' speech in the History is therefore to emphasise that the war was set in motion by irrational forces.

STHENELAIDAS' SPEECH (1.86.1 - 1.86.5)

1. RESPONSE TO THE ATHENIAN SPEECH

Sthenelaidas' reaction to the Athenians is very shrewd, delivered in a manner calculated to appeal to the Lacedaemonians. He immediately picks up the Athenians' "long" speech, saying "οὐ γινώσκω" (1.86.1), which can be interpreted as "it makes no sense to me" (not "I do not understand - he understood very well): although they praised themselves, they did not answer the accusations against them.

He makes a second point: their conduct in the Median War, which the Athenians cited in their own favour, makes them worthy of double punishment if it is compared with their current "bad" conduct because they have come, not from a neutral but from a morally high position. (This does not follow logically, but is an effective emotional appeal).

He then turns to Lacedaemon : although Athens has changed, Lacedaemon has not. This implies that, while Athens is unrighteous, Lacedaemon is virtuous. In persuading an audience to take action against someone else, it is important to take the moral high ground and to vilify the other party, so that the action has the stamp of righteousness (cf 3.82.4), which is what Sthenelaidas is doing here.

2. RESPONSE TO ARCHIDAMUS

Sthenelaidas twisted the meaning of Archidamus' words to justify his own proposals. His speech shows similarities with the use of words in the Corcyrean stasis, when meaning was perverted to justify the actions of the speaker.¹⁴

"...Reckless audacity was called courageous commitment, hesitation while looking to the future was high-styled cowardice, prudence was a cloak for unmanliness..., precipitate action was accounted manly..." (3.82.4). Sthenelaidas favours reckless and precipitate action himself and implies that Archidamus' prudent consideration for the future was not only unmanly but akin to treachery towards their allies and towards Lacedaemon. His speech is calculated to dispel the effect of Archidamus' prudent speech, responding to Archidamus in an insulting manner. He does not mention Archidamus' name, but puts a negative interpretation on the salient points in

¹⁴ The disparity between λόγος and ἔργον, which is demonstrated here, has not been pursued in this study, which has concentrated on the λόγοι.

Archidamus' speech, implying that all the proposals emanate from a callous disregard for Lacedaemon's allies and that they are a disgrace to Sparta.

The central part of the speech (1.86.2 – 5) consists of vituperation and an expression of contempt for Archidamus.

Sthenelaidas' words seem to have been chosen deliberately to disparage Archidamus' counsel and to discredit him while the tone of the speech is sarcastic, hectoring and rude, pitched at an emotional level apparently calculated to take advantage of the Lacedaemonian fear of Athens. “και τους ξυμμάχους, ην σωφρονωμεν ου περιοψόμεθα αδικουμένους” (if we are prudent, we shall not permit our allies to be wronged) (1.86.2a).

Archidamus had painstakingly explained that although the Lacedaemonian allies were being wronged, precipitate action would not be σώφρον, because the Lacedaemonians were *απαρασκευοι* (unprepared). He had suggested that the case of the allies be taken up by sending envoys to Athens, because the Athenians were willing to accept arbitration.¹⁵

Sthenelaidas disregards the possibility of redress for the allies through arbitration, insisting that real prudence lay in the opposite action to that which Archidamus had suggested. This is a demagogic manoeuvre which refuses to admit any alternatives to one's own proposal and puts the opposing speaker in the wrong.

“ουδε μελλήσομεν τιμωρειν οι δ ουκέτι μέλλουσι κακως πάσχειν” (neither should we postpone avenging - their wrongs – since they can no longer put off suffering them). (1.86.2b).

Sthenelaidas traduces Archidamus' proposal that retaliatory action against Athens be postponed, suggesting that it would be callous and unfeeling towards the allies, once again disregarding Archidamus' alternative to war.

“Others indeed may have money and ships and horses, ημιν δε ξύμμαχοι αγαθοί (but we have good allies) and they must not be delivered over to the Athenians” (1.86.3). This statement responds to Archidamus' description of the Athenian resources (1.80.3) which far exceeded those of Lacedaemon. Sthenelaidas claims that the allies are Lacedaemon's biggest asset, that they are worth more than the Athenians' resources and insinuates that Archidamus is proposing to hand them over to Athens, which almost brands him as a traitor to Lacedaemon.

Sthenelaidas continues in the same vein, gainsaying Archidamus:

¹⁵See the Athenian speech 1.78.4

Lacedaemon must not seek redress “δίκαις και λόγοις μη λόγω και αυτους βλαπτομένους” (through legal process and words) when it is not in word that we *ourselves* are being harmed” (1.86.3a) but they must take vengeance speedily and with all their might.

The injury to the allies is changed in midstream into an injury to Lacedaemon herself, which is a typical demagogic manoeuvre¹⁶ increasing the fear of the Lacedaemonians and emphasising that Sthenelaidas’ suggestion that they should act “εν τάχει και παντι σθένει” (speedily and with all our might) (1.86.3b) is the only solution.

The next section is more directly insulting to Archidamus: “let no man tell us that it befits us to deliberate when we are being wronged” (1.86.4). Sthenelaidas is telling the Lacedaemonians that while they are being harmed, Archidamus is standing by, proposing only talk and no action, which not only puts Archidamus in the wrong but turns him into a villain.

3. THE FINAL EXHORTATION (1.86.5)

“vote for the war αξίως της Σπάρτης (as beseems the dignity of Sparta)¹⁷ implies that Archidamus is working against the interests of the country. It is a distorted version of Pericles’ call to the Athenians to put the interests of the state before their own (cf 2.60.4).

“ μήτε τους Αθηναίους εατε μείζους γίγνεσθαι” (do not allow the Athenians to become too great). This is the most powerful argument of all, which plays on the underlying fear which motivated all the discussions and caused the war.

“The vote of the Lacedaemonians that the treaty had been broken and that they must go to war was determined, not so much by the influence of the speeches of their allies, as by the fear of the Athenians, lest they become too powerful, seeing that the greater part of Hellas was already subject to them.” (1.88)

“μήτε τους ξυμμάχους καταπροδιδωμεν” (Do not leave the allies in the lurch) appeals to the honour of the Lacedaemonians and also to ωφελία (usefulness, advantage);

“Let us advance with the gods against the wrongdoer” assumes the moral high ground.

The speech proper ends here, but Sthenelaidas’ subsequent actions continue his manipulation of the Lacedaemonians¹⁸. By pretending that he cannot distinguish between the βοήν for and against

¹⁶ Alcibiades executed the same manoeuvre by turning around Nicias’ allegations that he - Alcibiades - was harming the state and implied that it was actually Nicias who was harming the state. (See discussion under Alcibiades, 5 - 6).

¹⁷ The “do this for our fatherland” call has had many echoes in the centuries since 432 BCE.

¹⁸ A trick to expose those opposed to war as cowards, with the result that Sparta makes an unreasonable decision. (cf Stahl 2003, 56).

his proposal, he forces the groups to separate and shames a large enough number of those opposed to the proposal into joining the others so that he obtains a large majority, agreeing that “Athens had broken the treaty and are doing wrong” (1.87.2)¹⁹

Thucydides indicates that he thinks that Sthenelaidas’ action was manipulative: “...wishing to make them more eager for the war by a clear demonstration of their sentiment...” (1.87.2).

4. STHENELAIDAS’ TECHNIQUE

Sthenelaidas’ technique consisted of making the Lacedaemonians feel threatened, branding Athens as the wrongdoer, insisting that war was the only honourable course to help their allies and finally using a type of physical intimidation to force a decision.

Athens is depicted as a threat to Lacedaemon: “it is not in word that we ourselves are being harmed” (1.86.3a); “do not let Athens become too great” (1.86.5).

The Lacedaemonians’ pride is fed by “ἡμεῖς δε ὁμοιοι και τότε και νυν εσμεν” (We are the same now as we were then) (1.86.2) and “αξιῶς της Σπάρτης” (worthy of Sparta) (1.86.5). Sthenelaidas links their pride to succouring the allies by declaring war on Athens.

He refers to the verbose Athenians and then makes a short forceful speech himself. The Lacedaemonian audience would have appreciated his “laconic” style.

He emphasises action and decries words (1.86.3 - 4) which would also have struck a sympathetic chord.

He sways them by taking the moral high ground: righteous indignation is very persuasive. He does not argue the merits of the case, but immediately states that the Athenians have done wrong; Lacedaemon has not changed, she is being harmed and she is therefore in a morally superior position. Hence attacking Athens is equated with going “επι τους αδικουντας” (against the wrongdoer) (1.86.5). It would be morally right to take aggressive action because Athens was the “wrongdoer”.

It is a clever move to contrast the ships, money and horses of the Athenians with the good allies of Lacedaemon and then to place the emphasis in the rest of his speech on the allies; he implies that it would be dishonourable not to act against Athens. “μήτε τους ξυμμάχους

¹⁹ Sthenelaidas evidently calculated that many waverers, and even some favouring the delaying tactics of Archidamus, would lack the courage to allow themselves to be seen voting against the predictably predominant view that the peace had been broken. Presumably Thucydides has chosen to give a full account of this seemingly rather trivial incident to suggest that since the ephor is seen to have been capable of subterfuge, the blunt forthrightness of his speech is to be interpreted as a mere pose adopted because it was the most effective method of securing his goal (cf Westlake 1968, 100).

καταπροδιδωμεν” (let us not prove false to our allies) (1.86.5b),²⁰ but combines it with self-interest. It not only affects the honour of Sparta if the allies are abandoned to the Athenians but if that happens, Lacedaemon will lose the only thing which places her logistically on a par with Athens.

5.CONCLUSION

There has been some debate²¹ about Sthenelaidas’ speech, even including an enumeration of the rhetorical figures in the speech (Allison 1984, 9 – 16). However, the substance of the debate does not affect the conclusion reached here, namely that the speeches of Archidamus and Sthenelaidas confirm Thucydides’ opinion that it was the victory of emotion over reason which precipitated the Peloponnesian war.

Human nature, even when the causes that will affect future events, are known, will allow its decisions to be determined by emotional judgments (cf. Stahl 2003, 60).

²⁰ Archidamus had another code of honour: “...we can no longer conclude an honourable peace, especially if it is believed that we rather than they, began the quarrel...” (1.81.5); “it is not lawful to proceed forthwith against one who offers arbitration as though against a wrong-doer” (1.85.2).

²¹ Wassermann 1981, 129 – 143; Bloedow 1987, 60 – 66; Stahl 2003, *passim*.



CHAPTER 3

THE MYTILENEAN DEBATE

INTRODUCTION

The Mytilenean Debate is in essence an *αγών* about the Athenian Empire and the way it should be managed, expressed in specifics as the appropriate action towards a seceding ally (cf. Hornblower 2003, 429). Cleon and Diodotus represent two vastly different viewpoints: Cleon insists that all the Mytileneans should be killed, commons and aristocracy alike and that the women and children should be enslaved. Diodotus on the other hand, recommends that only the guilty should suffer and that, as potential allies of Athens, the commons in particular should be spared.

Both speakers claim that their own recommendations would be to the advantage of Athens and that the other alternative would be disastrous.

The debate also highlights the character of the Athenians and of their leaders, particularly Cleon and Diodotus. At the first congress at Sparta the Corinthian speakers had shown, that amongst other qualities, the Athenian character combined intellect and reason with an equally strong emotional dynamism (cf Wassermann 1956, 32; 35) which led to their activism.

“οι μὲν γε νεωτεροποιοι και επινοησαι οξει και επιτελέσαι έργω α αν γνωσιν” (For they are given to innovation and quick to form plans and to put their decisions into execution)(1.70.2).

“τη δε γνώμη οικειοτάτη ες το πράσσειν τι υπερ αυτης” (to use their minds as wholly their own) (1.70.6). According to the Encomium (2.65.8) Pericles was able to control the Athenians because he combined his own dynamism with the discipline of moderation and reason.

The Mytilenean debate is the first full scale example of the degenerative process in the Athenian leadership, illustrating the failures of a democracy lacking a leadership which is both dynamic and self-restraining (cf Wassermann 1956, 40 - 41). It shows a *δημος* in constant danger of being carried away by its own undisciplined energy and political leaders unable to control them through superior intelligence, steadiness and willpower. Cleon had the dynamism but lacked discipline while Diodotus stood for moderation but lacked the dynamism, which was why Cleon could deprive him of so much of his support that he almost lost the debate.



Several other important themes are handled in the debate, including the contrast between reason and passion, the relationship between the Athenian leaders and the people, the rise of anti-intellectualism and power politics in the Empire.¹ Only the themes pertinent to the speakers' rhetorical methods will be considered here, keeping the purpose of the study in mind, namely the identification and description of the rhetorical aspects of the speeches which illustrate the decline in the quality of the Athenian leadership after Pericles.

The Mytileneans had had a privileged position within the Athenian Empire: they were nominally free, but were nevertheless dissatisfied and restive because they resented the way in which the Athenians used their power to subjugate the Hellenes, and felt that sooner or later Mytilene too would be reduced. In a speech at Olympia (3.9 – 14) their envoys explained their grievances. They had long contemplated secession; even before the beginning of the Peloponnesian War they had approached Sparta for help, but without success (3.13).

In the confrontation with Athens, Mytilene was forced to capitulate. Paches, the Athenian commander, sent all the persons who had been involved in the revolt, to Athens to learn the Athenians' pleasure regarding them. Salaethus, a Spartan who had been encouraging the Mytileneans and assuring them of Spartan help (3.25; 3.35) was put to death without further ado and an assembly was then called to decide the fate of the other prisoners (3.36.1 – 2). The assembly took an emotional decision. “και υπο οργης εδοξεν” (and in anger they decided (3.36.2). They were particularly incensed because the Mytileneans had revolted from a privileged position and the help received from Sparta indicated that the revolt had not been undertaken on the impulse of the moment, but had long been contemplated (3.36.2). In the emotionally charged atmosphere and on the proposal of Cleon, the Assembly voted to put to death not only the prisoners at Athens, but also the whole adult male population of Mytilene and to enslave the women and children. They promptly sent off a trireme to Mytilene to instruct Paches to carry out the decision without delay (3.36.3).

Here the Athenian Assembly is acting as an incensed *όχλος* (mob), probably under the influence of Cleon's rhetoric. It is noteworthy that they did not wait in order to reflect, but

¹ cf Wassermann 1956, 27 – 41; Andrewes 1962, 64 - 85; Westlake 1968, 60 - 65; De Romilly 1977, 61 – 2; Crane 1996, 231 – 235; Rood 1998, 145 – 149.



acted precipitously, seemingly sending off the trireme to Mytilene on the same day.² It immediately presents a stark contrast with the debates conducted while Pericles was alive, in which he controlled the Assembly's emotions and kept them from extremes (2.65.9). The two speeches in the Mytilenean Debate will be discussed as examples of the deterioration in the calibre of the Athenian leadership after Pericles, but even before the debate, the behaviour of the *δημος* is indicative of this decline. It appears that the more moderate leadership (Diodotus) was not strong enough to keep the Assembly from rash action while Cleon used their emotions to spur them on to violent action which would satisfy his own violent nature (3.36.6).

By the next day the Athenians had had a change of mind: the majority now regarded the proposed action as “*ὤμιον ... και μέγα*” (savage and drastic) and so the debate was re-opened (3.36.4 – 6a). After their angry outburst the Athenians had gone home and had a chance to think, which sobered them.³ The change of mind provides an insight into the mechanics of mob behaviour: while the Athenians were together, they were carried away by emotion to act in a savage manner which was not in the Athenian tradition⁴, at least not in the tradition of *αρετή* praised by Pericles in the *Epitaphios* (2.37.3), but after the mob had dispersed, its influence was dissipated.

The emotional and impetuous audience which Cleon and Diodotus tried to influence, did everything in a hurry. The first trireme was sent immediately, carrying a message to Paches to dispose of the Mytileneans “*κατα τάχος*” (quickly) (3.36.3); “they immediately changed their minds” (3.36.4); “an assembly was immediately convened” (3.36.6) and at the end of the debate “they immediately sent another trireme in haste” (*εὐθύς ... κατα σπουδήν*) (3.49.2).

Cleon who claimed that he had not changed his mind after the first debate (3.38.1), spoke in favour of the first decision and his speech is an effort to rekindle the Athenians' anger and impetuosity. He tries to goad them into anger against the Mytileneans (3.39.1 – 5) and to persuade them to speedy action. “I am surprised at those who ... have inserted a lapse of time, since as time passes the victim pursues the offender with a less keen anger” (3.38.1) and

² Since a second trireme had to be sent on the following day (3.49.2), the first ship must have left very soon after the vote had been taken on the first day.

³ “The Athenians' shift of feeling over Mytilene was due to a rational awareness of an emotional abhorrence” (Rood 1998, 147).

⁴ A tradition which was finally discarded at Melos some time later.



“Keep as close as you can to your state of mind when you were suffering ... repay them now...” (3.40.7).

Diodotus, on the other hand, opposed the emotional impetuous mood of the Assembly and criticised Cleon for encouraging it. “I think there are two things, particularly opposed to good policy, haste and anger, because anger tends to be accompanied by foolishness (*ανοΐα*) and haste by uncouthness (*απαιδευσία*) and lack of judgment (*βραχύτητος γνώμης*) (3.42.1).

Although Cleon copies Pericles in several respects, he is a demagogue, using anger, fear and slander as his rhetorical tools as well as fine-sounding gnomes, unargued assumptions, slander of his opponents and blatant flattery of the less intellectual part of his audience. The speech of Diodotus (3.42 – 48), complements Cleon’s speech, contradicting, criticising and commenting on Cleon’s techniques and statements. Cleon almost wins the day: he persuaded so many of the majority who were in favour of reconsideration before the debate, that the votes at the end were almost equal.

While Diodotus competes with Cleon in a rational unemotional way, his speech also includes some demagogic aspects. It will be argued that these demagogic manoeuvres by both speakers can be interpreted as Thucydides’ comment on the Athenian leaders, “οἱ... ὕστερον”, the successors of Pericles whom Thucydides had condemned in his Encomium (2.65.10).

The Mytilenean Debate can thus be seen as a paradigm of the degenerative process in Athenian politics, which eventually led to the Sicilian disaster and its aftermath.



CLEON

1. THE CHARACTER OF CLEON

In the preamble to Cleon's speech in the Mytilenean Debate Thucydides describes him very briefly:

“Cleon the son of Cleaenetus who had carried the previous motion to put the Mytileneans to death, and who was in general the most violent of the citizens (βιαίωτατος) and at that time by far the most successful at persuading (πιθανώτατος) the people ...” (3.36.6). A more complete character sketch emerges from Thucydides' narrative about the Athenian blockade of Pylos, the Lacedaemonians' efforts to arrange a truce, the Athenian expedition to Pylos and the final outcome (4.15 – 23; 27 – 29; 39). The picture is completed by the narrative of Cleon's actions before Amphipolis, where he was killed while fleeing from the Lacedaemonians (5.7; 10; 16). As Thucydides had described him, Cleon was violent and impetuous, urging strong action for others, but shirking such action himself.⁵ He attacked his opponents in the Assembly with slander and abuse and was opposed to considered debate and negotiation. He was both a physical and a moral coward, and used devious means to avoid exposure of his lies and slanders. He was not a competent military commander and can be blamed for losing Amphipolis to Brasidas⁶. At the time of Pylos (425) however, he still had considerable influence; he was “a popular leader of the time and very powerful with the multitude” and persuaded the Athenians to give a harsh answer to the Lacedaemonian envoys who had come to discuss a truce (4.21).

Cleon argued strongly in favour of his original proposal, i.e. the proposal which the Athenians had found savage and extreme, which draws attention to his violent nature. Other aspects of the speech illustrate Thucydides' unfavourable opinion of Cleon's character and the speech may be regarded as a model of the demagogic style.

2. ECHOES OF PERICLES

2.1 General

Thucydides imbeds ‘signals’ to guide the reader in assessing the speech, i.e. echoes of and strong contrasts with Pericles. The Encomium on Pericles (2.65) expresses Thucydides'

⁵ Vide his reluctance to act about Pylos (4.27).

⁶ “...combining enough incompetence, overconfidence and cowardice to offset his superior troops and lose the battle in advance” (Lattimore 1998, 257).



opinion that Pericles was a model statesman. Echoes, parallels and contrasts elsewhere are regarded as deliberate insertions, which invite comparison between the speaker and Pericles. In this case each example can be construed as a demonstration that Cleon is conceived as the antithesis of Pericles, in his words as well as his attitudes.⁷

2.2 Emotion and violence

Cleon is introduced as “... ων και ες τα άλλα βιαίωτατος των πολιτων τω τε δήμω παρα πολυ εν τω τότε πιθανώτατος ...” (at that time he was the most violent and the most persuasive of the citizens) (3.36.6). Being both violent and persuasive, Cleon was able to make his compatriots violent as well. The introduction is “a virtual parody of Pericles” (Connor 1984, 79 n1), which evokes, to Cleon’s discredit, the “duality of word and deed” found in Pericles, who “... λέγειν τε και πράσσειν δυνατώτατος...” (was ablest alike in counsel and action) (1.139.4) (cf Rood 1998,147).

This gives a picture of a city where extreme violence could be summoned at the word of one orator and it brands Cleon as a rabble rouser even before he begins to speak.

The picture of the violent Assembly who could pass a savage decree at the instigation of Cleon, evokes, in turn, the image of the *πληθος* under the direction of Pericles, controlled at a word and kept from extremes (2.65.9).

In his third speech Pericles exhorts the Athenians not to succumb to their emotions namely anger (*οργή*) (2.60.1) and dismay (*ταπεινή ... η διάνοια*) (2.61.2) but to have the courage which becomes more effective through intelligence which puts its trust, not so much in hope but in reason supported by facts which gives a surer insight into the future (2.62.5)⁸.

Cleon acts in exactly the opposite way. He not only tries to arouse emotion by his words, but actively promotes a culture of emotionalism and passion. He scolds the Athenians for letting their anger cool, implying that they should cultivate their emotions (3.38.1) (cf Crane 1996, 232; Rood 1996, 139 – 148 *passim*).

While Thucydides has given unconditional praise to Pericles and his governance of Athens,

⁷ Westlake postulates that the verbal echoes show that Cleon’s attitude towards the Empire was based on Pericles’ principles, which he applied with greater harshness (Westlake 1968, 65). In my opinion the verbal echoes are contrived by Thucydides to show that Cleon was a demagogue.

⁸ The topic of intelligence versus emotion touches on Thucydides’ theory of history and on his postulate that a good statesman should be able to foresee the outcome of political events. See the discussion under the comparison between Pericles’ third speech and Alcibiades’ speech on page 120. See also Edmunds’ exhaustive analysis of Pericles’ use of intelligence (Edmunds 1975, *passim*).



the contrast with Cleon implies his censure. It is clear that, while the emotional *δημος* had not really changed its character, the change lay in the leadership, to the detriment of the City.

2.3 Democracy and the Empire as tyranny

In his opening statement Cleon echoes Pericles' description of democracy in action. Pericles had said that Athens was a democracy and that the citizens were, inter alia, free of suspicion of each other in their daily affairs (2.37.2). Cleon maintains that a democracy is not suitable for ruling other states. Because Athens is a democracy and the Athenians do not fear plots among themselves, they adopt the same attitude towards their allies, which Cleon said, could lead to dangerous consequences (3.37.2).

He claims that the Empire is a tyranny over unwilling subjects (*τυραννίδα έχετε την αρχην*) (3.37.2a), who are plotting against Athens and have to be ruled by force (3.37.2b). Therefore pity and goodwill are meaningless and any trust in their influence will be risky (Crane 1998, 186).

This is the much quoted echo of Pericles' statements in his third speech that the Empire was a tyranny (*τυραννίδα γαρ ήδη έχετε αυτήν*) for which the Athenians had incurred the hatred of their allies (2.63.1 – 2) (cf Friedrichs 2000, 39). The verbal echo emphasises the difference between Cleon and Pericles: where Pericles had warned the Athenians that relinquishing the Empire would be unsafe, Cleon openly calls the allies enemies of Athens and proposes to base their treatment on naked violence. (cf Rengakos 1984, 73). Pericles had stressed the importance of knowledge and rational judgment of a situation in order to encourage the *δημος* not to relinquish the Empire. He saw Athens' advantage in retaining the status quo with regard to the allies⁹ but Cleon takes the opposite position. For him there is no advantage for Athens in *επιεικεία* (3.40.2) so she must exert her power ruthlessly. He emphasises the resentment of the allies (3.40.3) in order to stir up the Athenians' emotions and stresses that the only way they can hold down the allies is by retaining their own anger and making an example of the Mytileneans in order to instil fear in the rest of the Empire (3.40.7).

The question of the hostility between a tyrannical *πόλις* and its subjects introduces a further verbal echo¹⁰. Pericles had indicated that although it may have been wrong (*άδικον*) to have acquired the Empire, it was too late to make restitution by "being upright" (*ανδραγαθίζεται*)

⁹ As Diodotus will do in his reply to Cleon.

¹⁰ Cleon may be copying Pericles deliberately here.



because of the hatred the Athenians had incurred from the allies. (2.63.2). He urged the Athenians to be firm of purpose. Cleon uses the same word¹¹ to taunt the opposition. He is saying virtually the same thing as Pericles, namely that for their own safety, the Athenians cannot afford to be morally fastidious. Cleon's conclusion is much more extreme than that of Pericles however. "If you think you can rule over them, even though it may be wrong, then you must punish these men appropriately and stop *ανδραγαθίζεσθαι* ... or else you must give up your empire" (3.40.4). He insists that violence is the only option for ruling an empire and that the Athenians' wish to act in a moral fashion, is in fact hypocritical.¹²

2.4 Constancy, opposition to deliberation, slander

Cleon presents himself as an example of steadiness, honesty and patriotic righteousness. (cf Wassermann 1956, 33). He tells the Athenians that he has not changed his mind about the Mytileneans and that he is surprised that anyone would want to reopen the debate. His words, "I remain of the same opinion as I was" (*εγω μεν ουν ο αυτός ειμι τη γνώμη*) (3.38.1a), echo Pericles, "I remain the same and do not change" (*και εγω μεν ο αυτός ειμι και ουκ εξίσταμαι*) (2.61.2, echoing in turn, 1.140.1) (*της μεν γνώμης...αιει της αυτης έχομαι*).

The echo serves as a clear illustration of the reason/passion antithesis between Pericles and Cleon, who is falsely adopting a Periclean pose: he claims constancy of opinion/judgment (*γνώμη*), while he is actually appealing to the Athenians to revert to anger (*οργή*). (cf Rood 1998, 147 – 8). The different circumstances and Cleon's exaggerated objection to the Athenians' change of mind highlight his pseudo-Periclean stance. In order to encourage the Athenians, Pericles had reiterated his constancy after long drawn out adversity, while Cleon retained his opinion only overnight.

Despite the fact that reconsideration of decisions was not unusual (cf. 1.44; 2.22.1-2; 2.59 etc) Cleon repudiates it altogether because it does not suit him. He dismisses reconsideration of any decision out of hand and pronounces it as the "absolutely worst scenario" (*πάντων δε δεινότατων*) (3.37.3). Thereupon he launches into a generalisation: A city with bad laws kept unchanged is stronger than a city with good laws not enforced. The point is irrelevant to the present case of reconsidering a decree of the Assembly on foreign policy. The decision of

¹¹ Used nowhere else in Thucydides (Crane 1996, 232).

¹² Alcibiades went a step further in *his* echo of Pericles by claiming that the only way to retain an empire was to expand it. (6.18.2 - 3).



the previous Assembly was not, whatever Cleon might wish to imply, more binding or authoritative than the decision to be made in the present Assembly. This diversion about the stable and unchanging city would have a particular appeal to a mass audience and although it is irrelevant to the argument about the treatment of the Mytileneans, it is useful in establishing rapport with the conservative audience.

Cleon employs exaggeration (“absolutely worst scenario”) combined with the formulation of a spurious ‘principle’ in the form of a gnome which, while it has no direct bearing on the debate, is brought in to lend authority to Cleon’s argument while blurring the distinction between ‘laws’ and ‘decrees’ (νόμοι and ψεφίσματα).

His opposition to the reopening of the debate (3.38.1b) runs contrary to Pericles’ stated principles (see discussion under Diodotus paragraph 6.1).

Thucydides, through the opening words of Diodotus, comments that what Cleon is doing militates against good policy: “I do not blame those who have given us the opportunity to reconsider our decision about the Mytileneans and I do not praise those who object to our deliberating several times on questions of the greatest importance. I think there are two things particularly opposed to good policy, haste and anger (τάχος τε και οργήν) because anger tends to be accompanied by foolishness (μετα ανοίας) and haste by uncouthness (μετα απαιδευσίας) and defective judgment (βραχύτητος γνώμης)” (3.42.1).

In the following section (3.38.2) Cleon slanders his opponents by accusing them of taking bribes. He presents himself as an incorruptible alternative to his opponents which recalls Pericles’ immunity to bribes (2.60.5; 2.65.8). What Cleon is doing is to assume a tone of virtuous indignation, which is a typical demagogic manoeuvre.¹³

The slander is also intended to create suspicion against his opponents and their proposals, which would discredit them and through them, discredit their arguments, thereby avoiding the need to counter the arguments themselves. It is also helpful to have a visible identified opponent as a focal point of resentment.

¹³ “He exhibits the combination, not uncommon in a demagogic spellbinder, of violence and righteousness” (Wassermann 1956, 29).



2.5 Cleon's treatment of his audience

Pericles' challenged the *δημος* several times in his speeches (1.140 – 144; 2.60 – 64), while Thucydides stressed in the Encomium (2.65.8 – 9) that because of his moral stature he was able to gainsay the people, even to the point of anger. He stood up to them in the interest of reason and showed a reasoned awareness of their emotions. Cleon copies Pericles in his forthright criticism of the *δημος* and could have angered them like Pericles but his purpose is completely different, in that he is aiming, not at reason but at anger. Cleon combines flattery of the *φαιλότεροι* with truculence towards the *ξυνετώτεροι*, comparing them to the disadvantage of the latter (3.37.3 – 5).

The whole process is a manoeuvre to influence the less intelligent part of the audience. Cleon identifies himself with them by the subtle use of “we” (“γνωσόμεθα”; “ως ουν χρή και ημας ποιουντας”), dividing the audience into “us” and “them” and making himself their mouthpiece, voicing their feelings and insidiously appealing to their latent fears and their distrust of those who preen themselves on their intelligence (cf Rood 1998, 149). Cleon shows that he shares their anti-intellectualism and that he is proud to be *αμαθής* because as he is demonstrating, the *φαιλότεροι* are better able to govern a city through their innate good sense¹⁴, which demonstrates a thorough understanding of their psychology because such sentiments probably echo their own. His emphasis on enforcing the laws (*νόμοι*) (3.37.3) would appeal to the common man and a careful reading of the rest of the speech shows that it is pitched exactly at that level, in that the arguments do not unduly exercise his understanding, while they maintain a tone of discontent and anger.

Cleon's moralising tone combined with his insistence that the Mytileneans should be executed, would also strike a chord with a mass audience because it justified their latent urge to violent activism.

“Cleon's rejection of reasonable argument is merely a way to put unreason over, using the plain man's prejudice against fancy thinking to prevent any thinking at all” (Andrewes 1962, 75). Apart from the blatant flattery of the *φαιλότεροι*, and the open criticism of the *ξυνετώτεροι*, the latter are subtly discredited by Cleon's use of words. He does not say outright that they are undisciplined, but hints at it, “ignorance combined with restraint, is

¹⁴ Cleon's sentiments as they are expressed here are the opposite of Thucydides' own opinion (cf discussion on p 4 that Thucydides felt that the masses have to be restrained).



more useful than cleverness combined with *ακολασία*” (irresponsible lack of discipline/ self-indulgence/ intemperance) (3.37.3).¹⁵ Like slander, this type of attack is very difficult to counter, because the audience subconsciously identifies the two characteristics and denial will only strengthen their conviction.

Cleon then extends his attack to those who have reopened the debate on Mytilene (3.38.1 – 2), which leads to criticism of the Athenian deliberative system (3.38.3 – 7). The right blend of flattering and cowing the audience shows his insight into the minds of the *φαυλότεροι* (cf Wassermann 1956, 33).

By inference Cleon linked the proposal for rescinding the decree to the intellectuals through placing his criticism of the proposal (3.38.1 – 2) between the two passages attacking them (3.37.3 – 5; 3.38.3 – 7). Together with the slur of possible bribery and the accusation that these people were trying to lead the Athenians astray (*παράγειν πειράσεται*) (3.38.2) it was intended to turn the audience against rescinding the decree. The second change of mind of the *φαυλότεροι* must have been almost automatic. The outcome of the debate showed that, fortunately for the Mytileneans, slightly more than half of the Athenians were not so easily led.

3.EMOTION

3.1 Emotion as a demagogic tool

At the original debate about the fate of the Mytilenean rebels most of the Athenians¹⁶ seem to have regarded the Mytilenean revolt as particularly shocking because of the Mytileneans’ apparent contempt for their privileges in the Empire.¹⁷ The connivance of the Peloponnesians further infuriated them, not only because of the help given to Mytilene but also because the Peloponnesian ships had dared to go to Ionia, which may have been taken as an insult to the Athenian navy. The implication that the revolt had been premeditated was the final trigger for the rage which led to the violent decision to exterminate the Mytileneans (3.36.2). As the motion was carried on Cleon’s proposal (3.36.6), it is possible that it was his rhetoric which

¹⁵ The thought in this passage has a parallel in 3.82.7 where there is also a contrast between clever villains and stupid good men. According to Thucydides it was true in Corcyra, but here Cleon slants it for his own purposes (cf Hornblower 2003, 424).

It also points to the character of Alcibiades, who is depicted as a clever villain. He was a demagogue but cast in a different mould from Cleon.

¹⁶ Diodotus and others apparently did not share these sentiments (cf. 3.41).

¹⁷ “The high status that the Mytileneans had enjoyed, meant that their act was simple treachery rather than the desperate rebellion of an oppressed subject” (Crane 1998, 184).



had originally inflamed the Athenians.

The second debate to reconsider their decision came about because the anger had dissipated overnight. Cleon had not changed his opinion however (3.38.1) and to prevent the Assembly from rescinding their decision, he set out to rekindle their angry mood of the previous day (Yunis 1996, 92). Cleon himself is a violent person (3.36.6) given to anger at the slightest sign of opposition¹⁸. His speech has an angry emotional tone¹⁹ which may have rubbed off on his audience but he goes further and deliberately tries to raise the emotional temperature with his references to the Mytileneans, which were first, calculated to instil fear (See 3.2 below), which would have led to anger in any case, and second, to arouse further anger (See 3.3).

It seems very likely that Cleon is here stating more drastically what he had urged the previous day when initiating his proposal in the first debate, using the Athenians' anger as a lever to get his proposal accepted. The result is that the audience is engaged at a very immediate and visceral level, bringing out and giving focus to underlying and ill-defined emotions.²⁰

3.2 Engendering fear

“Cleon shows an acute grasp of the power of unreason, insidiously appealing to latent fears...” (Rood 1998, 149).

In the opening statement of his speech Cleon touches on a very real fear of the Athenians, the fear of the ill will of their allies which could lead to general *απόστασις* within the Empire (3.37.1 – 2). He maintains that democracy is not suitable for rule over others, and enlarging on this, warns the Athenians against pity which could be taken as weakness and would not win them gratitude.

“ου σκοπουντες ότι τυραννίδα έχετε την αρχην” (You do not consider that the Empire is a tyranny) (3.37.2). They are ruling over unwilling subjects plotting against Athens and obedience is obtained on the basis of strength rather than goodwill. In the rest of the speech Cleon exaggerates the danger from the Mytileneans. By his choice of words he gives their secession the aspect of a threatening attack on Athens, which is a calculated move to instil

¹⁸ cf his angry responses to the Lacedaemonian envoys and to Nicias at the debate about the Pylos blockade (4.15 – 23).

¹⁹ See his use of words such as “πάντων δε δεινότατον” (worst of all) (3.37.3); “μάλιστα...ηδικήκοτας” (have done the most wrong) (3.39.1) and other extreme expressions.

²⁰ This is a recurrent element in Thucydides' presentation of the populist speakers: they give verbal expression to the inarticulate and undefined feelings of the audience, e.g. Sthenelaidas who traded on the Spartans' fear of Athens and Alcibiades who misused the Athenians' fear of domination by others.



apprehension in his audience.

“επεβούλευσαν τε και επανέστησαν μάλλον η απέστησαν” (they plotted and revolted rather than just seceding) “They sought to take their stand with our worst enemies (μετα των πολεμιωτάτων) and destroy us” (3.39.2).

“Pity ... is not given to those who will not pity us in return” and επιεικεία is more appropriate to future friends and not to those who will remain enemies (3.40.3).

“Respond with the same penalty which they devised for you” (3.40.5).

“think of what they would have been likely to do if they had got the better of you” (3.40.5).

Those who harm someone without justification will pursue their attack until they have destroyed him (cf 3.40.6).

He hammers home his point about the danger from the Empire. If the Mytileneans are not punished “αξίως της αδικίας” (as their wickedness deserves) (3.39.6), it will set a precedent and there will be general unrest in the Empire. “We will have to risk our wealth and lives against every city (αποκεκινδυνεύσεται ²¹ τά τε χρήματα και αι ψυχαί) (3.39.8). The reference to possible loss of life is included specifically to instil fear.

“Do not forget the danger which hung over you. Punish these men fittingly and set a clear example to the other allies that the penalty for anyone who secedes, will be death. If they understand this, there will be less need for you to neglect your enemies while you fight your own allies” (3.40.7). This statement creates a picture of Athens beset by hostility on all sides, while Cleon holds out drastic action as the only protection against these dangers.

His technique is to demonise the Mytileneans, exaggerating their secession into an attack on Athens which should be punished most severely to forestall general secession amongst the allies which was the Athenians’ greatest fear.

The narrative (3.1 – 6; 18; 27 – 36.3) and the Mytileneans’ address to the Lacedaemonians (3.9 – 14) show just how exaggerated Cleon’s statements were.

3.3 Arousing anger

In his speech Cleon uses the same levers which had made the Athenians angry before, namely the Mytileneans’ ingratitude and insolence, their alignment with the enemies of Athens and the idea that the revolt had been carefully planned.

²¹ a splendid word and phrase implying immense danger and risk.



All this is a demagogic manoeuvre to arouse fear and activate hostility, which Cleon intended as an incentive to violent retribution against the Mytileneans.

The core of Cleon's anger, which he tries to transmit to the Athenians, is moral outrage. It seems that the Mytileneans' actions were regarded as particularly harmful, not so much for what they did in seceding, but for seceding from a position of advantage in the Empire (3.39.1 – 2) (cf Stahl 2003, 116, 118).

He stresses that the secession was not necessary and could not be justified. "They made the first move in committing injustice" (3.40.5). For this reason alone the Mytileneans deserved severe punishment. The sense which is being conveyed to the Athenians is that the Mytileneans had not only betrayed their trust but had intended serious harm to Athens.

"ἀκοντες μὲν γὰρ οὐκ ἐβλάψαν, εἰδότες δὲ ἐπεβούλευσαν" (They did not do harm unintentionally but had plotted against [us] in full knowledge) (3.40.1).

His description of the Mytileneans' actions is condemnatory (3.39.3 – 4), using terms calculated to irritate the Athenians: prompted by over-confidence and a disregard for justice, they had acted recklessly despite their prosperity; "their hopes falling short of their desires, attaching more importance to force than to justice, for it was in the belief that they would succeed that they attacked us (ἐπέθεντο ἡμῖν), not because they had been wronged" (3.39.4).

After a short excursus²² on the typical behaviour of cities who experience unexpected success, Cleon argued that preferential treatment of the Mytileneans had been a mistake because their privileges had made them insolent, which led to their unprovoked attacks on the Athenians. There is a logical discrepancy in the argument because the Mytileneans did not have sudden good fortune, but had been treated differently *πάλαι* (3.39.5), as Cleon himself had said. The illogical conclusion, the exaggerated references to "attacks" (3.39.3, 6) and his extravagant language justify the description of his speech as emotional ranting.

In the hope that his talk about the insolence of the Mytileneans would revive the Athenians' anger, Cleon insists that the Mytileneans be punished as they "deserve" (*αξίως της αδικίας*) (3.39.6). In Cleon's opinion the Mytileneans deserve the death sentence and nothing less. He does not allow any alternatives, maintaining that any kind of leniency towards them will not elicit any gratitude but will be construed as weakness on the part of Athens (3.37.2).

²² The parallel passage in Diodotus' speech puts forward a contrasting view of human nature and of the behaviour of the Mytileneans. See 5.2 under the discussion of Diodotus' speech.



4. DEBATE EQUATED TO A FRIVOLOUS VERBAL CONTEST (3.38.3 – 7)

4.1 General

This section reveals, more than the rest of the speech just how much of a demagogue Cleon is and it also shows how he operates.

He puts himself forward as a serious responsible orator and reprimands the Assembly for taking important matters very lightly. He is clearly imitating Pericles, with the intention of impressing his audience, so that they would regard his proposal as a considered and responsible line of action.

This stance implies that his opponents are frivolous and irresponsible and acting against the interests of the City. Sober and responsible πολῖται should therefore take Cleon as their model and act on his advice.

The irony is that Cleon's stance is false and that he is advocating violent and irresponsible action under cover of a cloak of respectability. This kind of approach would appeal to the less intelligent and less perceptive part of the audience who would like to have their taste for violence indulged, disguised as action for the good of the City.

In chastising the Athenians, Cleon tries to do two things: he first wants to embarrass them so that they will look to him as their leader and follow his suggestions and secondly he wants to discredit his opponents, identifying the proposal to rescind the decree against the Mytileneans with irresponsible behaviour.

4.2 Specific criticism of the Athenian assembly

He blames the Assembly for making the type of contest in the Assembly possible where the normal order of things is reversed:

“The city awards prizes to others but penalises itself” (3.38.3);

“the Athenians have become θεαται ... των λογών, ακροαται δε των έργων” (spectators of words and hearers of actions) (3.38.4a);

They use words to judge action (cf 3.38.4b);

“You have more trust in hearsay than in your own observations” (3.38.4c)

The examples of reversal imply that rescinding the decree is one of these reversals of the proper way of doing things.

He then proceeds to describe the discussions in the Assembly, which are treated more like sophistic contests than serious deliberations about the future of the City: the speeches are judged, not on their content but on their presentation and the facility with which the arguments are put forward. The speakers pursue victory for themselves rather than the best



interests of the πόλις; everybody would like to be able to speak themselves, but, failing that, they want to be beforehand in assessing the arguments while they are all overcome by the pleasure of listening (3.38.5 – 6).

Cleon also accuses the Athenians of being unrealistic: they naively believe what they are told, despite the evidence of their own observations, they are deceived by the novelty of arguments, they do not anticipate the consequences of their light-hearted discussions; living in an unreal world, they disregard the true situation. (3.38.4, 5, 7). The implication is once again that the reality of the Empire demands that the Mytileneans be punished severely and that any other course of action stems from delusion and unrealistic idealism which will cost the Athenians dear.

It is possible that Thucydides used Cleon to express his own opinion about the Athenian assembly (cf Andrewes 1962 ,75), but what is more important here, is the deliberate irony of the passage.²³ While he is denouncing clever orators and fine rhetoric, Cleon indulges in a dazzling rhetorical display himself. This appears to be Thucydides' way of emphasising Cleon's false position which identifies him as a demagogue.

4.3 Rhetorical devices

A few of his rhetorical devices are given below:

Use of the figure of a contest with prizes: “η δε πόλις εκ των τοιωνδε αγώνων τα μεν αθλα ετέροις δίδωσιν” (the city gives the prizes to others in such contests) (3.38.3); “αίτιοι δ' υμεις κακως αγωνοθετουντες” (you are to blame for setting up bad contests) (3.38.4a).

The well-known play on words is a very effective rhetorical device: “θεαται μεν των λόγων ... ακροαται δε των έργων” (spectators of words and hearers of deeds) (3.38.4b) while the reference to seeing, hearing and being spectators at a spectacle is effectively repeated (3.38.7).

Cleon also employs antithesis very cleverly: “You are best at being deceived by the novelty of an argument, but you do not go along with one which has been tried and tested” (3.38.5a).

“προαισθέσθαι τε πρόθυμοι ειναι τα λεγόμενα και προνοησαι βραδεις τα εξ αυτων αποβησόμενα” (you are eager to forehear what is said, but slow to foresee the results which will follow from it) (3.38.6).

²³ I differ from Hornblower who does not believe that this section is a sustained exercise in irony (Hornblower 1987, 167,n5).



An even more calculated example in which the two parts are perfectly balanced (parison):

“δουλοι ὄντες των αιει απόπων
υπερόπται δε των ειωθότων”

(being slaves of what is unusual at any time and despising what is familiar) (3.38.5b).

5.CONCLUSION

Considering his performance in this debate Cleon can be described as a demagogue because of his extravagant language, abuse and slander of his opponents, his emphasis on emotion and insistence that emotion was the correct basis for prudent action.

Cleon is a clever orator who makes a pose of distrusting clever oratory. His anti-rhetorical pose is false and misleading and specifically calculated to influence the audience in his favour. He wants to convince his audience that he is a plain man, concerned about innovations which will be to the detriment of the City. The way in which he imitates Pericles and the deliberate echoes inserted in the text show that although he has Pericles' persuasive power, he is the antithesis of Pericles in his approach to the people and to deliberative discussion.

DIODOTUS

1. INTRODUCTION

Diodotus emerges from nowhere, to play a central role in the Athenian Assembly's tussles about the fate of the Mytileneans. He is first introduced in the preamble to his speech as the person who, on the previous day, had been the most prominent opponent of the decree to put all the Mytilenean men to death and to enslave the women and children (3.41).

This is the only piece of information given about him, apart from his name and his father's name. The lack of information about Diodotus, the speech itself and the outcome of the debate seem to indicate that the speech is largely an *artificial construction*. The debate was held before Thucydides was exiled so he could have been present, but Diodotus' speech does not read like a verbatim report, because no speaker, however brilliant, could have delivered such a speech in the heat of debate.¹ It looks more like a carefully constructed essay appropriate to the circumstances and it seems as if Thucydides had fully used the freedom which he had granted himself within the parameters laid down in his policy statement about the speeches in the History (1.22.1). It is postulated that within the fixed boundaries dictated by the mood and actions of the Assembly and the outcome of the debate, Thucydides wrote a speech for Diodotus in a format which was the only possible effective reply to Cleon, expressing his personal views at certain points.

The attempts to identify the expressions of Thucydides' opinions follow Stahl, "Today we have learned to be cautious in claiming any single speech for the author's opinion, unless our claim is corroborated by a passage, mostly of the narrative, in which Thucydides expressly speaks in his own name" (Stahl 1973, 60).

While scholarly opinion differs on Diodotus and on the authenticity of his speech,² this discussion will concentrate on the speech itself as a vehicle for refuting Cleon. The inclusion of some demagogic aspects is interpreted as Thucydides' way of commenting on the quality of the Athenian leadership.

¹Items which support this assumption will be mentioned in the discussion below. See also "... the debate as a whole... does not read much like an authentic report..." (Andrewes 1962, 73). Wassermann also commented on the artificiality of the speech (Wassermann 1956, 34), but his argument was subsequently criticised as having "no value" (Kagan 1975, 89).

² Andrewes 1962, 75 - 79; Westlake 1968, 62; Kagan 1975, 71 - 94 passim; Hornblower 1987, 167 n 51; Saxonhouse 1996, 59 - 86; Yunis 1996, 92 - 93.

2. THE TONE AND STYLE OF THE SPEECH

Diodotus' speech is a formal structure using a binary antithetical style, laden with abstractions and gnomes in an unemotional austere tone. It both refutes and indicts Cleon and has distinct echoes of Pericles while its comments on the Athenian *δημος* and on human nature seem to express Thucydides' own opinions.

The speech maintains a *rational and unemotional tone*. It is characterised by logical reasoning and by the absence of emotive terms such as Cleon had used.³ Cleon wanted the Athenians to retain their angry mood (3.38.1) while Diodotus exhorted them to look and think before they acted (*σκέψασθε*) (3.46.2; 47.1; 48) (*οραν*) (3.46.4). At the end of the speech Diodotus appeals to the Athenians not to be swayed by emotion (pity) and the desire to be fair (*επιεικεία*), but to be persuaded by his arguments, i.e. by his motivated statements. Diodotus speaks about deliberation, understanding and perception instead, while all his important statements are either accompanied by motivation (e.g. 3.42.1) or followed by reasoned argument (e.g. 3.44.1 – 4).

Not only is the tone of the speech rational, but the contents clearly favour considered debate: “The good citizen ought not to frighten away opposing speakers, but should be seen on an impartial basis to be the better speaker” (3.42.5).

Proper deliberation is necessary for correct assessments about the future. It is stressed that there is no other way to expound (*φράσαι*) what is in the future and is not self-evident (*περι του μέλλοντος ... και μη εμφανους...*) (3.42.2). The speakers themselves should also have *πρόνοια* (foresight).⁴ “...we speakers should claim to think further ahead...” (3.43.4).

The speech is not confrontational, but takes a non-partisan approach, opposing Cleon through logical reasoning.

“I do not blame those who have given us the opportunity to reconsider our decision... and I do not praise those who object to our deliberating several times on questions of the greatest importance” (3.42.1).

“I have not come forward either to speak on the other side (*άντερον*) about the Mytileneans or to accuse them...” (3.44.1).

³ Words such as “wrongdoing” (3.38.1) “wickedness” (3.39.6), “danger” (3.40.7), “suffering” (3.40.7), and the like.

⁴ cf of the discussion under the comparison between Pericles and Alcibiades.

Each of these statements is followed by a logical argument:

- explaining the value of deliberation and the principles of good debate (3.42.1 – 43.5);
- demonstrating that enforcement of the decree against the Mytileneans would not benefit Athens (3.44.1 – 4).

The non-partisan, unemotional tone of the speech is reinforced by its *formality*, evidenced by the binary style, by a ring structure in the speech and by the use of abstractions, generalisations and gnomes.

Diodotus uses a *binary antithetical style* throughout. A large number of his statements consist of two parts,

e.g. 3.44.1 quoted above

and

“For even if I can demonstrate that they are guilty of serious wrongdoing /

I shall not on that account recommend that they should be also be put to death, unless that is in our interest” (3.44.2).

and

“Cleon particularly insists that it will be advantageous for the future, as a means of preventing secession if we inflict the death penalty/

but for my part I insist on the contrary that I am convinced of the opposite for our future well-being” (3.44.3).

These examples⁵ illustrate that both sides of the question are stated at crucial points in the argument, which emphasises the rational unemotional tone.

A loose *ring structure* can be identified within the speech which further illustrates its formality :

The ring is formed by references to *deliberation*, within which Diodotus presents his arguments.

He starts off by discussing the need for instructive deliberation (βουλευέσθαι; εβουλία; διδασκάλους) (3.42.1 – 2). He then completes the topic, mentioning deliberation and debate as he proceeds (3.42.5; 43.2 – 4) and then passes on to the next point, namely the appropriate action against the Mytileneans and the inefficacy of the death penalty as deterrent, mentioning deliberation again (3.44.4; 46.1), coming back in the final gnome to the opening topic and so closing the ring.

⁵ Other examples are found in 3.42.2, 3, 5, 6; 3.43.1, 2, 4, 5; 3.44.4; 3.45.4; 3.46.4; 3.47.3, which support the suggestion that the speech is an artificial construction.

“for whoever *plans / deliberates* well against his adversaries, is stronger than someone attacking them with actions of senseless force” (ὅστις γὰρ εὖ βουλευέται πρὸς τοὺς ἐναντίους κρείσσων ἐστὶν ἢ μετ’ ἔργων ἰσχύος ἀνοία ἐπιών) (3.48.2).

Diodotus *responds* to Cleon’s attacks (see below 3.1) in an unemotional way. He does not deny Cleon’s accusations of bribery for instance, but describes the problems created by such accusations instead, which leads to an abstract discussion of good debate and the shortcomings of the Athenians (3.42.3 – 3.43.5).

The real point of the speech, namely rescinding the decree against the Mytileneans is handled on the basis of benefit to Athens and of the inefficacy of the death penalty as a deterrent. This portion contains a gnomic excursus about human nature (3.45.1 – 7), followed by the application to the situation, of the principles of human behaviour (3.46.1 – 47.5) which leads to Diodotus’ conclusion that lenience towards the Mytileneans would be the logically correct course to follow. Diodotus speaks in favour of proper instructive debate (3.42.5; 3.43.4; 3.48.2) (cf Yunis 1996, 95). The speech itself follows the principles which he lays down while the tone of the speech forms a clear contrast with Cleon’s emotional statements. The tone, format and content of the speech seem to confirm the artificiality of the speech, so it seems reasonable to surmise that Thucydides used Diodotus’ speech as his personal vehicle for refuting and criticising Cleon. (cf Andrewes 1962, 85).

3. DIODOTUS’ RESPONSE TO CLEON

3.1 Response to Cleon’s attacks

Because of Cleon’s slanderous allegations, Diodotus had to spend a considerable part of his speech simply establishing his right to speak (3.42.1 – 43.5).

Cleon had attacked his opponents, including Diodotus, on three counts, namely the use of deliberation (3.37.4 – 5), the reopening of the debate and lenience towards the Mytileneans (3.38.1 – 2). In all three cases he had used slanderous tactics in order to intimidate the opposition. He claimed that those speaking against him were hubristic (3.38.2), dishonest (3.38.2) and had succumbed to pity, a pleasure in words and ἐπιεικεία (moderation) (3.40.2), all of which worked against the advantage of the City. Diodotus’ rejoinders refuted Cleon’s claims and then implied in turn that Cleon was stupid and self-interested and was trying to lead the City into error (3.42.4).

Diodotus opens his speech by stating that he is not taking a position on the reopening of the debate: “I do not blame those who have given us the opportunity to reconsider ... and I do not praise those who object to our deliberating several times on very important matters” (3.42.1) which refers to Cleon’s objection to the reopening of the debate (3.38.1). He handles the subject in an oblique way, refraining from replying directly to the accusations (3.38.1 – 2), while he discusses the accuser in (unflattering) abstract terms. Cleon’s haste and anger and his opposition to deliberation as a way of solving problems are handled by means of gnomes and general statements in which he is branded by implication, as foolish and biased (3.42.1 – 2).

The tone of the speech remains unemotional, there is no personal confrontation and all the statements are presented as abstract principles, but there is no doubt about Diodotus’ (Thucydides’) opinion of Cleon’s lack of intellect and about the fact that this is an effort to discredit him.⁶

Cleon’s efforts to smear his opponents (3.38.1 – 2) are handled in the same way. Diodotus does not reply to the accusations of bribery, but discusses the problems created by such accusations instead (3.42.2 – 5). He concludes by saying that the good citizen ought not to frighten away opposing speakers but should be seen on an impartial basis to be the better speaker, which implies that Cleon is not an *αγαθος πολίτης* (3.42.5).

By not replying directly and by using another approach, Diodotus avoids the trap created by Cleon’s slanderous accusations, both in the initial response to Cleon and in the argument for lenience. His explanation of the problems created by slander, show that he is aware of Cleon’s efforts to frighten the opposition and that he is clever (devious?) enough to frustrate Cleon’s intentions.

An important point in Diodotus’ comments on Cleon’s slanderous accusations is that mud-slinging deprives the city of advisers, because they would be afraid of being tarnished with a reputation for being either unintelligent (*αξύνετος*) or dishonest (*άδικος*). “The likelihood of suffering an attack on one’s character will silence those who have useful advice and would otherwise volunteer. If that advice never comes before the Assembly, the polis suffers” (Yunis 1996, 94). It would be best for the City if men of that kind (*τους τοιούτους των πολιτων*) “were

⁶ Alcibiades employed a similar technique in the Sicilian Debate, discrediting Nicias by implication, while he maintained an unemotional tone.

not competent at speaking, since then they would be least able to persuade it into error” (3.42.4), which is another oblique reference to Cleon.

3.2 Justice

Cleon’s argument against the Mytileneans is ostensibly based on justice: the Mytileneans had committed *αδικία* by attacking the Athenians without provocation (3.39.3), so they deserved appropriate punishment.

Cleon builds up the Mytilenean revolt into a serious threat to Athens and emphasises that it was Mytilene who had initiated the *αδικία*. He felt that it had been a mistake for the Athenians to have given the Mytileneans special treatment because their position within the Empire had made them insolent, which led to their unprovoked attack on the Athenians. By seceding despite their privileged position, the Mytileneans had done the Athenians the greatest wrong of all the cities. He maintained that the Mytileneans’ actions had gone beyond defection (*απόστασις*). They had risen aggressively against Athens (*επανέστησαν*), they were guilty of plotting and had conspired with Athens’ worst enemies to destroy her (3.39.2).

He enlarges on this central idea in various ways by pointing out that the proposed punishment would not only be just towards the Mytileneans but also advantageous for the Athenians. (3.40.4). He adds a rider about the Empire, namely that if the Athenians want to continue ruling the Empire they will be obliged to punish the Mytileneans, even if it does not appear fair, thereby implying that running an empire and equitable dealing are mutually exclusive (3.40.5).

Diodotus evades the issue of justice by arguing that it is irrelevant. The issue at stake is not the Mytileneans’ wrongdoing but Athens’ advantage (3.44.1 – 3). He insists that he will not recommend any action which is not beneficial (*χρήσιμον*) for the City and makes the point that the opposite of Cleon’s proposal, i.e. no death sentence for the Mytileneans, is necessary for the future well-being of Athens (3.44.3), an aspect on which he will enlarge later (see next page).

He makes it clear that he is neither defending nor accusing the Mytileneans, but promoting the advantage of Athens (3.44.1). He does not contradict Cleon about the guilt of the Mytileneans and he also concedes that, in the Athenians’ current state of mind the proposed punishment would seem more just. He disputes Cleon’s contention however, that the death penalty will be advantageous for the future and insists that in this case, justice and advantage are mutually exclusive (3.44.4).

At this point he asks the Athenians not to reject the usefulness of his argument (χρήσιμον) for the appropriateness (ευπρεπει) of Cleon's, which is an adroit rhetorical manoeuvre. In one sentence Diodotus has shown that he is not defending the Mytileneans (thus evading Cleon's accusations) and that although Cleon's proposal may be appropriate, it is nevertheless shortsighted (another point on which he will enlarge) and that his own suggestion of lenience towards the Mytileneans would be preferable for the City.

He continues, expanding his argument about justice, "In your present state of anger against the Mytileneans, his speech may perhaps be accepted as more just" (3.44.4a). He ends this section with an incontrovertible statement: "However, we have not gone to law with them, to obtain justice, but we are deciding about them, to make them useful to us" (3.44.4b).

Any other reply to Cleon's accusations (3.1 – 2) would have implicated his opponent, but Diodotus deftly refrained from replying and made Cleon's proposals look foolish and ill-considered. Diodotus' reiterated concern for the welfare of the City also suggests that Cleon was placing his taste for violence above the interests of the City. In this subtle way Cleon is discredited under a veneer of carefully considered unemotional rhetoric.

Diodotus' argument about justice is repeated in his reference to the δημοσ in Mytilene: if they are executed together with the oligarchs, the Athenians would be acting unjustly because they would be killing their benefactors. Diodotus' argument has undergone a subtle change. The death sentence, which previously was conceded to be just but not advantageous, has now become both unjust and harmful to Athens.

Diodotus suggests that even if the Mytilenean δημοσ happened to be guilty along with the oligarchs, the Athenians should pretend that they are not, in order to retain the support of the δημοσ elsewhere (3.47.4). He makes the point that it is important ες την κάθεξιν της αρχης (for the maintenance of the Empire) that the Athenians should voluntarily submit to injustice rather than unjustly destroying those who should not be destroyed (3.47.5a). He finally dismisses Cleon's argument by stating that justice and advantage for the Empire cannot be achieved together (3.47.5b).⁷

⁷ This is reminiscent of the implication of Cleon's statement in 3.40.5 that αρχή excludes equitable dealing.

3.3 Advantage

Having disposed of Cleon's main reason for severe punishment and having neatly sidestepped his allegations about people speaking in favour of the Mytileneans, Diodotus now proceeds to demonstrate why the death penalty will not be to Athens' advantage.

Cleon had said that it would be an error to show pity or *επιεικεία*⁸ towards the Mytileneans and they should therefore be punished *αξίως της αδικίας* (as their wickedness deserves) (3.39.6), otherwise it would set a precedent which would be to the disadvantage of Athens. He maintained that his proposal was both just and advantageous because severe punishment would set a clear example to the cities in the empire and Athens would then not have to neglect her enemies while attending to her seceding allies (3.40.4 – 7).

Diodotus' response is that the opposite is in fact the case:

“Cleon particularly insists that it will be advantageous for the future as a means of preventing secession, if we inflict the death penalty, but for my part I insist on the contrary that I am convinced of the opposite for our future well-being” (3.44.3).

He maintains that, because of the susceptibility of human nature to emotional pressure, the death penalty will not act as a deterrent to secession (3.45.1 – 7), and further, that if the Mytilenean *δημος* is executed, the Athenians will alienate the *δημος* in the other cities, who are their only allies (3.47.4).

He agrees with Cleon that pity and *επιεικεία* should not weigh with the Athenians and asks them to be persuaded by his arguments alone (3.48.1).⁹

He proposes that the Mytileneans should receive moderate punishment so that they can be retained as a financial resource. The Assembly should try the guilty Mytileneans at leisure and allow the rest to live, which would be beneficial at the current time and inspire fear in the future (3.48.1 – 2).

The speech concludes with a gnome insulting to Cleon, in which Diodotus implies that Cleon's violent proposal is foolish and that the Athenians will weaken their position if they act according to his proposal (3.48.2).

⁸ Translated as even-handedness, equity, reasonableness, fairness, decency, humanity

⁹ The feelings of the Athenians that the decree was too extreme (3.36.4), which was also felt by the crew of the first trireme sent to Mytilene (3.49.4), are not considered here, because they are not pertinent to the techniques used in the speeches. For the same reason, criticism of Diodotus for his cold-bloodedness (cf Wassermann 1956, 29) is also disregarded.

4. RHETORICAL METHODS

4.1. Use of gnomes

Both Cleon and Diodotus make use of gnomes as a rhetorical technique. The speaker expresses his own opinion in the form of a generally accepted truth which cannot be denied, thereby lending authority and persuasive power to his statements.

There is a similarity between the two opponents in this respect. Both use gnomes in straightforward argument but also for specific demagogic purposes.

Cleon uses gnomes, first, to ingratiate himself with his audience (3.37.3). He tells his audience, in the form of “general truths” that ignorant ordinary men can manage their cities better than more intelligent men (οἱ ...φαυλότεροι ...προς τοὺς ξυνηγετῶν ...ἀμεινων οἰκουσι τὰς πόλεις.) (3.37.3). Such a statement discredits the opposing speakers (the “ξυνηγετῶν”), especially Diodotus, while it flatters the less intelligent part of the audience, which should persuade them to agree with Cleon’s arguments. It was very effective, as was shown by the closeness of the vote at the end of the debate.

He also uses gnomes to argue against reconsideration of the decree (3.38.1), to substantiate his arguments for severe punishment, showing that because the Mytileneans were hubristic in their secession, they merited such punishment (3.39.4) and finally to emphasise his argument by pointing out that it would be dangerous for the Athenians not to carry out the punishment (3.39.5).

In contrast, Diodotus makes personal attacks on Cleon by means of gnomic expressions (3.42.1; 3.48.2). He also uses gnomes in his argument showing that the death penalty is no deterrent to communities set on secession, which counters Cleon’s statement (3.39.3) that the Mytileneans should have taken note of other examples of failed secession.

It is an ingenuous rhetorical technique to criticise your opponent by implication, without mentioning his name¹⁰ and although Diodotus’ speech maintains a lofty rational tone, he is nevertheless guilty of vituperation, because he is in fact calling Cleon foolish, uncouth and lacking in judgment (...μετα ανοίας ...μετα παιδευσίας και βραχύτητος γνώμης) (3.42.1) as well as violent (...μετ’ ἔργων ισχύος ανοία ἐπίων) (3.48.2).

¹⁰ cf Alcibiades’ speech 6.16.3; 6.17.6; 6.18.2.

4.2 Other rhetorical methods

Cleon's speech makes it clear that he is the arch demagogue and the antithesis of Pericles, while, as has been shown, Diodotus' speech may be taken as Thucydides' own rebuttal and criticism of Cleon (see p 53).

The cool rational tone of Diodotus' speech¹¹ acts as criticism by way of contrast with Cleon's emotional delivery. He refers directly to Cleon only in his role of opposing speaker and recommends, on the basis of his own arguments, that the Athenians should not accept Cleon's advice (3.47.1; 3.48.1) bringing no emotion into the equation.

Diodotus' argument for lenience towards the Mytileneans is a clever piece of rhetoric. Cleon had made some heated remarks about anyone daring to speak against the decree and "claiming to show that the Mytileneans' wrongdoing is advantageous to us and our misfortunes are damaging to the allies" (3.38.1), adding that such a person must either be trying to prove that facts are not facts or he must have accepted bribes (κέρδει επαίρομενος) (3.38.2). He then explains to the Athenians just how badly the Mytileneans have behaved and concludes that they deserve the most severe punishment.

Diodotus does not deny the Mytileneans' wrongdoing, nor does he argue on the basis of pity but approaches the situation from a completely different perspective, namely whether the punishment would benefit Athens. He shows through several arguments (see 3.3 on p 60) that implementation of the decree would not be to the advantage of the Athenians (3.44.4 ; 3.46.2 – 4). This technique in which the orator does not try to disprove his opponent's statements but argues for his own point of view on a totally different basis, is very effective and makes the opponent look foolish. In the case of Cleon, it ridicules his vehemence, while playing to the audience with the concept of advantage to Athens.

5. PARALLELS AND SIMILARITIES

5.1 Echoes of Cleon in Diodotus' main argument

Cleon concludes his motivation for severe punishment with the following statement::

“και τυχόντες μεν πόλιν εφθαρμένην παραλαβόντες της εκειθεν προσόδου δι’ ην ισχύομεν το λοιπον στερήσεσθε” (If we win, we shall gain a ruined city and thereafter you will lose the revenue from it, on which our strength depends) (3.39.8).

¹¹ See page 54.

This statement is echoed verbatim by Diodotus, in the context of *his* argument:

“It would be harmful to us ἢν ἐλωμεν πόλιν εφθαρμένην παραλαβεῖν καὶ τῆς προσόδου το λοιπὸν ἀπ’ αὐτῆς στέρεσθαι; ἰσχύομεν δὲ πρὸς τοὺς πολεμίους τῷδε” (if, on capturing a city, we take it over in a state of ruin and are deprived of any further revenue in future, that revenue which gives strength against our enemies) (3.46.3).

The conclusion is based on the argument that it would be an error of judgment to have faith in the death penalty, because it would set an example which would be to the detriment of Athens. Seceding cities who might currently still be able to atone for their mistakes (τὴν ἀμαρτίαν), would become desperate and fight to the bitter end (3.46.1 – 2).

The verbatim echo of Cleon’s statement in Diodotus’ speech must be deliberate. It emphasises the difference between the two arguments, Diodotus’ criticism of Cleon and rejection of his violence, which would lead the Athenians into error (“χειρὸν βουλεύσασθαι”) (3.46.1).

5.2 The Mytilenean δημοσ

Cleon had recommended that the Athenians should not blame the oligarchs in Mytilene and acquit the Mytilenean people, for all alike had attacked the Athenians. The people had considered it more secure (βεβαιότερον) to share the danger of the oligarchs and ξυναπέστησαν (had joined them in secession) (3.39.6).

Diodotus took the opposite position, claiming that the δημοσ in all the cities was well disposed towards the Athenians. They either refuse to join a rebellion or, if compelled to do so, they become antagonistic towards the rebels, so whenever Athens goes to war against a rebel city, she has the masses as her allies.

He verifies his argument by claiming that the Mytilenean δημοσ did not take part in the rebellion, but in fact handed over the city to Athens, as soon as they were armed. If they should be executed, the Athenians would be acting unjustly in putting her benefactors to death and would alienate the masses in the other cities, thereby benefiting the ruling classes by providing them with allies.

Thucydides’ narrative (3.27 – 28) shows that Diodotus was exaggerating the role of the Mytilenean δημοσ in the capitulation of the city. Cleon’s version of the attitude of the Mytilenean δημοσ was closer to the truth and Diodotus’ claim to support from the δημοσ throughout the Empire appears to be no more than a deceptive rhetorical stratagem to counter Cleon.

6. REASON AND PASSION

6.1 Echoes of Pericles

A reason/passion antithesis is evident throughout the History¹² and this antithesis is an important aspect of the Mytilenean Debate. Cleon's speech is an expression of emotion (anger) and it is also an effort to stir up anger in his audience. Diodotus' speech is a complete contrast. He is depicted as the embodiment of reason and the promoter of rationality. He contends that deliberation about important matters is essential (3.42.1) and that speeches are necessary for appropriate action. "Speeches teach action" (...τούς τε λόγους ... διδασκάλους των πραγμάτων γίγνεσθαι...) (3.42.2), which echoes Pericles:

"It is not debate that is a hindrance to action, but rather not to be instructed by debate (μη προδιδασχθηναι ... λόγω...) before the time comes for action" (2.40.2).

"We have this point also of superiority over other men, to be most daring in action and yet at the same time most given to reflection upon the ventures we mean to undertake (... επιχειρήσομεν εκλογίζεσθαι) ... With other men ... boldness means ignorance and reflection (λογισμος) brings hesitation" (2.40.3).

Pericles also believed that passion clouded judgment:

2.22.1 "Pericles ... seeing them exasperated (χαλεπαίνοντας) ... and convinced that his judgment was right (πιστεύων δε ορθως γινώσκειν) about not going out, did not convoke a meeting ... for fear that they would err through passion rather than judgment (οργη τι μαλλον η γνώμη ...εξαμαρτειν).

In his own voice Thucydides unequivocally endorses Pericles' attitude by praising his rational unemotional dealings with the Athenian δημοσ, saying that Pericles maintained an emotional equilibrium in his audience and restrained the multitude, i.e. held them back from excesses.

"... whenever he saw them unduly confident and arrogant (παρα καιρον ύβρει θαρσοουντας) his words would cow them into fear; when they were unreasonably afraid (δεδιότας αυ αλόγως), he would restore them to confidence again" (αντικαθίστη πάλιν επι το θαρσειν) (2.65.9).

Diodotus said that the wise city should maintain a balanced attitude to both good and bad speakers to discourage orators from speaking purely to please the people.(προς χάριν λέγοι... τω αυτω χαριζόμενος) (3.42.6). In this he once again recalls Pericles who did not resort to flattery,

¹² For a comprehensive discussion see Luginbill 1999, 21 – 35; 53 – 64.

seeking power by dishonest means. (μη κτώμενος ἐξ οὐ προσηκόντων τὴν δύναμιν πρὸς ἡδονὴν τι λέγειν) (2.65.8)

Diodotus thus aligns himself with Pericles and creates a strong contrast with Cleon's emotional statements. The above is an indication *that Diodotus' speech reflects Thucydides' opinion of Cleon, presented as a rebuttal of Cleon's arguments and an indictment of Cleon as a statesman and orator.*

6.2 Human Nature (φύσις)¹³

Cleon had claimed that the death penalty would be a deterrent against secession and rebellion (3.37.2; 3.40.7) but Diodotus took the opposite position. As part of his argument for rescinding the decree against the Mytileneans he said that all men made mistakes and then analysed the reason/passion polarity in human nature (3.45.1 – 7). He came to the conclusion that no law or punishment, however severe, would deter men under strong emotional compulsion from acting irrationally.

He argued that men are ruled by their passions and that their wishes dictate their actions. Hope and desire, anticipating good fortune, will drive them to take risks. Under the compulsion of necessity (ανάγκη), born from poverty, or greed (πλεονεξία), bred from the insolence and presumption of abundance, or any other irresistible or overpowering passion (3.45.4), men's wishes will lead them to take risks in defiance of visible dangers. If they have unexpected good fortune, they will overestimate their resources and act accordingly.

These sentiments, expressed by Diodotus, about the dominant role played by the impulsive side of human nature, are consistent with Thucydides' views expressed in the passages cited below (cf Luginbill 1999, 27):

“... For anger comes over men on seeing ... that they are suffering something unaccustomed and those who least employ calculation are most driven into action” (Archidamus' speech) (2.11.7).

The decisions of the subject cities “... were based more on vague wishes than on secure foresight, following the human habit of entrusting desires to heedless hopes, while using arbitrary reasons to dismiss what is unacceptable” (4.108.4).¹⁴

¹³ This discussion is limited to a demonstration that, on the subject of human nature, Diodotus expressed Thucydides' own opinion and commented on Cleon and his rhetorical methods. The definition of φύσις, the different shades of meaning of γνώμη and the interplay between ὄργη and γνώμη fall outside the scope of this part of the study. See Luginbill 1999, 21 – 35.

¹⁴ In 2.65.9 Thucydides describes Pericles' ability to control these passions.

When the Athenians first heard of the Mytilenean revolt, they would not believe the charge, “giving too much weight to their wish that it might not be true” (3.3).

Thucydides also indicates that human fallibility includes the fabrication of facts:

he was, for instance, unable to make an accurate calculation of the relative strengths of the opposing forces in the battle at Mantinea in 421, because of the human habit of boasting, i.e. irrationally inflating one’s own strength (cf. 5.68.2).

Apart from furnishing psychological reasons for lenience towards the Mytileneans, it may be taken that the passage (3.45.3 – 7) was used to express Thucydides’ own view of human nature.

6.3 Diodotus’ audience

The passage 3.45.1 - 7 is also a comment on Diodotus’ audience, whose behaviour clearly exhibited the reason/passion antithesis:

The decision taken on the previous day (3.40.2), which had been carried by Cleon (3.36.6), was prompted by anger (3.36.2). This means that Diodotus, as the voice of reason, had failed to control the Athenians’ passions. He had been unable to persuade the Athenians to his point of view and the decree was passed despite his opposition (3.41). On reflection, the Athenians changed their minds, regarding their decision as savage (ωμων) and monstrous (μέγα) (3.36.4) and on the second day “the majority of the citizens” (το πλέον των πολιτων) wanted the opportunity to reconsider the matter (3.36.5). The Mytilenean Debate can thus be seen as a contest between passion (represented by Cleon) and reason (represented by Diodotus). After Diodotus’ speech the Assembly itself entered into the contest (“οι Αθηναιοι ηλθον ... εξ αγωνα της δόξης”) (3.49.1) and the outcome was a narrow victory for Diodotus’ motion. This outcome was in reality a *defeat for reason*, because it meant that almost half of the citizens had been persuaded by Cleon to revert to their savage and monstrous decision of the previous day. The voice of reason was not strong enough to counter the fear and anger which Cleon had engendered in them through his speech. Their behaviour conformed exactly to Diodotus’ picture of human nature acting under the compulsion of emotion and disregarding rational thought.¹⁵

¹⁵ Although Diodotus referred only to men who were taking irrational *risks*, the same principles apply to the actions of the Athenians who reverted to their previous opinions.

The contest in the Assembly and their repeated changes of opinion indicate that, despite Cleon's persuasiveness, no speaker was recognised as authoritative, which is a telling comment on the quality of the Athenian leadership at the time.¹⁶

6.4 πρόνοια and Thucydides' theory of history

According to Thucydides, the consistency of human nature is responsible for the repetitive pattern of human history.¹⁷ In other words, Thucydides believes that with human nature as a given constant, events will always follow similar courses under similar sets of circumstances.

This thought is expressed in the introduction to the History:

“If ... they (i.e. the results of Thucydides' investigations) are judged useful by any who wish to look at the plain truth about past events and those that at some future date, in accordance with human nature will recur in similar or comparable ways, that will suffice” (1.22.4).

Comment on the stasis in Corcyra:

“And during the civil war the cities suffered many cruelties that occur and will always occur as long as men have the same nature ...” (3.82.2).

The implication is that a statesman or an orator can make predictions about the future, if he bases his predictions on a correct understanding of the political situation and takes full cognisance of human nature.

In his speech Diodotus claimed πρόνοια for himself: “On the questions of greatest importance and in the present circumstances, we speakers (ημᾶς λέγειν) should claim to think further ahead (περαιτέρω προνοούντας) than you, perceiving little ...” (3.43.4).

He continues, “If the man who persuades and the man who follows, were damaged equally, you would judge more sensibly; but, as things are, there are times, when in anger after a failure, you punish the one man who persuaded you, for his misjudgment, and not yourselves, though many of you joined in the mistake” (3.43.5).

These statements recall the occasion of Pericles' third speech and point ahead to a similar reaction from the Athenians when the news of the Sicilian disaster reached Athens :

¹⁶ “Where no speaker is recognised as authoritative, proposals must acquire authority in the minds of the audience solely on the basis of pertinent arguments (*or emotional appeals*) (my insertion) that support them (Yunis 1995, 95).

¹⁷ “This assumption is based on certain utterances in speeches, corroborated by the narrative and editorial sections of the History” (Luginbill 1999, 31 n 20).

On the first occasion the Athenians were angry with Pericles and blamed him for their misfortunes (2.59.2; 2.60.1; 61.2), but he told them that he had expected their anger and pointed out that they were blaming him unfairly.

In his first speech delivered before the outbreak of the war, Pericles had said that the enthusiasm for war (οργή) which is prevalent when men are being persuaded to enter into war, fluctuates according to the fortunes of war because their judgments (γνώμαι) change according to events (1.140.1).

On the second occasion, when the Athenians heard of their total defeat in Sicily, “they were angry with the orators who had shared their zeal for the expedition, just as if they had not voted for it themselves” (8.1.1). The Athenians had undertaken the expedition without forethought and under the impetus of irrational hope and desire, trying to extend their empire during the course of the war. Pericles had predicted that they would prevail in the war, if they did *not* extend the empire (2.65.7) and here again his πρόνοια is shown to be correct.

The claim to πρόνοια and the reference to Pericles indicate that Diodotus is expressing Thucydides’ own views and so his argument in favour of rescinding the decree against the Mytileneans, is in fact the application of Thucydides’ theory of history to the current circumstances. For Thucydides it is a given that men will always be led by the impulsive side of their natures, and it is on this basis that he makes Diodotus predict the likely outcome of the implementation of the Mytilenean decree.

It is noteworthy that both Cleon and Diodotus claim that their proposals are important for the future of Athens; both of them motivate their proposals by predicting what will happen if their particular suggestions are not followed, the word σκέψασθε (consider) introducing both predictions¹⁸.

6.5 The Sicilian Debate and its sequel illustrate Diodotus’/Thucydides’ view of human nature

Diodotus’ comments are mirrored by the description of the events preceding the departure of the Athenian expedition to Sicily¹⁹:

¹⁸ Cleon: 3.39.7 – 8; 3.40.7. Diodotus: 3.46.2 – 4; 3.47.1 – 5.

¹⁹ “The Athenian decision of 416/5 to send out a military expedition to conquer Syracuse and Sicily is characterised as irrational, guided by greed and blind to factual obstacles” (Stahl 2003, 190). See also Luginbill 1999, 33 – 34, n 41.

The Athenians were hoping to conquer the whole of Sicily – a large undertaking (6.8.4) – and for a variety of reasons (6.24.3), which had greed as their most important ingredient, an irresistible desire to sail, fell upon them (και έρωσ ενέπεσε τοις πασιν ομοίως εκπλευσαι) (6.24.3).

As Diodotus had said (3.45.5), hope led the way, followed by the irresistible desire (έρωσ) for things which were as yet unseen (αφανη) (3.45.5). Nicias had described the young Athenians' feelings as a "morbid craving for things which were out of reach" (δυσέρωτασ ειναι των απόντων) (6.13.1). Mirroring Diodotus' (Thucydides') explanation, these desires led the Athenians into disregarding the visible dangers from the Lacedaemonians, from their own empire and from the Sicilians themselves which Nicias had originally pointed out to them. They became only more eager to sail (πολλω μαλλον ... ώρμηντο στρατεύειν) (6.19.1), which confirms Diodotus' statement that neither law nor danger will dissuade men who are powerfully compelled to act (ορμωμένησ προθύμωσ) (3.45.7).

They deluded themselves into thinking that Nicias' subsequent outrageous demands for men and armaments (6.20.2 – 23.4) actually constituted good advice (6.24.2) and they thought that they would be invincible (6.24.3). The outcome of the expedition revealed the basic error in their calculations, namely that numbers alone were not sufficient to defeat the Sicilians. They also needed an able commander. Without Alcibiades the risk was too great and their delusions brought about disaster.

Before the Sicilian expedition the Athenians were manipulated by Alcibiades, who probably shared Thucydides' opinion of human nature but took advantage of it for the sake of his own ambition, love of ostentation and the money he needed for his extravagant lifestyle (6.15.2).

So Diodotus' speech is not only a refutation of Cleon but also contains Thucydides' analysis of the psychological pressures on the Athenians, which led to the Sicilian disaster. The criticism of Cleon is explicit in the speech; comment on Alcibiades and the situation before they sailed for Sicily is implied only.

7. CRITICISM OF THE ATHENIAN ASSEMBLY

7.1 Details

Cleon and Diodotus both criticise the Athenian Assembly in two parallel passages²⁰, as follows: Cleon attacks the intelligentsia and the orators who strive to outdo each other in cleverness and accuses the Assembly of frivolity. They treat the discussions as a sophistic spectacle rather than as a serious forum where decisions must be taken which affect the City and its safety (3.38.3 – 7). After defining good debate as an interchange where both the orators and the audience have certain responsibilities, Diodotus accuses the Athenians of doing the opposite.

He adds that the orators should not use intimidatory tactics but must debate fairly while the audience is responsible for equitable judgment of the speeches (3.42.5). The Athenians' suspicious attitude and excessive cleverness (*περινοΐας*) (3.43.1 - 3) compel both good and bad advisers to use deceit and to speak contrary to their true opinions in order to win the audience's favour.

7.2 Thucydides' opinion

Both Cleon and Diodotus refer to orators giving advice *contrary to their beliefs*, i.e. speaking dishonestly.

Cleon: "It is necessary for us to act and not to be excited by cleverness and intellectual contests into giving you, the citizens, advice *contrary to our true belief* (*παρα δόξαν ... παραινειν*) (3.37.5).

Diodotus: In properly conducted debate " the successful speaker will be least likely to say things *against his true opinion* (*παρα γνώμην ... λέγοι*) in order to curry favour, with a view to claiming yet higher honours and the unsuccessful will be least likely to win favour in the same way and win over the audience to his point of view" (3.42.6).

"Cleon's critique of specious intellectualism recalls the charges that Thucydides levels at his own specious predecessors, both poetic and prose" (Crane 1998, 55).²¹ It may therefore be concluded that on this particular point, Cleon is expressing Thucydides' opinion.

Diodotus' statements about the dishonesty of the orators and about their efforts to ingratiate themselves with their audiences echoes Thucydides' opinion about Pericles' successors. It is implied in the Encomium that they resorted to flattery, seeking power by dishonest means, unlike

²⁰ The formal parallelism between the two speeches seems to be a further indication that Diodotus' speech at least, is an artificial construction.

²¹ cf 1.21.

Pericles himself, “... μη κτώμενος εξ ου προσηκόντων την δύναμιν προς ηδόνην τι λέγειν...”(2.65.8).

The Athenian leaders at the time of the Mytilenean Debate were “οι δε ύστερον ίσοι μαλλον αυτοι προς αλληλους όντες” (the successors who were more on an equality with each other) (2.65.10) and who did not have the stature to prevail without deceiving the audience, i.e. they had to do what Pericles never did, “προς ηδονήν λέγειν” (speak to please). What this passage says, is that the δημοσ dominated the Assembly, so the orator who won a debate was the one who best knew how to handle them in a devious manner which, according to the remarks given to Cleon, could include the ability to give the best sophistic performance.

Even if Cleon is used to convey Thucydides’ view of the Assembly, it does not alter his opinion that Cleon is a devious and persuasive demagogue, which is made apparent in the contents of his speech. Cleon indulged in the very tactics which he was criticising. While he was attacking the rhetoric used in the Assembly, he was using the same kind of rhetoric himself.

Diodotus’ statement that the City cannot be benefited openly and that both good and bad advisers are compelled to use deceit, can be seen as a significant comment from Thucydides about the situation in Athens in 427 and about the post-Periclean decline in the quality of the leadership. It must be read in parallel with 2.65.8, “(Pericles) ... was able on the strength of his high reputation to oppose them and even provoke their wrath” (αλλ’ έχων επ’ αξιώσει και προς οργήν τι αντειπειν).

8. IS DIODOTUS A DEMAGOGUE?

8.1 General

Diodotus’ support for democratic debate (3.42.1 – 2) has been called dishonest, because he supposedly used it to make the Assembly change its mind (Immerwahr 1973, 28 – 29).

His rhetorical manoeuvres discussed under 4.2 also raise several questions and he has been accused of, inter alia, lying and employing invective (Macleod 1978, 74 – 75). If these accusations are valid, it would place Diodotus on a par with Alcibiades, the consummate demagogue.

His counter-argument about the Mytileneans, from advantage only, can be interpreted “as a deceptive rhetorical stratagem to counter Cleon” (Yunis 1996, 99 – 100).

As this study does not purport to judge the speeches in absolute terms, but is concerned only with the effect of Thucydides' opinions on the record of the speeches, the text alone is used as criterion for deciding the question.

The text shows that Diodotus' speech has contradictory characteristics in that it contains definite demagogic features as well as expressions of Thucydides' own opinion, serving as Thucydides' vehicle for refuting and criticising Cleon.

The expressions of Thucydides' opinion have been highlighted²² and it has been shown that the speech is a counter to Cleon, both in its overall format, tone and content and in smaller details.

8.2 Demagogic features

Diodotus had alleged that political rhetoric in Athens was based on deceit, but his own performance apparently followed the same trend.

He had opposed the original decree on the previous day which indicates that he probably agreed with the humanitarian sentiments of the Athenians²³. Diodotus does not oppose Cleon's proposals on humanitarian grounds however. When it comes to the judgement and severe punishment of the Mytileneans, he seems to feel compelled, despite the moral scruples of his audience, to waive humanitarian arguments and put political interests before his better judgment (3.44.1 ff) (cf Friedrichs 2000, 42). He was doing exactly what he had just decried, namely speaking "παρά γνώμην" (against his true opinion) (cf 3.42.6).

The possibility should also be considered that Diodotus had originally opposed the decree on the grounds of advantage to Athens and not for humanitarian reasons. It is unlikely, in view of his previous remarks, but even if he had been thinking of advantage only, his response to Cleon is still devious. By arguing from the point of view of advantage he evades²⁴ all Cleon's arguments about the culpability of the Mytileneans and the harm they had done to Athens. He even uses Cleon's appeal to justice against him. "In your present state of anger against the Mytileneans his speech may perhaps be accepted as more just. However, we have not gone to law with them, to obtain justice, but we are deciding about them, to make them useful to us" (3.44.4).

²² pp 56, 64 – 65, 66, 67, 68 – 69, 70, 71.

²³ 3.36.4: The Athenians changed their minds because they felt that the decree against Mytilene was savage and drastic.

3.49.4: The first trireme had not travelled with haste "ἐπι πραγμα αλλόκοτον" (on the distasteful/unwelcome/horrid business).

²⁴ Evading the issue is one of the techniques used most blatantly by Alcibiades in the Sicilian Debate.

From every angle the remarks in 43.1 – 3 indicate that Diodotus used tactics of which Thucydides disapproved: he either spoke against his true beliefs for the sake of advantage or he engaged in “specious intellectualism”.

The rhetorical manoeuvres which Diodotus employed in his reaction to Cleon’s attacks resemble Alcibiades’ response to Nicias’ accusations. Diodotus did not reply to the charges levelled at him by Cleon, but like Alcibiades, he evaded the issue so cleverly that he turned the tables on his opponent.

The passage 43.1 - 5²⁵ appears to be a deliberate inclusion by Thucydides to emphasise the deterioration in the calibre of the Athenian leadership after Pericles. The Athenian *δημος* was no longer wisely led but were flattered and cajoled into following the suggestions of the most persuasive *ρήτορες*.

The demagogic features in Diodotus’ speech are therefore interpreted as Thucydides’ comments on the situation and circumstances of the speech, to emphasise this deterioration and the character of the Athenian *δημος*.

Diodotus may or may not have been a demagogue, but it is postulated that when Thucydides used his speech as the instrument for opposing Cleon, given the character of the Athenian *δημος* and the calibre of the leadership, straightforward instructive rhetoric would not have been appropriate, so it was necessary to include demagogic features in the speech.

It is a rather sad comment by Thucydides that under the circumstances and with that particular audience, it was “necessary ... for someone giving excellent advice, to tell lies to make himself credible” (3.43.2).

²⁵ Despite the criticism by some scholars about this passage (Andrewes 1962, 74 n 25; Hornblower 2003, 434), I maintain that it is one of Thucydides’ key statements on post-Periclean politics.

CHAPTER 4

THE SICILIAN DEBATE

INTRODUCTION

1. GENERAL

The Sicilian debate is a further step along the line of post-Periclean degeneration in the Athenian leadership. While the Mytilenean debate showed a lack of distinctive leadership, despite the persuasiveness of Cleon, the Sicilian debate is a paradigm of *moral degeneration*.

Alcibiades was a gifted war leader and a brilliant persuasive orator, talented enough to have taken Pericles' place, but his inordinate ambition made him put his own interests before those of the πόλις and his dissolute lifestyle made him vulnerable to the suspicions of the people which manifested themselves in a foolish action after the Sicilian expedition had already sailed. Alcibiades' eloquence persuaded the Athenians to undertake an enterprise which could have succeeded only with him in command. When he was stripped of his command because of the suspicion against him, the expedition was doomed, especially with Nicias as one of the στρατηγοί. Nicias, the other participant in the debate, an unwilling participant in the expedition, a timorous man, who was really unfit to command, was dishonest in debate, masking his true motives behind a screen of other reasons. He further showed a lack of self-control, as witness his abuse of Alcibiades and Alcibiades' young followers (6.12.2 – 13.1).

The keynotes of this debate are a lack of truth, deception and delusion. It is also the continuation of the process, which in Thucydides' opinion dominated the start and progress of the Peloponnesian war, namely the predominance of emotion over reason (cf 1.88). This debate is in fact the prime example where reason was replaced by irrational emotions which were so strong that Thucydides used the word έρως to describe them.¹

From this perspective the Sicilian debate lies very close to the nadir of degeneration after Pericles: the wisely led δημοσ of Pericles' day had been manipulated into becoming an όγλος, governed entirely by emotion. The outcome of the Mytilenean debate was that reasonable counsels prevailed over a decision that was “ωμον και μέγα” (savage and violent) (3.36.4; 3.49.1) - but only just. Here reason is swept away completely.

¹“ και έρωσ ενέπεσε τοις πασιν ομοίως εκπλευσαι” (and on all alike there fell an overwhelming desire to sail out) (6.24.3).

The Sicilian Debate has been analysed from many different viewpoints². This study tries to concentrate on its purely rhetorical aspects and so the characters of the orators, the political climate, the eventual effects of the Debate and other factors are considered only insofar as they impact on these aspects.

2. NICIAS AND ALCIBIADES

This study will try to show that although Nicias was not really a demagogue and although he put forward the right arguments against the Sicilian Expedition, there are nevertheless demagogic strains in his speech.

Alcibiades, on the contrary, is depicted as a consummate demagogue. He wins the contest with Nicias and inflames the Athenian Assembly to a high pitch of enthusiasm for the Expedition.

Thucydides clearly wanted to draw comparisons between Nicias, Alcibiades and Pericles, so the figure of Pericles looms large in the narrative of the Sicilian Expedition, as in the speeches.

The rhetoric of Nicias and Alcibiades will be compared with that of Pericles and a further detailed comparison will be drawn between Alcibiades' speech and Pericles' last speech.

The Sicilian Debate is not a carefully reasoned discussion but a psychological contest, an *αγών*, fought in emotional terms for the control of the audience, namely the Athenian Assembly. Despite Nicias' arguments favouring the merits of foresight against experimentation, Alcibiades won the contest and carried away the audience through his demagogic rhetoric to an emotional outcome.

In Books 5 and 6 the conflict between Nicias and Alcibiades is presented as a clash of personalities as well as of foreign policies, both here in the Sicilian Debate and in the debate preceding Nicias' embassy to Lacedaemon (5.43 - 47) (cf Westlake 1968, 169 -70).

The speeches represent two diametrically opposite characters as well as two diametrically opposite foreign policies. Nicias, the successful, mature general, excessively cautious (5.16; 5.46 - 47) and careful of his own honour and safety, favoured peace with Lacedaemon and a quietist foreign policy (*ἡσυχία*) (cf Westlake 1968, 171,173).

Alcibiades, the brilliant but dissolute young aristocrat had in recent years "encouraged the Athenians to support the enemies of Sparta in the Peloponnese, thus endangering the uneasy

² Westlake 1968, 169 - 72; Palmer 1992, 93 - 106; Yunis 1996, 103 - 9; Rood 1998, 161 - 7; Luginbill 1999, 155 - 6; Stahl 2003, 177 - 8.

peace” (Yunis 1996, 104). For personal reasons he now warmly advocated the Sicilian expedition (6.15.1 – 3).

3. THE CONTRAST WITH PERICLES

3.1 The individual and the state / the leader and the people

According to Thucydides the Sicilian Expedition brought disaster upon Athens because the Athenians had not followed Pericles’ policies in the war (2.65.6 – 7) (Hornblower 2003, 343).

Led by individual ambition and individual greed they harmed the City when, contrary to his advice, they attempted to extend their territory, so putting the City at risk. As long as these policies were successful, they benefited only individual citizens, but when they failed, they were detrimental to the state (2.65.7). Although these statements may refer to other leaders as well, they are definitely clear references to Alcibiades.³

The emphasis here is on the contrast between private and public interests. Pericles placed the public interest above that of the individual (2.65.8 – 10) and during his tenure as first citizen the City reached the height of its greatness (και εγένετο επ’ εκείνου μεγίστη)(2.65.5).⁴ Thucydides implies that afterwards, when personal interests took precedence, the City met disaster.

The *ιδία - δημοσία* contrast forms an important theme in the Sicilian Debate and occurs in both Nicias’ and Alcibiades’ speeches.

The second reason (*αίτιον* - 2.65.8) for the disaster which overtook Athens, lay in the deterioration of the quality of its leadership from the ideal standard set by Pericles. Because of his high moral qualities and strength of personality, Pericles became the “first man” of Athens, although he was no *τύραννος* (*κατειχε το πληθος ελευθέρως*) (he restrained the multitude while respecting their liberties) (2.65.8). His successors, not being of the same calibre, had to compete for supremacy⁵ and even pandered to the whims of the people by handing over the city’s affairs to them (2.65.10).

In Thucydides’ opinion such a system was a recipe for disaster, the Sicilian Expedition being the most notable example (2.65.11).

³ cf 6.15.2 and Hornblower 2003, 342 – 3.

⁴ I argue that the “successors” mentioned in 2.65.10 were not a homogeneous group and that this statement does not refer to Alcibiades. See discussion on p 77.

⁵ Except for Alcibiades.

I argue that Alcibiades is not included amongst these weak leaders because Thucydides describes him as a capable commander (6.15.4) and the Athenians' reaction to his speech in the Sicilian Debate shows that he was able to manipulate and control the people (after his speech they were even more eager than before to sail) (6.19.1).

Despite Thucydides' previous implied criticism of Alcibiades for instigating the attempt on Sicily, he is clearly set apart from the other leaders, which is borne out by an apparently contradictory statement: Thucydides says that the Sicilian Expedition was not so much (ὡς οὐ τοσοῦτον) an error of judgment, considering the enemy the Athenians faced, but that "disadvantageous decisions" (οὐ τὰ πρόσφορα) (2.65.11) hampered those in the field.⁶ At the same time the leaders at home were distracted by their intrigues to gain popular leadership, which then led to civil discord (2.65.11).

This leads to the conclusion that, although the Sicilian Expedition was a hazardous and reckless venture, undertaken at Alcibiades' behest, for his own gain, *Thucydides thought that he was the only commander who could have succeeded.*⁷ When he was relieved of his command, the other leaders, including Nicias, were either too divided or too weak to succeed.

The preamble to Alcibiades' speech in the Sicilian Debate confirms his capabilities. The Athenians "καὶ ἄλλοις ἐπιτρέψαντες οὐ δια μακροῦ ἐσφηλάν την πόλιν" (entrusting the city to other hands, after no long time brought it to ruin) (6.15.4).

Thucydides' recognition of Alcibiades' talents is also confirmed later on in the History: the soldiers at Samos were threatening to attack the Piraeus, but Alcibiades prevented it "when no other man would have been able to hold back the multitude, but he stilled it and with a scolding dissuaded those who were personally enraged against the envoys" (8.86). Shades of Pericles! Pericles was able to "ἀντειπεῖν" (gainsay) the crowds (cf Rood 1998, 276 n 76).

The encomium on Pericles can thus be seen as a sad comment on the Athenian leadership, namely *that the only man who could have led Athens to success after Pericles' death, was a debauched demagogue, pursuing only his own aggrandisement and profit, at the cost of the City.*

⁶ The decision to recall Alcibiades and not Nicias being one of these errors (Hornblower 2003, 149 , 348).

⁷ "Thucydides suggests that victory in Sicily was difficult but possible, but also that the expedition itself was an unsound deviation from the Periklean policy of not increasing the empire in time of war" (Rood 1998, 161). "The successes of Alcibiades ... in 411 - 407 may have shown that he could have won Sicily" (Rusten 1989, 212).

3.2 The debate – the protagonists compared with Pericles

The debate between Nicias and Alcibiades which precedes the departure of the Sicilian Expedition, shows a distorted image of Pericles. Each protagonist manifests some of Pericles' characteristics, but they are deficient in others.

Pericles defined the qualities of a statesman as *knowledge, exposition, patriotism and honesty* (2.60.5).

As discussed above, Alcibiades, though gifted with political insight, eloquence and the ability to lead the people, lacked Pericles' honesty, prudence and patriotism.

Nicias adhered to Pericles' principles about the war, but he was also deficient in honesty⁸ and lacked Pericles' coercive powers (Rood 1998, 158; See also Pouncey 1980, 116).

In his speech Alcibiades is portrayed as a sophisticated and subtle orator who was able to inflame his audience without resorting to the crude demagogic measures employed by Cleon in the Mytilenean Debate or to Nicias' clumsiness here in the Sicilian Debate. In the Mytilenean Debate Cleon resorts to slander (e.g. 3.38.2 and 3.40.1) while Nicias is not quite honest and descends to argument by open insult (6.12.2). Alcibiades is portrayed as such a skilled demagogue that he defeats Nicias by, inter alia, simply patronising him (6.17.1) (Cogan 1981, 95).

Against these flawed characters Thucydides places the figure of Pericles who, in his opinion, led the Athenians by clear reasoning and the strength of his incorruptible character (2.65.8).⁹

4. APPEARANCE VS REALITY

4.1 General

The Sicilian Debate and its background are defined by an absence of truth. The debate is built around a core of lies, deception, ulterior motives, pretexts, false perceptions, ignorance and illusion. The absence of hard facts and reliable information gives scope to wishful thinking and rash impulses on the part of the demos, and to manipulation and misrepresentation by the orators. Alcibiades in particular deftly turns this to rhetorical advantage in urging the expedition. When his unfounded views prevail, unreality becomes real to the Athenians and the facts which Nicias had put forward about the Lacedaemonian threat and the problems in the Athenian Empire,

⁸ Finley (1947, 158 – 9) calls Nicias honest (χρημάτων κρείσσων) but overlooks his dubious handling of the truth.

⁹ It is necessary to stress that this study is not concerned with the correctness or otherwise of Thucydides' opinions but with the effect his opinions had on the content and format of the speeches in the various debates.

become unreal. The decisions taken in the Assembly are based on ignorance combined with a desire for conquest (Crane, 1996, 182 – 3).

4.2 Athenian ignorance and duplicity

In the winter of 416/5 the Athenians resolved to sail to Sicily, although they were *ἀπειροί* (ignorant) of its size and population and unaware that they were undertaking a war about as great as the one against the Peloponnesians (6.1.1).

Thucydides begins Book 6 with an “archaeology” of Sicily (6.2 – 5), formally establishing a parallelism with Book 1 whose “archaeology” (1.2 – 19) prefaces the outbreak of war between Athens and the Lacedaemonians in 431 (Lattimore 1998, 302) and in this way he emphasises the magnitude of the enterprise and the extent of the Athenians’ ignorance.

The Athenians had the pretext of succouring their kindred and allies in Sicily, but they really wanted to conquer the whole island. In describing their real ambition, Thucydides uses the phrase *τη ἀληθεστάτη προφάσει* “the truest cause” (6.6.1), which is an echo of the phrase he used in Book 1 about the situation before the outbreak of the war in 431 (1.23.6).

In Book 1 there were many ostensible causes of war, but the real cause lay in the Lacedaemonians’ fear of the growing power of Athens. Here, in the parallel situation, the Athenians’ ambition and greed, which they kept hidden, lay behind their ill-considered attempt at the conquest of an island about which they knew very little. The absence of facts and reliable information made them vulnerable to manipulation and misrepresentation by the orators. The parallelism emphasises the Athenian ignorance and the magnitude of the undertaking, hinting at its disastrous end.

4.3 The duplicity of the Egestaeans

The Egestaeans who had asked Athens for help in their domestic dispute with their neighbours, furnished the Athenians with a plausible excuse for the expedition, namely that if the Syracusans were not punished for depopulating Leontini, they might take over the whole Sicily, ally themselves with the Peloponnesians and eventually pull down the Athenian Empire (6.6.2).

The Egestaeans made a false promise of funding for the expedition and with a false display of wealth they deceived the Athenian delegation sent to investigate the situation and their resources. Their deception was discovered only after the Expedition had sailed (6.46.1) and had already arrived at Rhegium.

On the return of the delegation, the envoys and the Egestaeans presented much that was both attractive and untrue (6.8.2) to the Athenian Assembly, very neatly combining the Athenian fear of Lacedaemonian aggression with their greed and tacit desire for conquest. Alcibiades easily exploited this state of mind in promoting the expedition, giving much prominence to this political line as a cover for his own personal motives. Nicias was sceptical of the Egestaeans' arguments and correctly surmised that they were false.

4.4 The duplicity of the orators

Both speakers are in a sense lying, because each had for reasons quite external to the ones he adduced in the debate, made the decision about his position on the Expedition (Cogan 1981, 95).

Nicias wanted peace for personal reasons: his real reasons for opposing the enterprise lay in his natural caution and his desire to retain his reputation (5.16). To that extent he was not entirely disinterested.

Alcibiades wanted to oppose Nicias and desired glory and money (6.15.2 & 3).

The reasons they mentioned in the speeches are different and their arguments are put forward as counters to move the Athenian audience. Private agendas are marked as public interest.

Nicias exaggerates the Spartan danger and the dangers from the empire while Alcibiades gives a distorted view of Sicily and the Spartan threat and exaggerates the Athenian characteristics and their need for constant action (6.18.3).

The crucial point is that the exaggeration and distortion go unnoticed because the *δημος* is led purely by their emotions. (See 6.24. 2 & 3) and are prone to accept the version that matches their wishful thinking most closely.

By way of Diodotus' speech in the Mytilenean debate, Thucydides, supplies an apt description of the Athenians' state of mind at this point :

“Hope and desire, in every case, the one leading and the other one following, the one thinking out the plan and the other pointing to the success that will come from good fortune, though unseen entities, are more powerful than the dangers which can be seen” (3.45.5).

It was hope and desire, together with a fear of being dominated by others, which motivated the Sicilian expedition.

NICIAS

1. NICIAS AS ORATOR

1.1 A double-layered speech

There are two layers in Nicias' speeches, namely one, the surface layer, i.e. what he actually said and two, the underlying layer, formed by his personality and his real motives for delivering these speeches.

Nicias was not a true demagogue in the sense of a rabble-rousing orator. He promoted a sensible course of action by opposing the Sicilian Expedition, thus following Pericles' advice: "...he (Pericles) said that by keeping quiet ... not extending the empire and not endangering the city they would prevail" (2.65.7).

Nicias even used "Periclean" arguments by stressing the need for deliberation before action (6.9.1 cf 2.40.2) and prudence (6.11.1 see above 2.65.7) i.e. putting forward the merits of foresight in contrast to experimentation. He was genuinely concerned about the rashness of the Assembly's decision to undertake the Expedition and he recognised the duplicity of the Athenians.

"He thought that the city had not come to a right decision but that with a slight and specious pretext (προφάσει βραχεία και ευπρεπει) aimed at the whole of Sicily, a large task" (μεγάλου έργου) (6.8.4).

The interpolation *μεγάλου έργου* suggests an authorial opinion but the point is that they were not the only reasons why Nicias opposed the Expedition.

1.2 The underlying layer

The key to the underlying layer of Nicias' speeches lies in the words " και ο Νικίας ακούσιος μιν ηρημένος άρχειν" (Nicias, who had been elected to command *against his will*) (6.8.4.a) .

He did not want to command the Expedition, but instead of refusing outright he tried to dissuade the Athenians from undertaking it¹⁰. His first speech advocated the right action, but his motives were suspect. More specifically, the following aspects are relevant:

¹⁰ It is not known whether refusing a command would have been regarded as dishonourable. Nicias may also have been under pressure from his peers to accept the command (Pouncey 1980, 122). On a later occasion though, he had no scruples about asking to be released from this command (7.15).

Nicias was excessively concerned about his own reputation and honour.

5.16 “Nicias who was the most fortunate general of his time, desired peace ... While still happy and honoured and wishing to secure his good fortune, to obtain release from trouble for himself and his countrymen and to hand down to posterity a name as an ever-successful statesman, he thought he should keep out of danger and commit himself as little as possible to fortune, and that peace alone made this keeping out of danger possible”.

Further – when the peace treaty started disintegrating, Nicias was sent as one of the ambassadors to ask the Lacedaemonians to give up their alliance with Boeotia, otherwise Athens would ally herself with Argos, the opposing side (5.46). The Lacedaemonians refused to give up the alliance, which put Nicias in a panic. He asked them to renew their oaths to keep the peace with Athens because “he feared to return to Athens without having accomplished anything and be disgraced” (5.46).

The command of the Sicilian Expedition was a threat to Nicias, the man of peace who wanted to rest on his laurels (Pouncey 1980, 130) so that he could maintain his reputation for public service and military heroism. He seems to have had a particular concern for appearances, as witness his remark “we all know that what is most admired is what is farthest off and least liable to have its reputation put to the test” (6.11.4).

He also believed that the individual's well-being was tied up with that of the state.

“... a man need (not) be any the worse citizen for taking some thought for his person and estate; on the contrary, such a man would for his own sake desire the prosperity of his country more than others” (6.9.2).

Nicias is echoing Pericles here; “a man may be personally well off but if his country is ruined, he must be ruined with it; a flourishing commonwealth ... affords chances of salvation to unfortunate individuals... a state can support the misfortunes of private individuals, while they cannot support hers” (2.60.4).

It is postulated here that for Nicias (and for Pericles) the *ιδία* - *δημοσία* interests are on the same level and mutually interdependent: a citizen should promote the state's interests, not only for the sake of the state, but also for his own sake. On this basis there is no virtue in Nicias' concern for Athens, because he was in fact only trying to protect himself.¹¹

¹¹ See also Rood 1998, 185 and Nicias' other statements about the interests of the state: “A good citizen” (6.9.2 & 6.14); “public danger” (6.12.2); “national benefit” (6.13.1); “physician of the country” (6.14).

Alcibiades reverses the equation, placing the personal dimension above the public dimension and making the public interest dependent on personal achievements.

The difference between Pericles' and Nicias' statements lies in the *context* in which they were made – Pericles was trying to encourage the people, while Nicias' excessive concern for his honour indicates that he was thinking about himself more than about the City, using public interest as a cover for private concerns. Pericles argues from τα δημοσία to τα ἰδία– the city must prosper and then everybody will prosper as well; Nicias places τα ἰδία first - he wanted to retain his reputation and the only way lay through a safe city which meant that ill-considered attempts at conquest such as the Sicilian Expedition, had to be opposed (See further Palmer 1992, passim).

The effect of the underlying layer on the format of the speech

Nicias' state of mind gives his speeches their sense of desperation; a careful reading gives the impression that he did not expect to convert the Athenians to his point of view, for he knew their disposition (6.9.3). He had neither Pericles' nor Alcibiades' powers of persuasion, so he used other techniques such as exaggeration about the perils besetting Athens and a clearly recognisable attack on Alcibiades to discredit him (an ad hominem attack as argument) (Cogan 1981, 95). In his second speech he eventually attempts to hoodwink¹² the Assembly by deliberate exaggeration, “Nicias, after deciding that he could no longer dissuade them with the same arguments, but could probably change their minds by the magnitude of the preparations, if he made them considerable, came before them again” (6.19.4), and also,

“so much Nicias said, thinking that he would deter the Athenians by the multitude of his requirements, or if he should be forced to make the expedition, he would in this way set out most safely” (6.24.1).¹³

Although Thucydides recognises Nicias' essential virtue in his brief epitaph (7.86.5), his total depiction of Nicias gives the impression of a “general smaller than his reputation” (Pouncey 1980, 130). In the Sicilian Debate in particular, his speeches must be regarded as “demagogic rhetoric” because of his ulterior motives and his attempt at deception, which ironically, had an

¹² Westlake in Stadter (ed) 1973, 106. Crane calls his method “reverse psychology” (Crane 1996, 248), which still amounts to deliberate deception of the audience.

¹³ Note Thucydides' emphasis on Nicias' concern for himself in his effort to deceive the Athenians.

effect contrary to his purposes because it made the Athenians far more intent on the Expedition than before (6.24.2 - 3).

Nicias stands in contrast to both Pericles and Alcibiades; the latter is depicted as an unscrupulous demagogue while Nicias is at best a feeble pseudo-Pericles.

1.3 Nicias and the rules of procedure

The Athenian envoys dispatched to Sicily to investigate the situation and check on the financial resources of the Egestaeans, returned with glowing reports of the funds available – “as attractive as they were untrue” (6.8.2). The Assembly then decided to dispatch a fleet under Nicias, Alcibiades and Lamaches to succour the Egestaeans and to restore Leontini (6.8.2). Five days later at an Assembly called for logistical purposes, Nicias reopened the debate in an effort to dissuade the Athenians from sending out the expedition.

“This Assembly was convoked with reference to our armament ... *to me however*, it seems that we ought to consider yet again whether it is best to send the ships at all” (6.9.1).

“Although we know little about the procedures through which speakers were given the floor and debate was conducted” (Yunis 1996, 9 n 20), reconsideration would not have been illegal had it been placed on the agenda by the Council, as was plainly the case in the Mytilenean debate.¹⁴

It is however clear that Nicias was out of order because he did not keep to the *agenda* of the meeting, which was to discuss the *logistics* for the Sicilian expedition (6.9.1), but misused the opportunity to address the Assembly. His appeal to the Prytanis at the end of his first speech shows that he was well aware of the procedural rules, but nevertheless took the risk of violating them, in order to get himself heard.

Nicias puts psychological and moral pressure on the Prytanis by implying that if the latter does not do what he says, he would be failing in his duty, he would not be a good citizen and he would not be exercising good governance:

“If you think it your duty to care for the πόλις and you wish to prove yourself a good citizen (βούλει γενέσθαι πολίτης αγαθός), *bring the matter to the vote again*” (6.14.a).

The implication is that *if the matter is not brought to the vote again, the Prytanis would be failing in his duty.*

“Think, if you fear to put the matter to the vote again, that breaking the law would carry no guilt in front of so many witnesses” (6.14.b).

¹⁴ See Yunis on the reconsideration of decisions (Yunis 1996, 89).

In other words, Nicias indicated that *the seriousness of the decision justified re-opening the discussion even if this meant departing from strict procedure*. The decision was serious - for Athens - but as discussed above, for Nicias himself as well.

“You would become a physician for the city in its counsels” (της δε πόλεως βουλευσαμένης ιατρος αν γενέσθαι) (6.14c). The medical terminology assumes that the city is in poor health, that its discussions are unhealthy and that it is the proposed expedition which is making the City ill because of Alcibiades’ influence. In this way psychological and moral pressure is put on the Prytanis to take a stand against the Expedition by allowing another vote.

“Good governance is (και το καλως άρξει τουτ’ είναι) to benefit the country as much as possible and not to harm it intentionally” (6.14c). This patronising final statement emphasises that the Prytanis would be a bad leader if he does not do what Nicias wants. Personal interests are cleverly passed off as a concern for national and collective interests.

Nicias’ not-so-subtle pressure on the chairman of the meeting by various loaded appeals to get him to depart from procedure, can only be called demagogic.

The Prytanis was placed in an invidious position:

on the one hand Nicias’ proposal was against the rules and if he acceded to Nicias’ request, his impartiality would be compromised because he would be taking a stand against those who supported the expedition;

on the other hand a refusal to allow further debate and a second vote would carry the slur of dereliction of duty and a lack of patriotism.

This manoeuvre is so clever that it is worthy of the best (or worst) of demagogues and in the end Nicias gained his point, because the debate was allowed to continue (6.15.1). A second vote was taken but Nicias lost. Because he had not read the mood of his audience correctly, he had not really converted them to his point of view and ironically, in the continued debate which he had requested, his opponent who understood them very well, managed to make them more enthusiastic than before about the enterprise (6.24.2).¹⁵

¹⁵ It is a moot point whether Nicias thought that the Prytanis would call for another vote immediately, without allowing further debate. If he had done that, Alcibiades would not have spoken and Nicias might have had more support. As the outcome is historical fact, the arrangement of the speeches might be no more than Thucydides’ convention and then the above question does not arise.

1.4 The mechanics of duplicity

The opening statements of Nicias' first speech define the two layers of the speech:

- The surface layer

Nicias shows his concern for the city by expressing his reservations about the expedition, “consider ...whether it is best to send the ships at all... we ought not on such slight deliberation about matters of great importance undertake a war which does not concern us” (6.9.1).

- The underlying layer

“..from such an enterprise I myself get honour (καίτοι έγωγε και τιμωμαι εκ του τοιούτου) and have less fear than others about my person, although I consider that he is quite as good a citizen who takes some forethought for his life and property; for such a one would for his own sake, be most desirous that the affairs of the city should prosper. But nevertheless neither have I in the past, for the sake of being preferred in honour (...δια το προτιμασθαι), spoken contrary to my judgment, nor shall I do so now, but I shall speak just as I deem best” (6.9.2).

In the light of Nicias' unwillingness to accept command of the expedition, these sentences can be regarded as a signal from Thucydides that Nicias' statements should not be taken at face value, but should be interpreted in the light of his excessive concern for himself and his honour.

Nicias also tells an outright lie: It is not true that he thought that he would get honour from the enterprise. He really felt that because the expedition was ill-considered, foolhardy and doomed to failure, it would bring him, as the commander, disgrace and not honour (See 1.2 above).

It was further misleading to say that he had less fear than others about his *person* (περι τω εμαυτου σώματι ορρωδω) (6.9.2) because he had more fear than others about his *reputation*, which affected his behaviour during the Sicilian campaign, to the detriment of Athens.¹⁶

In the debate prior to the embassy to Lacedaemon in 420, Nicias had said that the adjournment of the war could only increase the Athenians' prestige and *because their own affairs were flourishing*, it would be in the Athenians' interest to preserve this prosperity as long as possible (5.46).

He then does a volte-face and in 415 in the Sicilian Debate he says that Athens is beset by dangers (6.10.1 – 5) and is *risking greater danger than ever before* (ως μέγιστον δη πριν κίνδυνον αναρριπούσης) (6.13.1).

¹⁶ “Nicias did not want to be put to death on a shameful charge unjustly, but preferred to meet it from the enemy” (7.84.4), demonstrating his predominant concern for his own welfare over his army's welfare” (Pouncey 1980, 125).

Since the Athenian situation had not materially changed between 420 and 415 and may even have improved in the light of the destruction of Melos, the two different statements were most probably fabrications by Nicias to support his argument for peace in each case. His desire for peace seems to supersede his regard for the truth.

The conclusion from the above is that Nicias' concern for himself led him to duplicity because he desired peace at all costs in order to protect his reputation, as Thucydides had observed in 5.16.

1.5 The realm of fantasy

In the next part of his speech Nicias points at the Athenians' wrong perceptions and false confidence – their haste is untimely and their aims not easy to attain (6.9.3) - and warns them about their false confidence in the security of the treaty with Lacedaemon (6.10.2). He uses an abundance of strategic and political arguments and emphasises especially the value of prudence and moderation (6.10.1 – 5) (Friedrichs 2000, 73).

However, as he goes on, his own argument is based more and more on supposition, which includes a series of statements with no basis in fact (6.11.2 - 4), continuing the theme of illusion and unreality.¹⁷

The ample use of conditional constructions, $\epsilon\iota$ and $\acute{\alpha}\nu$ shows that what Nicias says, reflects nothing more than his own opinions, fears and suppositions and hypothetical constructs, put forward as part of his argument to convince his audience (see analysis in Annexure A).

Nicias maintained that the Sicilian states would be less and not more dangerous, as the Egestaeans alleged, if Syracuse acquired rule over them. The states might attack Athens singly “but it it was not likely that one empire would attack another empire” (6.11.3).

“This seems a very lame argument... Nevertheless one does come across other silly notions in the politics of the day – or of any day, for that matter” (Tronson 1990, 135).

Nicias continues:

The Hellenes in Sicily would be most in awe, first, if the Athenians did not come at all and second, if they should go and then depart after a brief demonstration of power (6.11.4). It is

¹⁷ Yunis seems to gloss over Nicias' utterings in 6.11.2 – 4 and calls his argument “pertinent and instructive” (Yunis 1996, 104 – 5). The examples quoted here, seem to indicate that this is only partially correct.

noteworthy that in another effort to curtail the expedition, Nicias proposed the same “show of force” manoeuvre when the Athenians were already at Rhegium (6.47).

Nicias based these statements on the value of appearances and perceptions in warfare and illustrated his point with the Athenians’ own incorrect perception of Lacedaemon (6.11.5 – 6).¹⁸ The Athenians should not be elated (6.11.6) at the misfortunes of their opponents because, despite appearances, they were still extremely dangerous.

Replacing fact with supposition as a basis for argument could be taken as an admission by Nicias that the facts at his disposal were not enough to persuade the Athenians. Lacking the skill to convince them on the basis of fact, he had to resort to suppositions and appearances as a rhetorical tool.

He did say at the beginning of his speech “against tempers like yours, my words would be unavailing if I should exhort you to preserve your assets and not to hazard present possessions for things that are unseen and in the future (περι των αφανων και μελλοντων) (6.9.3). While he is urging the Athenians to refrain from taking risks for the sake of illusions (των αφανων) Nicias resorts to unreality himself.

1.6 Excessive caution and exaggerated pessimism

Nicias’ prominent character traits of caution and the avoidance of danger (5.16) (see 1.2 above) contributed to the Athenians’ failure in Sicily¹⁹. In the Sicilian debate he used caution, warning and pessimism as rhetorical tools. The keynote of his two speeches is the avoidance of any risk²⁰ creating the impression that he is carrying caution to excessive lengths (Westlake 1968, 172). He depicted Athens as a beleaguered state, beset by dangers on all sides, which would be brought to ruin by the slightest setback or defeat.

The largest part of his first speech (6.10.1 - 11.7) is devoted to warnings and descriptions of the dangers facing Athens viz.

(i) He felt that the difficulty of the expedition had not been adequately considered because the Sicilians were far off and powerful and would be difficult to control even if they were subdued, which was in itself uncertain (6.11.1);

¹⁸ There is a difference between these statements and Alcibiades’ claims that his displays created a perception of strength (6.16.3). Although both Nicias and Alcibiades postulate that appearance is important, Alcibiades refers to actual fact, while Nicias is arguing in the realm of pure supposition.

¹⁹ Westlake 1968, 173, 177; Pouncey 1980, 120, 130; Cogan 1981, 95; Rood 1998, 163.

²⁰ 6.10.2 - 5; 11.5 - 7; 20.2 - 4; 21.2.

(ii) The threat from Lacedaemon was very serious, because the peace treaty was on the point of collapse and some of the Lacedaemonian allies had not even concluded a formal peace with Athens. The Lacedaemonians were looking for an opportunity to resume the war to avenge their own defeat and if the Athenians were defeated in Sicily they would certainly attack Athens. Even if the Athenians were not defeated, the Lacedaemonians could help the Sicilians and work towards Athens' downfall (6.10.2 - 4);

(iii) Her own Empire was not secure because the Thracian Chalcideans were in revolt and the allegiance from the other σύμμαχοι was doubtful (6.10.5).

“His argument virtually rules out any possibility of an Athenian victory: a telling piece of character portrayal by Thucydides” (Tronson 1990, 136).

As the examples above show, apart from Nicias' self-justification at the beginning and the exhortation at the end, the whole first speech is negative; there is not a single positive statement. As the speech was intended to oppose the Sicilian Expedition, negative statements are to be expected, but the tone of the speech is so pessimistic and defeatist that it is not surprising that the Athenians, who were thinking of conquest and enrichment (6.24.3), and who were active and enterprising by nature, were not at all amenable to Nicias' dire warnings. The potential dangers must have acted as a challenge to them. The young men in particular, were most probably excited by the risks which Nicias had pointed out (Rood 1998, 167) (see 2.2 below).

2. THE αγών

2.1 Background

As shown above, Nicias was opposed to the proposed expedition to Sicily, not only for the sake of the City, but also for his own sake. When he addressed the Assembly, asking them to rescind their previous decision to sail for Sicily, he entered into an αγών with Alcibiades who favoured the expedition for his own reasons (See 6.15). The prize was the support of the audience. In this contest Nicias had four adversaries, one being the audience. The audience consisted of younger men who were supporters of Alcibiades and older men of whom the majority had already voted for the expedition (6.13.1). They may have been openly hostile and were at least unsympathetic, with little interest in hearing Nicias' arguments.²¹

²¹ Yunis 1996, 104. Compare also the Corinthians' description of the Athenian character (1.70).

Nicias' other adversaries were Alcibiades himself, his young supporters who are singled out for special treatment and the Eggestaeans whose request for Athenian help had initiated the Sicilian enterprise.

2.2 Nicias and his audience

Nicias was a virtuous man (7.86) and a fortunate commander, (see discussion of Nicias' luck under Alcibiades 3) but he was un-Athenian in that he lacked the Athenians' πολυπραγμοσύνη (meddlesomeness) and their restless energy. He wanted peace; they were by nature not peaceful.²²

Nicias seemed to be unable to see beyond his own point of view and so his arguments appear to be directed only at that part of the audience with whom he could identify, namely the more cautious older men. By decrying Alcibiades' youth (6.12.2) and the extravagant feelings of the younger men (6.13.1), Nicias seemed to be driving a wedge between young and old, which did not help his cause at all but left an opening for Alcibiades to use to his own advantage (6.18.6).

His efforts to persuade the audience to his point of view failed because he did not understand them and approached them in the wrong way. He did not address the real reasons for the Expedition,²³ and his appeals to the audience were ineffective because he had no rapport with them. To them his warnings probably sounded like pious platitudes. In contrast, Alcibiades understood the Athenians' innermost desires (Luginbill 1999, 155) and knew exactly how to exploit their characteristics.

Before he put forward his arguments against the expedition, Nicias made a statement establishing his bona fides. In the light of his underlying motives, this statement illustrates his duplicity (see Section 1.4, pp 86,87) but it is also part of his technique. It is an effort to convince his audience of his sincerity and concern for the city, in order to get their attention.

Nicias said that the Assembly should not, on such *slight deliberation* on matters of great importance, and at the instigation of *men of alien race*, undertake a war which did not concern them (6.9.1), which recalls Pericles (2.40.2) (See 1.1, p 81). The Periclean echo would have commended itself particularly to the older members of the audience who might previously have voted for the expedition because they were afraid that they might be considered cowardly if they did not do so (6.13.1).

²² See Edmunds' extensive analysis (Edmunds 1975, 109 - 130).

²³ Edmunds 1975, 122. Apart from the Athenians' character, the "true reasons" lay in their ambition and greed. See Introduction, 4.2, p 79.

Nicias also tells the audience that he is a man of principle – he has never spoken against his judgment, even for the sake of honour and he will not do so now. Even though he will gain honour through the expedition, he will still oppose it because he regards it as unwise and not in the interest of the city (6.9.2). This is a ploy to gain the audience’s respect although his words were not strictly true (see 1.4, pp 86, 87). Through this statement Nicias separates himself from those successors of Pericles who “through personal love of honour propose policies bad for the state” (2.65.7) and from Alcibiades who is such a man (cf Rood 1998, 186).

His objection to the slight deliberation given to important matters, is also an indictment of Alcibiades, whose influence had, in Nicias’ opinion, brought the Assembly to a rash decision.

“The men of alien race” are the Eggestaeans. Nicias may not have been deceived by their show of wealth, (6.22 & 6.46) but for him their deceit was only part of the problem. The fact that they were αλλοφύλοις i.e. of alien race, was important enough. He felt that Athens should first look after her own interests before she became involved in the concerns of other nations.

In a digression in the middle of the statement Nicias says that although he cares less for his life than other people, those who do care for their lives and possessions are also good citizens because they would for their own sakes, desire the welfare of the city. It is again an appeal to the more cautious members of his audience and provides an honourable and acceptable excuse for them to change their minds and vote against the expedition.

Next statement:

“against tempers like yours, my words would be unavailing if I should exhort (παρανοίην) you to preserve your assets and not to hazard present possessions for things that are unseen and in the future but what I will show you (διδάξω), is that your haste is not timely and that it is not easy to attain what you are striving for” (6.9.3).²⁴

- the impetus of the statement lies in Nicias’ acknowledgement of the Athenian character²⁵ and his subsequent imitation of Pericles;
- he says that he will not “exhort” (παρανοίην) but will rather “instruct” (διδάξω) them.

²⁴ Nicias’ words echo the Corinthians’ description of the Spartans (1.70.2), which means that he had Spartan characteristics and was completely out of harmony with the Athenian audience (see Rengakos 1984, 104).

²⁵ This is the only place in the speech where he recognises the πολυπραγμοσύνη of the Athenians but it does not affect the tone of the rest of the speech in which he continues to disregard it.

The use of the word διδάξω has certain connotations: it was used by Athenian orators to emphasise to the audience that the orator was about to inform them of something important. It also recalls Pericles, Thucydides' model orator who excelled in instructive rhetoric (Yunis 1996, 72 – 76). The use of the word here could be a deliberate indication that Nicias is trying to gain credibility by impersonating Pericles, by speaking for the good of the city and assuming a tone of superiority in which the wayward Assembly is being instructed for their own good.²⁶

- διδάξω also emphasises the contrast between Nicias and Pericles, who, when the Athenians were unduly confident (as they actually were before the Sicilian Expedition) “cowed them into a state of fear by his speaking...” (2.65.9). Nicias was unable to, even though he put forward many reasons for caution and fear.

Cogan says that it is “unexpected” that Nicias' speech did not succeed (Cogan 1981, 96). The statement seems to be based on the assumption that the δῆμος is rational and that Alcibiades succeeded because Athenian attitudes had changed. An investigation into demagogic rhetoric points to a different conclusion, namely that the δῆμος is an irrational and fickle animal, ruled by emotion and that it can be manipulated at will by skilful ῥήτορες. Thucydides held this view: after deposing and fining Pericles, “not much later, as a multitude is apt to behave” (2.65.4), they re-elected Pericles to his former position. The description in the Encomium of the way in which he controlled the δῆμος (2.65.8 & 9) and the end result of the Sicilian Debate confirm Thucydides' opinion. Given the lack of rapport between Nicias and the Athenians and Alcibiades' rhetorical skill, the outcome of the Sicilian Debate was a foregone conclusion.

Nicias' weakness as a ῥήτωρ comes out most clearly in his pronouncements about his other opponents viz Alcibiades, his young supporters and the Egestaeans. He seems unable to enter into reasoned debate with them or to demonstrate by logic why the Assembly should not accede to their requests, but reviles them instead. Thucydides' authorial comments show that Nicias was right about them: Alcibiades was *motivated by self-interest*, his followers were *irrational and deluded*, the Egestaeans were *deceitful*. Nicias' mistake here is that he speaks the truth in the wrong way. Argument by means of abuse is, as in the Mytilenean Debate, a degenerate form of rhetoric.

²⁶ Although Pericles had the authority to rebuke, Nicias manages only a muted reprimand.

2.3 The Egestaeans

Nicias made a point of disparaging the Egestaeans as foreign barbarians who did not deserve more consideration than the Athenians themselves.

“... we ought not... at the instigation of *men of alien race* (ανδράσιν αλλοφύλοις)

“... undertake a war which does not concern us” (6.9.1).

“the issue before us, is not the fate of the Egestaeans, ανδρων βαρβάρων (a barbarian people) ...but how we shall keep watch on a state intriguing against us with oligarchic devices” (Lacedaemon) (6.11.7).

For Nicias, one of the main faults of the Egestaeans was that they were not even Greek (Gomme 1970, 236) and it obviously irked him that the Expedition to which he was so strongly opposed, was being undertaken at their instigation.²⁷ During the course of his argument he referred to them several times in a disparaging way:

He accused the Athenians of inconsistency, because when Athens herself was wronged by some recalcitrant allies, they delayed their punishment, but they rushed to help (οξέως βοηθουμεν) the Egestaeans when they were wronged. (“δη ουσι ξυμμάχοις” - a negative reference, probably implying “who are unfortunately our allies”) (6.10.5).

The main argument the Egestaeans had used in their request for aid, was that if the Syracusans were left unpunished for the depopulation of Leontini, they could acquire power over the whole Sicily and could perhaps join the Peloponnesians in bringing down the Athenian Empire (6.6.2).

Nicias now referred to this:

“... if the Syracusans should acquire rule over them – that prospect with which the Egestaeans especially try to terrify us” (6.11.2).

and made out that it was not a threat at all because “one empire would scarcely attack another”, which, although it was not a good argument at all (see 1.5, pp 87, 88), still disparaged the Egestaeans.

Up to the end of 6.11 Nicias’ speech follows a reasonable pattern, but there is a break between 6.11 and 6.12. From 6.12 onwards the tone becomes completely emotional and it is as if his patience suddenly broke and he then launched into vituperation. The Egestaeans are the first targets:

²⁷ Alcibiades picked up this point very cleverly and turned it against Nicias. See 6.18.2

They are fugitives who are liars at the cost of others, who only talk, who are ungrateful in success and in case of failure, involve their friends in ruin. They call for aid, but “lie cleverly” (ψεύσασθαι καλῶς) (6.12.1).

As Thucydides had said beforehand (6.8.2), the Egestaeans had actually lied and Nicias seems to have had knowledge of their deception. At the end of the debate he said that the resources of the Egestaeans “were available in word only” (6.22) and after the Expedition’s arrival at Rhegium the news that there was no money, surprised the other two commanders but did not surprise Nicias (6.46).

Apart from the accusation about their deception, the rest of the attack is distorted: the Egestaeans were not fugitives; the Leontines were (6.19.1) (Gomme 1970, 239; Lattimore 1998, 312), but Nicias simply lumped them together. As the vituperation becomes more heated, factual accuracy is easily discarded. It was also unfair to say that their resources were available in word only. They had after all brought sixty talents of silver with them (6.8.1). He also had no grounds for saying that they were ungrateful and would involve their friends in ruin. They did lead the Athenians to ruin but at this stage there was no logical base for the statement. Nicias is cast here in the role of the tragic “warner” whose words are disregarded (probably because of their aggressive and emotional tone).

After his attack on Alcibiades and his young men, Nicias exhorted the older men to vote against the expedition and suggested that the existing boundaries between Athens and Sicily be retained. He then shrugs off Sicily as a complete nuisance: “they must settle their own quarrels and the Egestaeans must be told that as they started their war without Athens, they must bring it to an end themselves” (6.13.2a).

Before he addresses the Prytanis, he tosses another remark at the Egestaeans, “for the future let us not make allies, as we are wont to do, whom we defend when they are in trouble but from whom we get no benefits when we are in need ourselves” (6.13.2b), which is uncalled for because there was no indication at this stage that the Egestaeans would desert the Athenians.

Nicias found the Egestaeans irritating, he was unable to produce a cogent argument against them, so, as with his other adversaries, he simply reviled them.

2.4 Alcibiades and his supporters

From Nicias' point of view he was involved in a personal tussle with Alcibiades. This is no cool presentation of arguments for the informed judgment of the Assembly; it is an emotional appeal directed at the emotions of a mass of people who had been influenced to an irrational pitch of enthusiasm by Alcibiades. While Nicias was criticising the Athenians for their behaviour, he was really contending with his antagonist, and trying to undermine Alcibiades' influence.

Nicias told the Athenians that their decision to sail to Sicily was *irresponsible, inconsistent, and foolish* (6.9.1 – 6.12.1) and then openly accused Alcibiades (6.12.2) of instigating the scheme for his own nefarious purposes. Alcibiades is almost a personification – in Nicias' view – of the collective faults and flaws. Every earlier accusation, apparently directed at the audience, becomes an indictment of Alcibiades who had either proposed the expedition or had at least supported it (Annexure B).

After the indirect allusions to Alcibiades, Nicias attacked him directly, without mentioning his name (6.12.2). He disparaged Alcibiades' youth: Alcibiades was too young to command and too young to take serious decisions.

Alcibiades is then accused of promoting the expedition for his own ends, namely to get funds to indulge in his expensive horse-breeding hobby, for which he craved admiration. The Assembly is warned not to let him glorify himself at the cost of the state because “such men” damage the public interest while wasting their own resources.

Some of these accusations were justified, as Thucydides confirms:

(Alcibiades)“was eager to be made general and hoped thereby to subdue both Sicily and Carthage and in case of success, to promote at the same time his private interests in wealth as well as in glory...he indulged desires beyond his actual means, in keeping horses as well as in his other expenses”(6.15.2 – 3).

The tone of Nicias' accusations is however crude (“blunt”) (Yunis 1996, 105) and unlike the tone of reasonable debate. Alcibiades, the real demagogue, was able to refute Nicias completely without attacking him in return.

From Alcibiades' blatant misuse of the opportunity to gain from the expedition, Nicias moves on to Alcibiades' young supporters and accuses them of the worst kind of delusion:

They were *δυσέρωτας των απόντων* – “sick in love with “ or “ have a morbid craving for” or “have an unhealthy fascination with” - “ things which are out of reach” (6.13.1). Nicias is

saying that they have become completely irrational about the expedition and have lost touch with reality, the term *δυσέρωτας των απόντων* having the connotation of an emotion like an overwhelming sexual desire.

Nicias was right: at the end of the debate the whole Assembly *was* possessed by a strong desire - *έρως* - (6.24.3) - a blind irrational desire to sail. The Athenians had lost themselves in unreality and reason had fallen away.

3. CONCLUSION – THE OUTCOME OF THE *αγών*

Because Nicias had misjudged his audience and had been unable to deal with his antagonists in a reasonable way, but gave way to emotion, he was placed in an unfavourable position. Alcibiades knew exactly how to deal with the audience, disposed of all Nicias' points against him and then tapped into the audience's real wishes, so Nicias inevitably lost the debate.

ALCIBIADES

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 A multi-faceted speech

Alcibiades was largely motivated by personal ambition and the need of money (5.43.2: 6.15.2; 8.47.1) (Finley 1947, 158). He wanted to command an Athenian campaign to Sicily because he saw an opportunity in it for great conquest, glory and financial gain for himself (6.15.2). The Athenian Assembly had already voted for such a campaign and was ready to discuss logistics, when Nicias interfered, urging the Athenians to reconsider their decision (6.9.1 – 6.14). In the process he also attacked Alcibiades and his young supporters (6.12.2 – 13.1) and made some very serious allegations against Alcibiades.

Alcibiades replied in a brilliant demagogic speech which has three sections: the *reply to Nicias' accusations* (6.16.1-17.1), the *refutation of Nicias' arguments* against the expedition (6.17.2 – 8) and an *exhortation to the Athenians* to undertake the expedition (6.18.1 - 7). These divisions are not watertight and the different facets of the speech overlap. When Alcibiades follows a particular theme, it is not ended when he picks up the next theme, but is continued, giving many of his statements more than one function. An effort to discredit Nicias is present in all the different parts of the speech, done very subtly and in a non-confrontational manner.

1.2 Demagogic rhetoric

In connection with this speech, Thucydides' key in 1.22.1 can be paraphrased as follows:

"I recorded what I regarded as appropriate to the given circumstances, keeping as closely as possible to the intent of the speech."

"what I regarded as appropriate" – Thucydides' own opinion;

"the given circumstances" – the Athenians' state of mind and the outcome of the speech;

"the intent of the speech" – Alcibiades' purposes.

Taken in reverse order, *the intent of Alcibiades' speech* is, as above, to ensure his command of an expedition to Sicily and to respond to and discredit Nicias (6.15.2).

The *circumstances of the speech* are created by the situations before and after the speech, the former being the Athenians' state of mind and the latter, the outcome of the speech. The strongest depiction of Alcibiades as demagogue is in his ruthless exploitation of the Athenian character and of the subliminal fears of the Athenians (See 5 below); the outcome of the speech is historical fact: the Assembly did not rescind its previous decision, but with

increased enthusiasm they even agreed to Nicias' exaggerated demands for soldiers and equipment. (6.24.2 – 4).

Within this framework the content and format of the speech reflect *Thucydides' opinion* of Alcibiades. As has already been discussed, Thucydides was critical of Alcibiades, although he recognised Alcibiades' skill as a commander. For Thucydides, Alcibiades was a distorted version of Pericles, so the speech shows a reversal of Pericles' values,¹ a misapplication of Alcibiades' own rhetorical skills which he uses for persuasion towards his own ends,² a disregard for the truth³, inconsistency in his statements about the relative strengths and strategic positions of Athens, Lacedaemon and Sicily⁴ and his sophistic manoeuvres.⁵

Thucydides depicts Alcibiades as a demagogue who was able to deflect some very serious allegations against himself and twisted the truth in order to paint a picture favourable to his own interpretation of Athens' strategic position. Through his expert knowledge of his audience and audience psychology in contrast to Nicias, he was finally able to manipulate them to a high pitch of irrational enthusiasm for the expedition.

2. ALCIBIADES' REPLY TO THE ACCUSATIONS AGAINST HIM

2.1 General

Alcibiades dealt with Nicias' allegations at length by claiming that his own actions had not harmed but rather benefited the City. This means that he was indirectly claiming credit for patriotism. He insisted that his own superiority entitled him to command, implying that Nicias' accusations against him were nothing more than an ordinary person's envious reaction to his superiority. By patronising Nicias, he further devalued Nicias' accusations and arguments.

2.2 Reversal of public and private interests

Nicias' accusations and warnings against Alcibiades were very serious:

He alleged that Alcibiades promoted the Sicilian Expedition for selfish purposes; that he wanted the command for the sake of self-glorification and for the sake of profit, in order to finance his horse-breeding hobby; that he wanted to make a personal display at the cost of the city; that he would damage the public interest while wasting his own property with his extravagance (6.12.2).

¹ Seen especially in Alcibiades' defence where he puts his own personal interest above that of the city (6.16.1 – 17.1).

² See especially 6.18.1 – 7.

³ In his distortion of facts, eg 6.17.6.

⁴ See especially 6.17.4 compared with 6.18.2.

⁵ See 6.16.4.

According to Thucydides, these accusations were well founded (6.15.2 & 3) but Alcibiades answered them with flair. Instead of denying the accusations, he turned the points of accusation into virtues:

He not only claimed the right to command but insisted that his public actions had demonstrated that he was worthy of the position (6.16.1). He claimed that his ostentation brought glory, not only to himself and his ancestors but to Athens as well. The seven chariots at Olympia, the victory feast afterwards and all the choruses he had sponsored, created an impression of strength for Athens and would impress their enemies. Appearances were very important. “From what is done, men also infer power” (εκ δε του δρωμένου και δύναμις άμα υπονοειται) (6.16.2).

His claims made it unnecessary for him to deny the accusations and they made Nicias look petty because he had complained about things which had benefited Athens.

2.3 Evasion

Alcibiades’ lengthy reply to Nicias’ allegations and his claims about benefiting Athens masked the fact that he had not met the point about possible financial gain from his command, which was the one aspect which he could not deny or explain away. *It is a clever technique to respond to part of an accusation* at length and then to ignore the other part, in the hope that the audience will have forgotten it in the mass of verbiage. Alcibiades succeeded. Neither the audience, nor Nicias pressed the point about his financial motives.

2.4 Superiority as an argument

In reply to Nicias’ allegation that he was too young, Alcibiades claimed that despite his youth he was *entitled to command*, obviously because he regarded himself as a superior person, probably because of his aristocratic background but also because of his opinion of his personal qualities.⁶ Thucydides describes Alcibiades elsewhere (5.43.2) with the words φρονήματι φιλονικων, which can be interpreted as an arrogant love of superiority. Here Alcibiades argued that because of his superiority, he could act as he pleased, because his personal glory added distinction to the City.⁷ Arrogance is justified as the prerogative of a superior person (Yunis 1996, 105).

He continued by alleging that it was only fair that a person who had a *high opinion of himself* (i.e. he, Alcibiades), should refuse to be equal to others, because the opposite was true of people in adverse circumstances, who could not claim equality with others (6.16.4-5). This

⁶ Alcibiades seems to have regarded himself as Pericles’ spiritual descendant (Edmunds 1975, 90).

⁷ This is the antithesis of Pericles’ attitude that the good of the polis transcended and subsumed that of the individual (2.60.2 – 4).

is a sophistic manoeuvre in which Alcibiades argues that if it is right for unfortunates to be treated by others as inferior, then it is right for those who regard themselves as superior, to treat others in that way. He mentions different examples to verify his claim, but these conceal a logical gap between a *decision* by a person who regards himself as superior and a set of *circumstances* which cause unfortunates to be despised. The gap in the logic is covered by the repeated use of the concepts of similarity and equality viz. μη ἴσον εἶναι , ἰσομοιρεῖ, ἐν τῷ ὁμοίῳ, τὰ ὁμοία, τὰ ἴσα. The purpose of the argument is to identify success with pride (Macleod 1983, 74) and to create the impression that Alcibiades' sense of superiority gives him certain rights, a typical aristocratic assumption, which makes Alcibiades undemocratic and un-Athenian.

He insisted that he *aspired to the distinction* which would place him among those who had benefited their country and whose kinship men would like to claim (6.16.5). Implicit in this statement is the suggestion that *his* participation would lend distinction to any enterprise, so even if he promoted the Sicilian Expedition for the sake of his own glory, this would still reflect favourably on the city, i.e. the benefit to the city is incidental to his pursuit of individual glory.

“In an especially cynical way he (Alcibiades) denies that there is any distinction between the public interest and the interests of its private persons ... he ... claims that the personal excesses and ambitions of its citizens make the city ambitious and exceedingly grand... Alcibiades' public admission of his ambition must have seemed shockingly frank and his cynicism about the springs of the city's greatness hard-nosed and realistic. Nicias' appeals to public spirit must have appeared platitudinous and naïve by contrast” (Cogan 1981, 99).

The claims to superiority had a twofold effect: they exonerated Alcibiades from blame and were at the same time a subtle attack on Nicias, which relegated him to an inferior position and devalued his statements.

The *boldness* of Alcibiades' assertion of superiority, is an effective demagogic tool. Given the character of the multitude, which does not operate on the basis of reason but of emotion,⁸ the boldness and confidence with which statements are made, often carry more weight than reasoned arguments.⁹

⁸ See Thucydides' remark about the multitude's irrational behaviour towards Pericles (2.65.4). Although Pericles had persuaded the Athenians not to send a delegation to Lacedaemon, they still fined him, but then reappointed him as strategos soon after, “as the multitude likes to do.”

⁹ This debate is far removed from the Mytilenean Debate in which, as Cleon alleged, the audience enjoyed the contest itself. Despite Alcibiades' unemotional delivery it is emotion which wins here, not reason (6.13.1).

In the final part of his defence Alcibiades descends from ostentation to falsehood. He boasted that he had demonstrated his abilities by his public acts in unifying the Peloponnesians against Lacedaemon, before the battle of Mantinea and although the latter had won the day, their confidence had been badly shaken (6.16.6). *This is pure fabrication put forward as fact.* Alcibiades had been instrumental in a diplomatic capacity in persuading the Peloponnesians to oppose Lacedaemon, but Thucydides gives him little prominence in the record of the events, (5.52 – 82), while the outcome was a defeat for Athens and her allies. The confidence of Lacedaemon was *not* shaken as Alcibiades averred.

Alcibiades regarded himself as completely exonerated and continued with his argument in favour of the Expedition.

3.OPPOSING AND DISCREDITING NICIAS

3.1 General

Alcibiades and Nicias were *political opponents* because Nicias was in favour of peace with Lacedaemon while Alcibiades was opposed to the Lacedaemonians and supported their enemies in the Peloponnese.

Alcibiades had a highly personal conception of politics (Gomme 1970, 361) and his antagonism towards Lacedaemon stemmed from no more than a perceived personal slight. His distinguished family had long been proxenoi for Lacedaemon, and although his grandfather had renounced the connection, Alcibiades had tried to reinstate it. When he was excluded on account of his youth, from the negotiations between Athens and Lacedaemon, before they entered into the treaty known as the Peace of Nicias (5.43.2 & 3), he was outraged. He felt that the Lacedaemonians had failed to show the proper respect due to him, so he became antagonistic towards them and afterwards pursued an anti-Lacedaemonian foreign policy in opposition to Nicias (5.43).

In his speech at Sparta (6.89.1 & 2) he explained his stance: “Although I remained committed, you, when reconciling with the Athenians, conferred power on my enemies (τοις μεν εμοις εχθροις) and disgrace on me (εμοι δε ατιμιαν περιεθετε) by working through them. On that account you rightfully (δικαίως) suffered at my hands when I favoured the cause of the Mantineans and Argives and otherwise opposed you.” Note Alcibiades’ tacit assumption that the Lacedaemonians were wrong and that he was right.

According to this statement Nicias and Laches were already Alcibiades’ enemies before the negotiations, but it is more likely that he started regarding them as such only after his exclusion from the negotiations.

So Alcibiades enters the Sicilian Debate wishing to thwart his political opponent and avowed enemy. Nicias had also openly attacked him and so Alcibiades' response carried a considerable element of retaliation. It was however done in masterly fashion, calculated to discredit Nicias completely, without seeming to be overtly hostile.

Superiority naturally evokes jealousy and negative reactions:

Alcibiades said that the choruses which he had sponsored and his ostentation at Olympia naturally caused jealousy amongst his townsmen (6.16.3) (φθονείται); superior persons always caused offence to their contemporaries, “λυπηρους όντας τοις ομοίοις μάλιστα” (6.16.5). This hint that the allegations against him were caused by jealousy, was a subtle form of slander, which discredited his opponent very effectively, especially because it was done in general terms as Alcibiades did it here. In not mentioning Nicias' name, except in the opening sentence of his defence, Nicias was classed as just another lesser person whose statements could be disregarded because they were motivated by jealousy.

Alcibiades dealt with Nicias' blunt, emotional attack ***by not retaliating openly***. ***His unemotional response*** was a deliberate demonstration that he was actually impervious to the attack and it implied that Nicias and his opinions were not really important. Such an attitude is a very effective defence because it relegates the attacker to an inferior position and devalues the accusations. Alcibiades' coolness is a good weapon, because it makes Nicias' hot, indignant allegations look ridiculous.

Nicias is mentioned by name only three times in the speech:

- in the opening statement where Alcibiades said that he was obliged to respond to Nicias' attack (6.16.1) which implied that his response was no more than the usual convention;
- in his patronising reference to Nicias' luck (6.17.1).
- when he finally exhorts the Athenians not to let Nicias' quietist policy and his setting young and old at variance, divert them from their purpose. He immediately follows up the exhortation with a statement reminiscent of Pericles (6.18.6 ff).

Without openly attacking him, Alcibiades creates the impression that Nicias does not really understand what is good for the city and that he is deliberately stirring up dissension.

3.2 The luck of Nicias - attack by implication

An important technique in Alcibiades' armoury is his ability to achieve his purposes, by ***what is left unsaid***. He not only refrained from open antagonism towards Nicias, but actually suggested that the Athenians should use him as a commander “while he still appears fortunate” (6.17.1). Such magnanimity disposes of an opponent more effectively than open

antagonism because it shows that the opponent's allegations have not disconcerted the speaker and implies that the allegations should not be taken seriously. His response to Nicias' blunt attack would have been far less effective if he had retaliated in kind. He left it to his audience to draw their own conclusions from his hints, and by a condescending reference to Nicias, he showed that his superiority made him impervious to attack. It also relegated Nicias to a position inferior to himself, which is a subtle form of retaliation (Cogan 1981, 95).

Alcibiades nevertheless recognised Nicias' reputation as a successful general and used it as an argument in favour of the Expedition. "ἕως ἐγὼ τε ἔτι ἀκμάζω μετ' αὐτῆς καὶ ὁ Νικίας εὐτυχῆς δοκεῖ εἶναι ἀποχρήσασθε τῆ ἐκατέρου ἡμῶν ὠφελία (6.17.1) ("...while I am still in the flower of youth and Nicias has the reputation of good luck, make the most of the services of us both").¹⁰

Nicias had alleged that Alcibiades was too young, i.e. not competent to command. Alcibiades' argument demonstrated the opposite: it was in fact Nicias who was inferior but his reputation for good luck could still be useful to the Athenians. While Nicias had in obvious anger asked them not to allow him to be a commander, Alcibiades coolly ignored the emotion and refrained from attacking Nicias. He was obviously mindful of the impression that this would project.

4. ARGUMENTS BASED ON DECEPTION AND SUPPOSITION; A LACK OF FACTUAL INFORMATION

4.1 General

The brilliance of Alcibiades' speech lies in his deceit and in the confidence with which he interpreted current circumstances and predicted the future (Crane 1996, 227; Gomme 1970, 246)

He argued against Nicias by deliberately painting a biased picture of the forces opposed to the Athenians, to make them think that the conquest of Sicily would be easy and that they would not experience any difficulties at home.

4.2 Assessment of the Sicilian resources

Alcibiades' further arguments are formulated very skilfully. Because of his misleading optimism they encourage the Athenians to sail for Sicily and at the same time counter Nicias' objections to the Expedition. His opening argument in favour of the expedition to Sicily is an assessment of the forces ranged against Athens (6.17.2 – 6), which recalls Pericles' assessment of the Lacedaemonian forces before the onset of war (1.141 – 143) and also refutes Nicias' arguments about Sicily.

¹⁰ Note how one statement in 6.17.1 serves several purposes

Alcibiades' assessment of the Sicilian situation must be a deliberate inclusion by Thucydides, who clearly wanted to draw a comparison with Pericles (cf p 98).¹¹

Alcibiades went to extremes in his assessment of the situation in Sicily. He described the Sicilians as a mixed rabble made up of many different kinds of people (όχλοις τε γαρ ξυμμείκτος πολυανδρουσιν) (6.17.2) in a community where changes were easily accepted in the body of citizens. They were not armed for the sake of the country but each obtained arms for himself, either by persuasion or by force and if they were not successful, they settled elsewhere.¹² It was unlikely that such a rabble (όμιλος) (6.17.4) would be united in mind or act with a common purpose, but individuals, given the right incentive, might even come over to Athens, especially since they were in stasis, according to reports.¹³

Alcibiades is using sophistic techniques here: he makes tacit assumptions arguing from probability and then twists and changes his postulates. If this is done fast enough and with enough confidence, the audience will be deceived.

Neither the Sicilians nor the other Hellenes had as many hoplites¹⁴ as they claimed; there had been great deception about numbers in general; many barbarians would furthermore join forces with Athens because of their hatred of Syracuse (6.17.6).

He was completely wrong, according to Thucydides, who held that the Sicilian expedition was “a war just about as great as the one against the Peloponnesians” (6.1.1) (ου πολλω τινι υποδεέστερον πόλεμον ανηρουντο η τον προς Πελοποννησίους).

“Thucydides...emphasises Sicily's size and importance by showing the complexity of its history; not incidentally his display of knowledge accentuates Athenian ignorance” (Lattimore 1998, 306).

So Alcibiades was *either as ignorant as the rest of the Athenians*, which meant that he was arguing purely on supposition, OR

he was aware of the real situation but deliberately misrepresented it in order to instil confidence in his audience and persuade them to sail to Sicily.

¹¹ Pericles was over-optimistic in his assessment of the Lacedaemonian resources and it can be argued that he practised a certain amount of deception on the Athenians. This seems to indicate that Thucydides found some exaggeration acceptable in persuasive rhetoric. The arguments put forward by Pericles, the ideal statesman, are not criticised while Thucydides was critical of Alcibiades, emphasising that he was not telling the truth.

¹² It is ironic that the word patriotism is put into Alcibiades' mouth, a man to whom the word meant less than to virtually any other Greek (cf Hornblower 1987, 68).

¹³ If it refers to factions within states, Alcibiades would be assuming a natural unity of Sicily, contrary to the general tenor of his argument. (cf Gomme 1970, 251).

¹⁴ Statements of this kind can be denied by his opponent but cannot be refuted except after laborious research, by which time it is too late to counteract their effect on the audience (cf Gomme 1970, 252).

In either case he was guilty of *deliberate deception*, by substituting his construction of the facts for the facts themselves.

The first possibility is more likely in my opinion because of Alcibiades' arrogance and ambition which would have driven him to undertake an enterprise from which he hoped to gain something, even if he did not have adequate information about the conditions.

Nicias had argued that the Sicilians were far off and powerful; even if the Athenians could defeat them, which was in itself uncertain, they would have a most difficult time in retaining control of Sicily at such a distance (6.11.1) (Cogan 1981, 96). Alcibiades' derogatory picture denied this and his emphasis on the inferiority of the Sicilian power would naturally have encouraged the Athenians to persevere in their intention of conquering the island.

Later in his speech Alcibiades exploits in the Athenians the very weak will and easily aroused passions which he attributes to the Sicilians (Crane 1996, 227).

4.3 Local dangers – insulting words spoken politely

Nicias had at length enumerated the forces hostile to Athens (6.10.1 – 5) but Alcibiades dismissed them out of hand in a brief statement, “και τα ενθάδε ουκ επικωλύσει ην υμεις ορθως βουλευησθε” (matters here will be no hindrance - “if you are rightly advised /if you judge rightly” – Crawley; “if you consider it correctly” – Lattimore) (6.17.6). With one phrase Alcibiades disposes of Nicias' lengthy list of local dangers, by hinting that Nicias' advice is wrong. This is done very subtly and in a non-confrontational way, which sounds calm and reasonable, without mentioning Nicias at all. *Alcibiades either based his argument on wishful thinking or he deliberately misled his audience, shaping the facts for his own ends, while attacking Nicias at the same time.*

4.4 The danger from Lacedaemon

Nicias' fundamental argument against the expedition concerned the Lacedaemonians: the peace treaty with them was extremely fragile and they were simply waiting for an opportunity to begin the war again. If Athens was defeated in Sicily, the Lacedaemonians would attack Athens; even if Athens was not defeated, the Lacedaemonians would help the Sicilians. Since *their* defeat, the Lacedaemonians had had only one thing in mind, namely the *defeat of the Athenians* (6.11.4 – 6).

Alcibiades made light of the danger from Lacedaemon, saying that the Lacedaemonians had never been so weak (6.17.8), and that the strength of the Athenian navy would confine them to attacks only on land.

He denied Nicias' supposition about the Lacedaemonians by putting another supposition in its

place. Neither of them had any real facts about Lacedaemon. They were both led by what they wanted from the debate. Nicias was opposed to the expedition, so he exaggerated the dangers in Sicily and from Lacedaemon to convince the Athenians that they should stay at home and defend themselves. Alcibiades was in favour of the expedition, so he exaggerated the weakness of the Sicilians and of the Lacedaemonians to convince the Athenians that they could easily undertake the expedition and succeed.

4.5 Inconsistency – shifting the danger from Lacedaemon to Sicily

- The Sicilian σύμμαχοι -while stressing the potential danger from Lacedaemon, Nicias had objected to the Egestaeans as allies (6.9.1 ; 6.10.5 ; 6.11.7) on the grounds that they were liars, supplying nothing but words, ungrateful in success, involving their friends in ruin in case of failure, while they were not even Hellenes.

Alcibiades took an ominous tone about the allies, saying that it was the duty of the Athenians to assist them (6.18.1), claiming that the Empire had been won through assisting both Hellenes and barbarians (6.18.2) and warning the Athenians that if they excluded some people from being allies on the basis of race, they would add little to the Empire and risk losing the Empire itself. *Alcibiades' statements are difficult to disprove without more research* (Gomme 1970, 251).¹⁵ In addition there is the implication that the present course is consistent with historical precedent, which is always a strong justification.

Alcibiades further said that the Egestaeans were taken into alliance so that, by annoying the enemies (in Sicily), they would prevent them from coming against Athens and moreover, “against a *superior* (τον προύχοντα) one does not only defend oneself when attacked, but you take precautions so that he should not attack at all” (6.18.2). Alcibiades has now shifted the danger from Lacedaemon to Sicily, which contradicts his statement made only a few minutes earlier: the Sicilians who were only a “motley rabble”, with no common identity or aim, have now become “superior”.

His arguments show that he will *unscrupulously twist the facts to suit his purpose, that he will say anything, even to the point of contradicting himself, to prove that the Athenians must go to Sicily, with himself in command*. The inconsistency is hidden behind a serious reference to Athens' past (see above - “the Empire had been won by assisting both Hellenes and barbarians”).

¹⁵ See also page 104, n 14

What Thucydides is doing here is to give Alcibiades a set of plausible sounding arguments, all based on self-interest, with little regard for the truth, the real situation or the interest of Athens, demonstrating how a skilful orator with no morality can manipulate a partisan audience.

5. MANIPULATION

The main thrust of Alcibiades' address to the Athenians lies in the final portion (6.18.1 – 7). Here he is fully revealed as the consummate demagogue who stirs the passions of the crowd, for his own interest.

He knows his audience's state of mind: their pride in the past and their apprehension about losing Athens' greatness, plus either a memory of Pericles or a knowledge of his reputation. This is combined with their well-known πολυπραγμοσύνη or meddlesomeness and an adventurous spirit. Nicias quite correctly told them in 6.9.3 that he would have no success against the Athenian character; Alcibiades knows very well how to manipulate it.

Alcibiades instils fear in a subtle way by suggesting that *inaction* poses the greatest threat to Athens. If they should sit still, they will lose all. They must rule or be ruled, they must act or lose the means to defend themselves. The Athenians might be enslaved themselves if they do not rule others, because, being what they are, they cannot regard a pacific policy like others (6.18.3). They therefore feel compelled to act because Alcibiades' words create a strong emotional motivation. They would not be Athenians if they remained idle, i.e. the argument is not only psychological but also patriotic. He does not have to prove his statements because they express the emotions of his audience exactly.

To this powerful compulsion he adds the prospect of gain (6.18.4) - they stand the chance to become the rulers of all Hellas. For them the expedition to Sicily is not only a way to protect themselves, but also the means to regain their former glory. They can become more than themselves, if not, they will lose everything. Both the honourable and the useful are emphasised, which is an irresistible combination. Their pride in being Athenians, i.e. superior to the other Hellenes, as Pericles had claimed (2.37 - 42), which was an integral part of the Athenian psyche, this superiority was under threat, which all of them must have felt, although they did not express it. Alcibiades puts their unspoken fears into words and holds out to them the possibility of conquest and glory which would make Athens supreme in Hellas and could even surpass the glories of the past.

Alcibiades creates an entirely emotional response with no basis in reason whatsoever. Emotion reigns supreme, through his manipulative tactics. He is the prototype of the ruthless

demagogue who moves the Athenian *δημος* at will, for purely selfish purposes. He does not need logic when his statements echo the Athenians' sentiments so exactly. He simply had to verbalise these sentiments and the audience would agree.

Cogan interprets this part of the speech as the reflection of a kind of paranoia in the Athenians and an uncontrolled urge for action, impelled by fear (Cogan 1981, 98). This may be so, but the point here is that it took Alcibiades' skill to exploit these feelings. Without him the sentiment of being under threat might have remained dormant and the Sicilian expedition might never have been undertaken.

Another important point is that the Athenians had not really changed; it was their leaders who had changed. It is still the same *δημος* who fined Pericles and then reinstated him, who wanted to butcher the Mytileneans and then changed their minds, but here they are in the hands of an unscrupulous *ρήτωρ* who, unlike his great predecessor, was not interested in moderation or the good of the city but only in personal glory and gain.

6. THE TONE OF THE SPEECH AS A DEMAGOGIC TECHNIQUE

The latter part of the speech uses mostly sober language, with a veneer of moderation, echoing the sober style of Pericles and recalling the past (6.18.3 - 6). It is the final refutation of Nicias and the resolution of and reply to the old-young conflict. Ironically, Alcibiades the young hothead calls for moderation and co-operation. This is an interesting paradox: Alcibiades activates the impulsive young men while claiming to be promoting balance, pretending that he is uniting the audience while polarising it.

From Thucydides' remark in 6.15.1 it appears that Nicias had managed to convince at least a part of the Assembly that they should rescind their previous decision but that the majority were still determined to sail to Sicily (*οι μεν πλειστοι στρατεύειν παρήνουν ...οι δέ τινες και αντέλεγον*) (the majority recommended sailing but some spoke against it.)

So, unlike Nicias, Alcibiades had a partisan audience, but he still had to convince those people who were opposed to the expedition. They were most probably older men, because the young men in the audience were already Alcibiades' supporters (6.13.1).

After having replied to Nicias' allegations against him (6.16.1 – 17.1), he aimed his speech specifically at these older men by imitating Pericles in sobriety of style and in format:

- he gave ostensibly reasoned arguments in favour of the expedition by estimating the resources of the Sicilians (6.17.2 – 6) (cf Pericles' first speech - 1.140 - 142 about the relative resources of Lacedaemon and Athens).
- he listed Athens' advantages and the rights of her allies (6.17.6 - 18.2).

-he then instructed his audience about the dangers of inaction (6.18.2 – 3) (cf Pericles' third speech). The similarity here between the two speeches is only superficial because what Pericles really said in his third speech was , “to let the Empire go is unsafe ...men of retiring views ... would quickly ruin a state (τάχιστ' άν τε πόλιν οι τοιουτοι ... απολέσειαν) (2.63.3), while Alcibiades advocated constant activity *and expansion* as a way to preserve the Athenian empire and prevent conquest by her enemies. There is a marked difference between *retaining* and *expanding* the Empire but it is unlikely that Alcibiades' audience would have looked beyond the sober tone and the Periclean echo.

Alcibiades' final move against Nicias (6.18.6) is a combination of sophistry and an imitation of Pericles. He exhorts the Athenians not to let Nicias' policy of inaction (η Νικίου των λόγων απραγμοσύνη) or his putting the young at variance with the old (διάστασις τοις νέοις ες τους πρεσβυτέρους) divert them from their purpose.

Alcibiades now pictures Nicias as the adversary who is trying to work against the good of the City through his quietism, which as Alcibiades has just demonstrated, would lead to her downfall. Not only is Nicias opposing the enterprise which is necessary for the continued welfare of Athens, but he is also trying to create stasis, i.e. he is trying to disrupt the present order in the city. Through distortion of Nicias' words, Alcibiades has managed to turn him into the villain in the present situation without attacking Nicias personally.

He continues his pseudo-statesmanlike restraint and decorum by a blatant copy of Periclean rhetoric: “but in our usual good order, just as our fathers, young men taking counsel with older men, raised our power to its present height, do you now also in the same way strive to advance the state. And consider that youth and age, without one another, avail nothing, but that the simple, the mediocre and the very subtle tempered together will have most strength” (6.18.6).

At this point Alcibiades has turned the tables completely on Nicias. It is now Nicias who is harming the state, not Alcibiades, as Nicias had originally alleged. Nicias had thrown it at Alcibiades' head that he was too young – Alcibiades now loftily advocates co-operation between old and young for the good of the state. He has managed to make Nicias look bad while he himself, the supposed young hothead, is advocating order and restraint.

While the audience was still probably suitably impressed, Alcibiades immediately urged his cause in his peroration: action is required, otherwise Athens will come to grief. She must not remain at peace, she must keep her warlike skills, i.e. undertake the Sicilian expedition. She must not defend herself in *word* but in *deed* (a final glancing blow at Nicias) (6.18.7).

The speech concludes with a ringing gnome, “ those men live most securely whose political action is least at variance with existing customs and institutions (laws) (τοις παρουσιν ἤθεσι και νόμοις) (6.18.7) even if these are not the best.

This final statement summarises Alcibiades’ persuasive rhetoric: it is a reminder to the Athenians to remember who they are - namely the citizens of the city lauded in Pericles’ Funeral Oration – and not to deviate from their traditions. He has however manoeuvred them into a state of mind where they feel that the right way for them to honour their past and preserve their city, would be through “pre-emptive action” towards Sicily.

After such a demagogic tour de force, it is a foregone conclusion that the audience would fall into an almost hysterical enthusiasm for the enterprise while Nicias played into Alcibiades’ hands by his exaggerated requests for men and equipment:

The elders thought that they would prevail or at least suffer no disaster with such a great force, the men in the flower of their strength longed for strange sights and far off places, believing that they would return safely while the common soldiers hoped for material returns (6.24.3).

The tone of Alcibiades’ speech, directed at an audience whom he knew well, had achieved his purposes.

6. DEMAGOGIC RHETORIC - AGAIN

The words “what is appropriate to the given circumstances” (των ...παρόντων τα δέοντα) in Thucydides’ key to the speeches in 1.22.1 has been interpreted by Macleod (1983, 68 - 69) as a twofold system, consisting of:

-one, practical reasoning, i.e. a rational approach to practical questions, the practical questions being the reason for the speech;

and

-two, persuasion, i.e. an effective presentation of the speaker’s case.

If Macleod’s explanation is accepted, demagogic rhetoric can be defined as rhetoric in which the rational aspect is either totally lacking or distorted.

As has been shown, the rational aspect is distorted in Alcibiades’ speech, while the speaker is bent mostly on persuasion, in order to achieve his own purposes. Alcibiades makes many statements purely for effect, either to distort the truth in his own favour (e.g. 6.16.6) where he makes a false claim about his influence and actions before Mantinea, or to manipulate his audience, (6.18.2) where he uses the Athenians’ fears as an incentive to action.

The speech is written as a calculated performance in which Alcibiades is portrayed as a cynical demagogue ruthlessly pursuing his own purposes, while putting himself forward as a dynamic leader (6.16.1 – 6 ; 18.4 – 6), mindful of the past (6.18.6 – 7), acting for the good of the City which lay in constant activity and an ever-expanding Empire (6.18.2 – 3; 6 – 7).

Thucydides shows that Alcibiades knows his audience well enough to realise that this last would be *the* argument which would tap into the Athenian psyche and bring about an enthusiastic desire to attempt the conquest of Sicily (Cogan 1981, 279 n 18).

Through his rhetoric Alcibiades degraded the Athenian Assembly into a mob (Yunis 1996, 108) who later blamed the orators for persuading them to undertake the disastrous expedition, “just as though they had not voted for it themselves” (8.1.1). *They* had not really changed from what they were in the time of Pericles who, however, could control their passions, but *the leaders* had changed, reaching the extreme in Alcibiades, the ultimate self-interested leader who would subvert debate and exploit the weaknesses of his audience (Crane 1996, 248).

THUCYDIDES' OPINION OF ALCIBIADES CONFIRMED IN THE SPEECH AT SPARTA (6.89 – 92)

1. GENERAL

After Alcibiades had been summoned back to Athens to stand trial on charges of impiety and conspiracy against the democracy, he defected to Sparta and spoke in their assembly, urging them to support the Syracusans against Athens and to fortify Dekeleia in Attica (6.89 – 92).

Here he faced an audience who were most probably hostile and explained to them why he had opposed them before, then he attempted to persuade them, first, that he was no longer their enemy and second, that they should accede to his requests to act against the Athenians.

In the Spartan speech the rhetorical manoeuvres are more obvious and the sophistry more blatant than in the Athenian speech. In terms of the interpretation discussed on page 98, the Spartan speech could be regarded as an authorial comment which confirms Thucydides' opinion of Alcibiades, expressed in the format and content of the Athenian speech. Thucydides regarded Alcibiades as a totally self-interested man whose "single-mindedness gave him the flexibility to make the best of any situation for himself" (Pouncey 1980, 42).

In both speeches Alcibiades is depicted as an unscrupulous orator who was persuasive enough to incite his audience to action, which would serve his own selfish purposes. He disposed of the hostility against him through sheer effrontery which was part of his monstrous ego. In Athens he turned the accusations against him into virtues while the natural hostility of the Lacedaemonians was simply swept aside. The content and format of the Spartan speech run parallel to those of the speech in Athens, confirming Thucydides' opinion that Alcibiades achieved his purposes by twisting facts, by sophistic redefinition and by demagogic manipulation, using his audience's emotions as a lever.

2. ALCIBIADES – "a persuasive apologist for himself" (Pouncey 1980, 116)

The opening of the Spartan speech (6.89.1 – 3) follows the same pattern as that of the speech at Athens. Alcibiades defends himself through attack. He calls the Lacedaemonians' natural suspicion and hostility towards him "prejudice" or "slander" (δισβολή). He had pursued a vigorous anti-Lacedaemonian foreign policy and was their open enemy until his defection, but he now demonstrated to the Spartan assembly that it was *their* fault that he had become hostile to them because they had brought dishonour upon him (6.89.1 – 3). As in his apologia in Athens, it is his egoism which Thucydides stresses here. The mere fact of being overlooked in the negotiations between Athens and Lacedaemon on account of his youth, was enough to turn Alcibiades into Lacedaemon's implacable enemy, who opposed peace between Lacedaemon and Athens and incited the Peloponnesians against Lacedaemon. The

tone of this section is one of entitlement and superiority. In the Athenian speech he went into detail about his principles of superiority, but here he stresses his aristocratic descent and his distinguished family, described in lofty tones as “we” who “always had the leadership (προστασία) of the people” (6.89.4). Alcibiades virtually describes himself as a royal heir with royal prerogatives, entitled to respect and special treatment. According to him the Lacedaemonians had failed in the proper respect, and so they had to bear the consequences.

3. SOPHISTRY AND DISTORTION OF FACTS

The next section (6.89.4 – 5) approaches the question of the state and the individual from the viewpoint of expediency. It suited Alcibiades’ purposes to call democracy “acknowledged folly”, and he spends a great deal of the argument on demonstrating that although his family were known as democrats, they received that label purely through their opposition to tyrants – another statement made for effect in front of an oligarchic audience.¹⁶

He argues that although all sensible men (οἱ φρονούντες) (6.89.6) know that democracy is acknowledged folly (ομολογουμένης ανοΐας) (6.89.6), his family who had always had the leadership of the people in their hands, were obliged to conform to the democratic form of government and because they were the leaders of all and not of just a part, they had decided to maintain the democracy which they had inherited and under which the city had enjoyed the greatest freedom and glory. They had however always tried to be more moderate than the prevailing intemperance (της δε υπαρχούσης ακολασίας) (6.89.5). The “prevailing intemperance” is not described and it is left to the audience to put their own construction to the words.

As in his Athenian speech such vague general statements are impossible to disprove, and Alcibiades places his own interpretation on history to ingratiate himself with his oligarchic audience.

He refers to the men “who steered the crowd (τον ὄχλον) in evil directions” (6.89.5) and says that they were the ones who exiled him. This statement conceals a sophistic leap: because he does not define the “evil directions” there is no way in which the men responsible for the “evil directions” can be identified, so he can easily allege that they were the ones responsible for his present situation.

¹⁶ It is possible that the suspicions of the Athenians were correct, namely that Alcibiades was aiming at a tyranny, but he would of necessity, not admit to that in Sparta. He probably regarded himself as Pericles’ spiritual heir, and wanted, not only to be “first man” in a democratic Athens but her sole ruler.

At one stroke Alcibiades dissociated himself from the Athenian actions which were offensive to the Lacedaemonians and made himself the victim of democracy which he now decried because it suited him.

He ends this explanation with the statement that he could not change his stance “with the Lacedaemonians so near” and insists again that his explanation is the true version of the so-called *τας εμας διαβολας* (6.90.1).

4. DEMAGOGIC MANIPULATION

Alcibiades unfolds the “grand scheme” to the Lacedaemonians (6.90.1 - 4):

The Athenians plan to subdue Sicily first, then the Italiots and Carthage and then they will attack Lacedaemon with the help of the conquered peoples. They aspire to the empire of all Hellas. If Lacedaemon does not help the Syracusans, this would surely happen. He claims superior knowledge, a point which the Lacedaemonians cannot dispute although the scheme probably did not exist much outside Alcibiades’ own ambitions.

Thucydides shows Alcibiades employing the same manipulative technique here as in Athens. He uses the hidden fears of his audience to goad them into action - the action *he* wants them to take. As the Athenians feared domination by Lacedaemon, so the Lacedaemonians feared domination by Athens (cf 1.88). Alcibiades deliberately exaggerates the threat from Athens to create a sense of urgency. The Lacedaemonians must send help to Syracuse immediately and invest Dekeleia in order to avoid disaster.

He then hammers home the lesson: if Lacedaemon does not help, Syracuse will succumb (6.91.1). Once Syracuse has fallen, the whole of Sicily will follow, Italy will be subjugated immediately and the danger which Alcibiades has sketched, will overwhelm Lacedaemon. It is not only the safety of Sicily alone which is at stake but that of the whole Peloponnese. They must immediately send hoplites to Sicily under a Spartan commander and fortify Dekeleia in Attica, because that is Athens’ weak point.

The torrent of words from someone who seemed so confident about his facts, must have allayed the audience’s suspicions. With his extravagant words Alcibiades created a sense of crisis and urgency just as he did in Athens. As in Athens, the emotions of the audience are whipped up to a point where they saw no alternative but to act as Alcibiades had asked them to act.

5. INSTILLING CONFIDENCE

In his Athenian speech Alcibiades copied Pericles in order to reassure his audience; here he displays his military skill and knowledge to create confidence in himself as a reliable source

of information. He gives a detailed and perceptive analysis of the advantages to Lacedaemon of fortifying Dekeleia, introduced by the gnome: “βεβαιότατα δ’ ἂν τις οὕτω τοὺς πολεμίους βλάπτῃ εἰ μάλιστα δεδιότας αὐτοὺς αἰσθάνοιτο, ταῦτα σαφῶς πυνθανόμενος ἐπιφέρῃ” (“the surest method of harming an enemy is to find out what he most fears, and to choose these means of attacking him”) (6.91.6).

Such a statement will inspire confidence in the speaker and reinforce the audience’s impression that his advice is worth taking.

Alcibiades’ point: There are significant advantages in fortifying Dekeleia because it will strike at the Athenians weaknesses. Alcibiades puts himself forward as *the* person who has the correct information about these weaknesses.

Ironically, the military strategy which Alcibiades proposed, was the same as his own demagogic strategy, which he employed to good effect at both Athens and Sparta. The gnome can be taken as another authorial comment on Alcibiades’ methods in both war and rhetoric. Thucydides approved of Alcibiades’ military strategy (6.15.4) but his critical comments in 6.15.3 – 4 and the way in which Alcibiades is depicted, blatantly using sophistry and manipulative techniques at Sparta as well as at Athens, show Thucydides’ disapproval of his civil actions.

6. SOPHISTIC ARGUMENT – AGAIN

In his self-justification to the Lacedaemonian assembly Alcibiades insists that Athens has compelled him to be her enemy and that he does her evil, so that he may regain her (6.92.3 – 4).

He claims that his actions are those of a real patriot (φιλόπολις), that the real enemies of Athens are those people who have caused his exile, not the Lacedaemonians who opposed her openly and that he is seeking to regain the real Athens. To prove these statements, he resorts to sophistic argument, twisting the meanings of the words “enemy” and “patriot”: the familiar bipolarity of the demagogue.

Thucydides clearly demonstrates that Alcibiades’ ego determines his judgment. His own interests exceed the good of the city to such an extent that he denies allegiance to a city where he is wronged - which is a more forceful statement than his claims in his Athenian speech that the city derived benefit from his ostentation. Thucydides shows that Alcibiades will revenge himself on Athens as he revenged himself on Lacedaemon, just because he was wronged. This is a dramatic contrast with Pericles who was fined unfairly, yet came back to continue his role as “first man” and guardian of the δῆμος.

As in the sophistic arguments in the Athenian speech, there is a logical gap in Alcibiades' reasoning: he fails to show how he will "regain" (αναλαμβάνω) (6.92.4) the City if it is conquered by Lacedaemon, but this gap goes unnoticed in the convoluted argument.

7. PERORATION

The peroration is pure demagoguery in that Alcibiades motivated his final appeal with statements which the Lacedaemonians would have liked to hear:

He puts himself at their disposal and reminds them that if he had harmed them as an enemy, he would be much more useful as a friend, because, while he previously *guessed* at the Lacedaemonians' secrets, he *knows* those of the Athenians (6.92.5). This is his most effective argument which finally convinced the Lacedaemonians (6.93.1).

The speech ends with an appeal to the Lacedaemonians to move against Athens, while Alcibiades holds out the possibility to them that they could become safe and rule all Hellas, not through force (οὐ βία) but through goodwill (κατ' εὐνοίαν) (6.92.5). How the goodwill will follow, Alcibiades does not make clear, but, because of the emotional appeal, it is a good note on which to end - for a demagogue.

CHAPTER 5

COMPARISON BETWEEN PERICLES' THIRD SPEECH AND ALCIBIADES' SPEECH IN THE SICILIAN DEBATE

1. INTRODUCTION

As the figure of Pericles dominates the first part of the History (Books 1 and 2), so the figure of Alcibiades dominates the last part (Books 5 – 8). Thucydides says of Pericles that those who came after, were more on a level with each other (2.65.10), but “Alcibiades is the most conspicuous exception to this; he enjoys the same kind of pre-eminence¹ over his contemporaries that Pericles did over his, and this shared elevation, even though Thucydides does not *explicitly*² couple the two personalities or allow any overlap between their careers, invites comparison” (Pouncey 1980, 110). The political and structural emphasis on the two figures justifies a comparison between their respective rhetorical styles.

This study has investigated some examples of post-Periclean rhetoric in Athens in an attempt to show how the decline in the calibre of the leadership (2.65.10) manifested itself in the speeches of some of the leaders. Alcibiades' speech in the Sicilian debate echoes Pericles' third speech in several respects and there are clear parallels and contrasts between them. A comparison of the speeches therefore suggests itself as a fitting conclusion to the study.

The two speeches have opposite points of departure:

Pericles called an assembly because the Athenians felt oppressed by the ravages of the plague and by their situation after the second invasion of Attica and they wanted to come to an agreement with Lacedaemon. They blamed Pericles for having persuaded them to go to war and held him responsible for their misfortunes (2.59.1 – 3).

Pericles wanted first, to *reassure* them and, secondly, *to rid their minds of resentment* against him (2.59.3).

In contrast, Alcibiades spoke to an audience prejudiced in his favour because they had already decided to sail to Sicily when Nicias reopened the debate. Alcibiades' *motives were purely selfish*, namely *retaliation* because Nicias had attacked him and *manipulation* to make sure that the Athenians should undertake the expedition against Sicily, with himself as one of the commanders, because he needed money and craved glory to satisfy his ambitions (6.15.2).

¹ Pre-eminence does not necessarily mean that Alcibiades was a superior statesman. See pp 132 – 3.

² My italics. This chapter postulates that there is an *implicit* contrast between the two men.

As mentioned above, the Sicilian Debate can also be construed as Thucydides' commentary on the process of degeneration in the calibre of the Athenian leaders after Pericles. This process is an important theme in the History, beginning in the wisely led democracy of Pericles and "continued with the first symptoms of mistake and misgovernment in the Mytilenean Debate ...reaching its height... in the Sicilian disaster..." (Finley 1951, xiii).

The two speeches form the end points of an arc which spans this whole process of degeneration and are expressions of Thucydides' opinion, given as authorial comment in the Encomium on Pericles (2.65) and in the preamble to Alcibiades' speech (6.15).

Thucydides depicts the two men as similar in their leadership and rhetorical skills but completely different in moral outlook and character, illustrating this in the significant parallels and similarities as well as in the contrasts between the two speeches.

As previously discussed,³ Thucydides presents Alcibiades as a distorted version of Pericles, in his reversal of Pericles' values, the misapplication of his rhetorical skills, his disregard for the truth, his inconsistency and his sophistic manoeuvres.

The reversal of Pericles' values is manifest in Alcibiades' rhetoric, in his attitude to the relationship between the individual and the state and in his expression of personal superiority. The speeches will be compared mostly within the framework of Thucydides' concept of a good statesman and the differences and similarities between the two men will be discussed under the applicable headings.

2. THE QUALITIES OF A GOOD STATESMAN

2.1. DEFINITION

These are defined by Pericles:

”καίτοι εμοι τοιούτω ανδρι οργίζεσθε ος ουδενος ήσσων οίομαι ειναι
γνωαι τε τα δέοντα και ερμηνευσαι ταυτα
φιλόπολις τε και χρημάτων κρείσσων”.

“And yet I, with whom you are angry, consider myself as competent as any man both in knowing what is necessary and in explaining it, a lover of my country and above money” (2.60.5).

The four qualities form a unit, so while γνωαι τα δέοντα is the most important, non-compliance with each following requirement negates the preceding qualities.

This description can be taken as an indirect indictment of Alcibiades and could even have been written with Alcibiades in mind. It does at least supply criteria by which the

³ See Sicilian debate pp 76 -78.

performance of the post-Periclean politicians can be measured. Thucydides clearly admires Alcibiades' skills as leader and military commander (6.15.4, 8.86) but Alcibiades does not qualify as a good statesman because he lacked political intelligence and foresight and extolled youth as more important than those qualities. He was no φιλόπολις.⁴ "For Alcibiades patriotism was engulfed in self-seeking" (Macleod 1983, 96) and as Thucydides had pointed out, he was subject to the influence of money (6.15.2).

The implied contrast with Pericles is emphatic; Pericles' speech is immediately followed by the Encomium (2.65.3,6,8 – 10) in which Pericles is lauded for, inter alia, the very qualities he mentioned in his speech: his foresight and judgment, powers of persuasion, care for the City and resistance to bribery.

2.2. γνωναι . . . τα δέοντα

Reason is the basis of good statesmanship and γνωναι τα δέοντα is the application of reason to a political situation, which manifests itself in *a correct understanding of the current political situation, correct foresight and perseverance.*

A correct understanding of the current political situation

This can be described as sagacity or ξύνεσις which is opposed to all impulsive, irrational or emotional action.

The situation in Athens (το αυτίκα, τα υπάρχοντα) at the time of Pericles' third speech had three important ingredients: the Athenians' state of mind, their military position in respect of Lacedaemon and their relations with their Empire.

The Athenians were despondent and were angry with Pericles. He told them that he was aware of, and in fact expected their anger and despondency. Their feelings about their individual sufferings and especially about the plague were predictable "for the spirit is cowed by that which is sudden and unexpected and happens contrary to all calculation, and this is precisely the experience you have had, not only in other matters but especially as regards the plague" (2.61.2 – 3).

He further understood that the Athenian resources were sufficient to withstand Lacedaemon and that the Athenian navy was powerful enough to ensure eventual victory if the Athenians handled their resources properly (1.144.1; 2.62).

Their empire posed a threat to the Athenians because of the allies' resentment towards them. Certain Athenians were advocating withdrawal from the Empire and Pericles took note of this but pointed out that despite their moral scruples about the acquisition of the Empire,

⁴ Despite his claims in Sparta (6.92). In fact, the context there negates his claims to patriotism.

withdrawal would be dangerous (2.63.1-2). The paradox of empire is that, once in control, the imperial power cannot relinquish that control without risk to itself.

In the Encomium Thucydides endorses Pericles' perception and judgment:

“So long as he presided over the affairs of the state in time of peace, he pursued a moderate policy and kept the city in safety (μετρίως εξηγειτο και ασφαλως διεφύλαξεν αυτήν) and it was under him that Athens reached the heights of her greatness and after the war began, here too he appears to have made a farsighted estimate of her strength” (2.65.5).

“Pericles ... was powerful through his recognised standing and *judgment*” (γνώμη) (2.65.8).

In contrast, in the same Encomium, Thucydides clearly refers to Alcibiades when he criticises the Athenians, who not only acted contrary to Pericles' advice, “but in accordance with personal ambition and personal gain (τας ιδίας φιλοτιμίας και ιδια κέρδη) they pursued other policies that seemed unrelated to the war, to the detriment of both themselves and the allies, since when these succeeded, they brought honour and benefit more to individuals (τοις ιδιώταις τιμη και ωφελία μαλλον ην) but when they failed, proved detrimental to the state in the conduct of the war” (2.65.7).

The situation was that, although the Athenians were ignorant about the size and resources of Sicily, the Eggestaeans who needed help in their personal war against their neighbours, had persuaded them to undertake the expedition, deliberately deceiving them about the financial resources available for the campaign (6.6.2; 6.8.2; 6.46). Nicias had already pointed out to the Assembly that if they sailed to Sicily they would have to face not only the Sicilians, but also the possibility of a Lacedaemonian attack, as well as problems from the Empire (6.10).

In Alcibiades' speech all the negative factors are simply brushed aside as of no account, instead of being considered on a reasonable basis (6.17.2 – 8). Alcibiades' perception of the political situation was clouded by his personal ambition and by his sense of personal superiority. (6.16.4 – 6). He lacks Pericles' clarity of vision and his γνωναί τα δέοντα and thrusts all objective factors aside in favour of subjective selfish wishful thinking. His version of τα υπάρχοντα is over-optimistic and incorrect, either because he wanted to mislead the Athenians or because he himself was ignorant of the real situation⁵. Whatever the cause, he does not show true ξύνεσις. He dismissed the potential Sicilian opposition as negligible, saying that the Sicilians were no more than a mixed rabble with no common purpose or

⁵ See my note on p 105 mentioning the possibility that Alcibiades was acting in ignorance of the Sicilian situation.

cohesion, lacking proper armed forces (6.17.2 - 4) while the Peloponnesians had never been so weak (6.17.8). The possibility that the two groups might combine against Athens, as they later did at Alcibiades' own instigation (6.91), was not even considered.

Alcibiades did understand the power of the Athenian navy correctly and used it as a persuasive tool to convince the Athenians that the navy would guarantee their safety (το δε ασφαλές ... αι νηες παρέξουσιν) (6. 18.5).

The potential opposition from the empire, which Nicias had described at length, is dismissed in a single sentence: "Matters here will be no actual hindrance if you are rightly advised" (6.17.6) – a highly coloured, cavalier, subjective and misleading statement, made more in order to discredit Nicias than to inform the Athenians.

Foresight - πρόνοια

An essential part of γνῶναι τα δέοντα is the statesman's ability to predict future events.

Because of Thucydides' view that history follows certain fixed patterns (Bender 1938, 9), it should in his opinion, be possible for a good statesman to recognise repetition and parallels in political situations and, based on γνώμη, he should be able to foresee the outcome of any political action because human nature is a constant, and in similar situations men will respond in similar ways. *The true statesman* (cf 1.140.1) does not base his calculations on τύχη but on reason although τύχη cannot be eliminated.

This is enunciated by Pericles: "And where fortune is impartial (απο της ομοίας τύχης), courage (is rendered) more effective through intelligence (την τόλμαν . . . η ξύνεσις . . . εχυρωτέραν παρέχεται), which puts its trust not so much in hope (ελπίδι τε ησσον πιστεύει) which is strongest in perplexity (ης εν τω απόρω η ισχύς) as in reason supported by the facts (γνώμη δε από των υπαρχόντων) which gives a surer insight into the future" (ης βεβαιοτέρα η πρόνοια) (2.62.5).

Alcibiades on the other hand, says : "...while I am in the flower of youth and Nicias has the reputation of good luck, make use of the services of us both" (ο Νικίας ευτυχης δοκει ειναι...) (6.17.1) which was really intended as a derogatory remark, but because he uses τύχη as an argument, it makes his predictions suspect. He stakes his hopes for success, not on γνώμη but on something as random as youth.

The key words in Pericles' definition are, "reason supported by the facts" i.e. not arising from emotion. In several other instances Thucydides also makes the point that there is no room for emotion in correct πρόνοια.⁶

Alcibiades' speech was intended to arouse emotion: the Sicilian expedition was undertaken, not on the basis of reason supported by the facts but on the basis of unrealistic expectations based on ignorance. This is a significant point of difference between the two speeches: Pericles relies entirely on reason while the most forceful thrust of Alcibiades' speech is emotion (eg 6.18.3; 6.19.1; 6.24).

The principle of correct πρόνοια is demonstrated in Pericles' speech:

He had expected the Athenians' despondency and anger against him (2.59.3; 2.60.1). Before the war began, he had foreseen that they would be affected by circumstances: "I am well aware that it is not with the same spirit that men persuaded into war, proceed with its execution, since their minds are swayed according to their encounters" (1.140.1). Pericles' use of gnomic laws exemplifies his understanding of human nature.

Pericles' insistence that he himself had not changed (2.61.2) (και εγω μεν ο αυτός ειμι και ουκ εξίσταμαι) emphasises his foresight. He points out to the Athenians that despite the plague which could not have been foreseen, the Lacedaemonians had done only what could have been reasonably expected of them when the Athenians refused to accede to their demands (2.64.1) (ει και επελθόντες οι εναντίοι έδρασαν άπερ εικος ην). His correct foresight and his reasonable explanation demonstrate that the Athenians are unnecessarily despondent.

Pericles then predicts that Athens will not succumb to Lacedaemon and gives reasoned arguments justifying his prediction (2.62.1) referring to what he had said before, namely:

"I have many other grounds for the hope of prevailing, if you are willing not to add to the empire while at war, and not to take on additional dangers of your own making..." (1.144.1).

He adds a new argument, namely that the strength of the Athenian navy would guarantee their freedom (2.62.2).

In the Encomium Thucydides twice endorses Pericles' πρόνοια:

The Athenians still held out for ten years after the Sicilian disaster against ever-increasing opposition, which justified Pericles' forecast (προέγνω) that Athens might quite easily have triumphed in this war over the Peloponnesians alone (2.65.12 – 13);

⁶ 2.11.4 Archidamos' speech; 2.22.1 Pericles' concern about the Athenians' emotional state; 3.42.1 Diodotus' speech; 6.13.1 Nicias' speech.

“And after his death his foresight as to the war, was even more fully recognised” (2.65.6 – 7). There is a strong contrast with Alcibiades, who is not mentioned by name in the encomium, but who is surely present in Thucydides’ mind and the target of his implied criticism.

The Athenians (incited by Alcibiades) acted contrary to Pericles’ advice (2.65.7).

What happened was that Alcibiades encouraged them in their irrational desire to undertake an expedition against an island of which they knew nothing (6.1.1). Because the undertaking was based on the wrong reading of the circumstances in Sicily, there was no real γνώμη but only emotion, which Thucydides describes very vividly (6.19.1; 24). Under the influence of Alcibiades, the Athenian view of their prospects in Sicily was no more than wishful thinking. Alcibiades’ attempt at foresight is shown to be faulty. He dismissed the power of the Sicilians as negligible and predicted that many barbarians would flock to the Athenians because of their hatred of the Syracusans (6.17.6). This could be a deliberate misrepresentation of the facts, but it is likely that Alcibiades really thought that he could easily conquer Sicily, because his ambitions went beyond Sicily to the conquest of Carthage as well (6.15.2).

Alcibiades ventures another prediction:

“If we should keep quiet (ησυχάζοιμεν) . . . we should add little to our empire and risk losing the empire itself (6.18.2), a statement which contradicts Pericles’ advice (1.144.1). Alcibiades then proceeds to sketch a possible future scenario: the Athenians cannot limit their empire or relinquish their present rule, because then they would run the risk of succumbing to other powers (6.18.2 - 3). This is a rhetorical manoeuvre calculated to instil fear. Despite the apparent parallelism, it is a warped version of Pericles’ statement in 2.63.2 - 3. Pericles admonishes the Athenians, because some of them wanted to *relinquish* the Empire on moral grounds. Alcibiades predicted that if the Empire was not *extended*, it would succumb (see also “Alcibiades” p 107).

In their predictions both Pericles and Alcibiades criticised inactivity (Alcibiades ἀπραγμοσύνη - 6.18.6) (Pericles το...ἀπράγμων 2.63.3; ο ἀπράγμων 2.64.4), but the dangers which they foresaw, were different. Pericles predicted that, because of *exterior* forces, το ἀπράγμων would ruin a city if it was not flanked by το δραστήριον; Alcibiades predicted that a policy of ἀπραγμοσύνη would destroy Athens *from within*.

Perseverance - εγκρατερειν

The right assessment of the political situation and the ability to prognosticate correctly, enables the statesman to persevere in his convictions and actions.

Pericles persevered in his opinion and in his actions and he wanted the Athenians to follow his example. Because the Athenians were failing in their resolve to resist Lacedaemon (2.59.1), his main purpose was to stiffen that resolve. He begins with knowledge and reason, leading to correct prognostication and points out that this should lead to perseverance. He reiterates his own firmness of purpose, rebukes them for their weakness and then exhorts them to continue and not to give up (2.61.2; 2.62.1; 2.64.3 , 6). “For my part, I stand where I stood before and do not move away from my position, but it is you who have changed” (2.61.2).⁷

The purpose of Alcibiades’ speech was to persuade the Athenians not to change their minds. In the setting of the speech, this is a call for perseverance. “... let not the policy of inaction (απραγμοσύνη) that Nicias proposes, ... divert you from your purpose” (αποτρέψη) (6.18.6).

“I declare that a state which is accustomed to activity would very quickly be ruined by a change to inactivity” (6.18.7).

These calls for perseverance are fundamentally different. Thucydides has made it clear that Pericles’ calls for perseverance emanated from genuine concern for the city and the citizens, while Alcibiades spoke from a position of self-concern, so his idea of perseverance for the Athenians was that they should keep on acting according to his requirements. His notion of consistency is dictated by his personal interests.

Alcibiades himself lacks perseverance. Apart from his personal changes of allegiance (his opposition to Lacedaemon changing to co-operation which changes to allegiance to Persia and then back to Athens), his speech itself contains inconsistencies.⁸

2.3. ερμηνεύσαι ταυτα

The requirement that the statesman should be able to communicate his understanding to the people is explained in Pericles’ speech:

“For he who has understanding (ό τε γαρ γνους), but does not expound it clearly (μη σαφως διδάξας) is in the same situation as if it had not occurred to him” (2.60.6).

⁷ Cf 1.140.1

⁸ See “Alcibiades” p 106.

Pericles' statesmanship had Thucydides' approbation, and the speech succeeded in its purpose because the Athenians were persuaded by his arguments (τοις λόγοις ανεπείθοντο). They sent no further envoys to Lacedaemon and pursued the war more vigorously (2.65.1).⁹

The speech can therefore be taken as a model of ερμηνεύσαι ταυτα and a point of reference for other speeches, including that of Alcibiades.

Communication has two aspects, namely informative (σαφως διδάξας) and persuasive.

Here the differences between Pericles' and Alcibiades' speeches lie in the balance between the informative and persuasive aspects and in the use of reason vs emotion. In Pericles' model speech all persuasive statements are based on fact and logical reasoning, while Alcibiades' speech, as has been shown, contains demagogic manoeuvres, distortion of the facts and persuasion based on emotional pressure.

σαφως διδάξας¹⁰

Pericles clarified his insights, described above, to the people, explaining that, if they considered their situation in a rational way, their despondency and anger were unnecessary (2.61.1 - 5); prognostication based on their resources, especially their navy, would show that they would not succumb in the war (2.62.1 4) .

Passivity (απραγμοσύνη) was dangerous, particularly in connection with the Empire. Even if they wanted to relinquish the Empire on moral grounds, it was too late to do that. In an imperial state it was not expedient to seek safety through submission (ουδε εν αρχούση πόλει ξυμφέρει ...ασφαλως δουλεύειν) (2.63.1 – 3).

The informative process in Pericles' speech is based on fact and presented in the form of logical argument. The rebuttal of the Athenians' reasons for anger against him, i.e. his self-defence, is a good example:

“my purpose in calling an assembly was that I might address to you certain reminders and remonstrate if in any case you are either angry with me or are giving way to your misfortunes without reason” (2.60.1).

“Do not be let astray... nor persist in your anger with me – for you yourselves voted for the war the same as I...” (2.64.1).

“..you are blaming both me, who advised you and yourselves who voted with me for it. Yet I, with whom you are angry, ος ουδενος ήσσων οίομαι ειναί” (am in my own opinion *as competent as any man*) (in the qualities of a statesman) (2.60.5).

⁹ The fact that they were still angry with Pericles and fined him, is dismissed by Thucydides as one of the foibles of the όμιλος, indicating that in his opinion it did not detract from the efficacy of the speech (2.65.3 – 4).

“If therefore, when you allowed me to persuade you to go to war, you believed that I possessed these qualities, “μέσως...μαλλων ετέρων” (*even in a moderate degree more than other men*), it is unreasonable that I should now bear the blame, at any rate, of wrongdoing” (2.60.7).

Alcibiades makes a parallel statement in *his* self-defence in which he compares himself with others: “...look at my public acts and see if I execute them *worse than another* (εί του χειρον)...” (6.16.6).

It appears that the example he gives about his actions before Mantinea is a distorted version of the facts (6.16.6) (see also “Alcibiades” p 101). The other part of his self-defence (6.16.1-5) is an exposition of his claim to command, which is based not on facts but on assumptions, inferences and appearances. Even the verbs used, indicate the absence of facts: Alcibiades claims that men *infer* (υπονοείται) a city’s power from the prowess (εκ δε του δρωμένου) of individuals (6.16.2); his own display gave the *impression* of strength (ισχυς φαίνεται) (6.16.3). Alcibiades had a very good grasp of the importance of impression, which was particularly useful as corroboration of statements which were not really based on fact.¹¹

His claim to the superiority which entitles him to command is substantiated by a sophistic manoeuvre (6.16.4-5) (see also “Alcibiades” p 100). His further arguments about the strength of the potential opposition against Athens (6.17.1 – 6) which are based on false premisses and once again on supposition, cannot be described as σαφως διδάξας.

The persuasive aspect of ερμηνεύσαι ταυτα

Rhetoric is the instrument of ερμηνεύσαι ταυτα and its function is to persuade the people.

As discussed fully before, Alcibiades used demagogic rhetoric, i.e. dishonest and manipulative tactics to persuade his audience to his point of view. (See “Alcibiades” p 97 ff).

Pericles advanced via persuasion to the διδαχή or enlightenment of the people, which then led to correct action (Bender 1938, 16).

Pericles’ speech is a logical structure built on reason. There is a recurring pattern throughout. Each section contains a statement of fact, followed by corroborating argument which ends in a logical conclusion in the form of a reprimand or exhortation. There are eight sections of varying length¹² ending in the peroration (2.64.3 – 6), which properly sums up and concludes the speech.

¹⁰ Yunis gives a detailed analysis of Pericles’ rhetoric (Yunis 1991, 180 – 190).

¹¹ See Macleod’s analysis of Alcibiades’ use of and blurring between appearance and reality (Macleod 1983, 73).

¹² 2.60.1 – 4a; 2.60.4b – 5; 2.61.1a ; 2.61.1b – 4; 2.62.1 – 5; 2.63.1 – 64.1a; 2.64.1b – 2; peroration 2.64.3 – 6.

The peroration is analysed below as an example:

Statement:

2.64.3

Because Athens has lavished lives and labour on war and has not yielded to misfortune, she possesses the greatest power. The memory of that greatness will be left to posterity.

Argument

2.64.4-5

-Although το άπραγμαον may disparage Athens, those who wish to act will strive for her advantage.

-Hatred is the lot of those who want to rule, but he who accepts it and aims at the highest ends, is well advised because hatred does not last, while splendour and glory do.

Conclusion in the form of an exhortation

2.64.6

-The Athenians must resolve that they will have future honour and no present dishonour and achieve both by prompt and zealous effort;

-They must make no overtures to Lacedaemon and must not show the effect of their afflictions.

Final gnome: those showing the least distress against calamities, and resist most vigorously, are the κράτιστοί, whether cities or individuals.

Through his rhetoric Pericles thus enlightens, reprimands and exhorts the Athenians to action, using reason in his explanations and finally demonstrating that the greatness of Athens and their pride in their inheritance oblige them to act vigorously.

His logic is inexorable: you have all accepted the dignity Athens has attained through empire, (τω τιμωμένω απο του άρχειν) you take pride in it, so it is reasonable to expect that you will support it. Do not avoid its burdens unless you resign its honours as well (μη φεύγειν τους πόνους η μηδε τας τιμας διώκειν) (2.63.1).

Applied psychology

The good statesman must know his audience well in order to present his ideas in a persuasive manner. Such knowledge can be misused by a demagogue like Alcibiades to manipulate an audience into irrational action. Pericles' techniques are however used for the sake of the Athenians themselves while he never deviates from the truth. Pericles knew that the Athenians were discouraged, angry and afraid (2.59.3) and changed these negative sentiments not only through reason but also by the way in which he spoke to them. He wanted to reassure

them (θαρσύναι), and bring them to a milder (ηπιώτερον) and less fearful (αδεέστερον) mood by ridding their minds of resentment i.e he had to convince them that they would be better off if they continued fighting rather than submitting to Lacedaemon.

His persuasive technique consists of encouragement based on logic, demonstrations of the advantages of continued resistance (2.62.3; 63.1 - 3) and references to the glory of Athens (2.62.2 - 5; 64.3 - 6) which would also be an incentive to pursue the war more vigorously.

The encouragement comes from his understanding and firmness. He knew why they were feeling discouraged, but since he was still confident (εγω μεν ο αυτός ειμι και ουκ εξίσταμαι) (I have not changed) (2.61.2) he chided them for infirmity of purpose. The logical demonstration that their military resources, especially their navy, would make them invincible, served as further encouragement (2.62.1 - 3).

Alcibiades' persuasive techniques were ruthless because he used the Athenians' desires and fears to manipulate them into doing what he wanted. He created a false sense of optimism by describing their potential opposition as negligible (6.17.2 - 8) in order to encourage their desire for conquest (6.6.1) and played on their fears (6.18.2 - 3) as an incentive to action, using the strength of the navy as a guarantee of safety (6.18.5). He further exploited their greed and ambition (6.24). The sober tone of the last part of the speech was specifically intended to persuade the older men to his point of view (see "Alcibiades" p 108).

There is one point of similarity with Pericles' mode of persuasion namely the reference to the πατέρες and to the Athenian tradition which, as in Pericles' speech, is intended to persuade the Athenians to act (6.18.2; 6). The difference lies however in the type of action: Alcibiades advocates "pre-emptive" action (cf "Alcibiades" p 109) while Pericles wants perseverance and continued resistance against Lacedaemon.

The last factor in ερμηνεύσαι ταυτα is its irrational aspect, which is the speaker's charm or strength of personality. Alcibiades had a chameleon-like ability to assume the character of his audience, which is seen in the differences between this speech and his speech at Sparta (see "Alcibiades" p 112). Alcibiades succeeds, not by instructing his audience and convincing them of the correct action, but by manoeuvring them.

Pericles "κατειχε το πληθος ελευθέρως" (restrained the multitude while respecting their liberties) (2.65.8). On the strength of his high reputation he was able to oppose them and even provoke their anger. He could bring them from unrealistic confidence to fear and from unreasonable fear, restore them to confidence (2.65.9).

In this speech Pericles restores the Athenians from unreasonable fear to confidence, not by flattery or by assuming the character of his audience but by stressing the difference between them, “I stand where I stood before . . . but you have changed” (2.61.2). He then instructs them and in so doing, persuades them to his viewpoint.

2.4. φιλόπολις

Pericles defines this quality of the Statesman: “ὁ τε ἔχων ἀμφοτέρω, τῇ δὲ πόλει δύσνους, οὐκ ἂν ὁμοίως τι οἰκείως φράζοι” (He who has both - i.e the two previous qualities - but is ill-disposed towards his city would not make any declaration with equal loyalty) (2.60.6).

In the Epitaphios Pericles had exhorted the Athenians to emulate the fallen, inter alia, by meeting the enemy unflinchingly, by considering the city’s power and by becoming her lovers (...ερασταὶ γιγνομένους αὐτῆς...) (2.43). He wants the citizens to have a vibrant feeling towards the city, akin to an erotic relationship in which the city’s needs take precedence over those of the individual.¹³

In his third speech Pericles gives a logical reason why this must be so.¹⁴ It is a further demonstration of his γινῶναι τὰ δέοντα and ἐρμηνεύσαι ταῦτα: He knew that the Athenians were aggrieved about their personal losses and appears to have understood that for his speech to be effective, it was necessary to show that they would gain individually from the city’s welfare in order to persuade them to continue to defend her. Pericles motivates his assertion that the Athenians are unreasonable in giving way to their misfortunes by showing that although the good of the individual is dependent on that of the state, the contrary is not true:

“A state confers a greater benefit on its private citizens when as a whole (ξύμπασαν) it is successful, than when each individual prospers but the community fails” (2.60.2).

“If someone is prosperous in his private affairs, but his country goes to ruin, he perishes with her all the same, if he is in evil fortune and his country in good fortune, he is more likely to come through safely” (2.60.3).

“Therefore, because the πόλις can bear the misfortunes of τῆς ἰδίας, but the individual cannot bear hers, all men must defend her” (2.60.4).

¹³ Hornblower claims that Pericles’ statement in his third speech is “a frank, even brutal statement of a totalitarian philosophy” (Hornblower 2003, 332). In my view this is a faulty interpretation because what Pericles asks of the citizens is tendered willingly, not imposed upon them from above.

¹⁴ Note that the tone of this speech is entirely rational, because Pericles had to counter the Athenians’ negative emotions, while the Epitaphios had a more emotional approach suitable to the occasion.

Alcibiades was not yet ill-disposed towards the City at the time of the Sicilian Debate, but his own interests took precedence over those of the City, as his subsequent actions showed.

Alcibiades feels that the city's good proceeds from the individual and not vice versa, as Pericles would have it. He sees the state as a collection of individuals. The πόλις is not an entity in itself, to which the individual owes allegiance (see his speech at Sparta – 66.89 – 92). He holds that the success of the superior citizen reflects favourably on the state and that his own successes and sponsorships of choruses had benefited Athens because they had created an impression of strength which would have impressed the other Hellenes because “from what is done, men infer power” (6.16.2).

In Alcibiades' hierarchy the superior citizen is placed above the state because the state benefits from his prowess. “It is not unjust that one μέγα φρονούντα should not be equal to others” (6.16.4). The other citizens who should accept that they are inferior, usually resent superior persons, although later on they claim kinship to those who shed glory on the state.

Superiority reserved for special people is an oligarchic concept at its broadest, or given Alcibiades' ambitions, a tyrannical one which contrasts very strongly with Pericles' benevolent rule (cf. 2.65.8).

Pericles' asserted that the statesman must be loyal to his city, otherwise his statements i.e. his speeches or approaches to the citizens, would not be made with the same concern for his city (ομοίως τι οικείως φράζοι) (2.60.6), which can be taken as a critical comment on Alcibiades, who did not comply with this requirement .

2.5. χρημάτων κρείσσων

Thucydides feels that deficiency in this one quality negates all the others:

“προσόντος δε και τουδε , χρήμασι δε νικωμένου, τα ξύμπαντα τούτου ενος αν πωλοιτο” (and having had this also, if he is conquered by money, he would be completely for sale for this one thing OR everything would be for sale for this one thing only) (2.60.6).

According to Thucydides, the question of money, incorruptibility or personal enrichment at the cost of the state goes to the root of a politician's integrity because it has implications for all three other statesmanlike qualities. If money is stronger than the man, it will affect his judgment, he might give false explanations to the people and he would place his own interests above those of the state and the people, hence he cannot be regarded as a good statesman.

To get the right perception of Thucydides' requirements for the statesman, and to put the question of χρημάτων κρείστων in perspective, the above statement should be read together with Thucydides' positive definition of a good statesman, given in extended form in the Encomium.

“Pericles, who owed his influence to *his recognised standing and ability*: and had proved himself *clearly incorruptible in the highest degree, restrained the multitude* while respecting their liberties, and *led them rather than was led by them*, because he *did not resort to flattery, seeking power by dishonest means* but *was able* on the strength of his high reputation *to oppose them* and even provoke their wrath” (2.65.8).

All the elements of Pericles' definition in 2.60.5 - 6 are here, plus the indication that honesty in money matters should also be extended to include honesty in everything else, especially in the dealings of the statesman with the people (“did not resort to flattery, seeking power by dishonest means”).

Alcibiades does not qualify as a good statesman on any count. He was driven by ambition and the need for money, to promote the Sicilian expedition (6.15.2 – 3) and although Thucydides does not record any instance of him accepting bribes, there is a record of his devious dealings with some Lacedaemonian ambassadors (5.45) while his speech gives ample evidence of deception, evasion and misrepresentation of the facts. (See “Alcibiades” pp 99, 100, 103 - 4). So, despite his obvious talents as an orator and a military commander, he cannot be regarded as a good statesman.

In an even wider sense, the quality of integrity also includes self-control (σωφροσύνη) (Bender 1938, 25). The statesman cannot command sacrifices from the people if he does not practise them himself. Self-indulgence places his rule on an insecure basis. While Pericles could even anger the δῆμος and still retain his position, Alcibiades was immediately implicated in the affair of the Hermae and the desecration of the Mysteries because of his lifestyle, which made him a prime suspect. He had already offended so many people (6.15.4) that his control of the Assembly which gave him the command of the Sicilian expedition, evaporated as soon as he was out of sight.

3. REAL VS ASSUMED SUPERIORITY

Pericles makes no overt claim to superiority over his fellow Athenians but says that he thinks that he is *equal (not superior)* to anyone in the qualities of a statesman. (ουδενος ήσσων οίομαι ειναι) (2.60.5). After enumerating and defining these qualities (2.60.6), he implies that, because the Athenians had allowed him to persuade them to go to war, *they* must have considered him superior to others in statesmanship, even if it was just moderately so (2.60.7). From the structure of his argument it is clear that for Pericles, it is not superiority which counts, but adherence to the requirements of statesmanship.

Thucydides' opinion of Alcibiades indicates (6.15.2 & 4) that Alcibiades' pre-eminence was irrelevant to statesmanship, but with fine irony however, he makes Alcibiades open his speech with an arrogant claim to superiority:

“προσήκει μοι μαλλον ετέρων, ω Αθηναιοι, άρχειν ... και άξιος άμα νομίζω ειναι” (It belongs to me, more than others, Athenians, to have command ... and I think too, that I am worthy to command) (6.16.1).

A few lines further on he reiterates his sense of superiority: “ ουδέ γε άδικον εφ' εαυτω μέγα φρονουντα μη ίσον ειναι...”(nor is it unjust either, that one who has a high opinion of himself, should not be equal to others...” (6.16.4a).

In the ensuing portion (6.16.4b – 6) Alcibiades expands on the topic of his own superiority, ending with a (false) claim that what he did before Mantinea showed that his public actions proved his superiority.

These two portions of the speeches, read together, create a clear contrast:

As discussed, Pericles, who, according to Thucydides, was a superior statesman, was *modest*, merely claiming *equality* with others and deferring to the opinion of the Athenians, who followed his advice, ostensibly because *they* regarded him as superior to others, even in a *moderate degree*. Note the use of the words “ήσσων” and “μέσως ... μαλλον ετέρων”.

Alcibiades, who, in Thucydides' opinion, was deficient in statesmanship, *arrogantly* claims superiority, based on his *own opinion* and on his dubious claims to public benefits from his actions. Alcibiades uses the words “μαλλον ετέρων” without qualification about his own superiority.

4.CONCLUSION

The comparison of the two speeches confirms the conclusion reached before from the detailed analysis of Alcibiades' speech, namely that although Alcibiades probably considered himself to be a second Pericles, and had undoubted talent, he was in reality a "counter-Pericles". He did not conform to Thucydides' idea of a good statesman and so, despite his brilliance, he was inferior to Pericles.

The style of the two speeches shows Thucydides' interpretative powers at their best (cf 1.22.1). Alcibiades' deviousness and his intense self-absorption are clearly depicted, as well as his ambition, which are all more emphatically displayed in his speech at Sparta. The echoes, direct contrasts and parallels between the speech in the Sicilian debate and Pericles' third speech are obviously deliberate and emphasise the difference between the two men as well as the shift in the political climate after Thucydides' model statesman's departure from the scene.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

1. IN SEARCH OF A DEFINITION

On the basis of a preliminary definition (see page 1) “demagogic rhetoric” in the first congress at Sparta, the Mytilenean debate and the Sicilian debate was identified and discussed. From these analyses it was possible to identify a number of characteristics of demagogic rhetoric, but although these characteristics *describe* different ways in which demagogic rhetoric was used, they do not necessarily *define* its essential character.

The readings showed that there are parallels and echoes between the speeches, of which the well-known echo of Pericles in Cleon’s speech is a notable example. Cleon says, “ἐγὼ μὲν οὖν ὁ αὐτὸς εἰμι ...”(But I am the same...) (3.38.1), echoing Pericles’ statements in 1.140.1 and 2.61.2., while parallel statements also appear in Archidamus’ speech (1.85.1) and Sthenelaidas’ speech (1.86.2). The question is, why are these statements regarded as demagogic in Sthenelaidas’ and Cleon’s speeches but not so for Pericles and Archidamus ?

Cleon was a *δημαγωγός*, but so was Pericles, in the strict sense that they were both leaders of the people. What is it that characterised Sthenelaidas, Cleon and Alcibiades, so that *δημαγωγός* and *δημαγωγεῖν* now have a pejorative meaning? What is it, in essence, that distinguishes the demagogue and his rhetoric?

This exercise does not aim at definitions in absolute terms but is an attempt to approximate Thucydides’ own concept of demagogic rhetoric as closely as possible. A definition will therefore be ventured in terms of Thucydides’ pronouncements about the three ingredients of rhetoric, namely the audience, the speaker, and the speech.

The audience

It is self-evident that the audience will always react according to human nature. Although human nature manifests itself in different ways under different circumstances, there are common denominators which, in Thucydides’ opinion characterise and determine human reactions.

The famous excursus (3.82 – 84) in the record of the Corcyrean stasis gives a gloomy view of human nature, describing the perversion of moral values during civil war.

“During the civil wars many cruelties fell on the cities, that occur and will always occur *μὲν καὶ αἰεὶ ἐσόμενα εὖς ἂν ἡ αὐτὴ φύσις ἀνθρώπων ἦ* (as long as men have the same nature)” (3.82.2a).

“ο δε πόλεμος ... βίαιος διδάσκαλος ...” (War... is a violent teacher) (3.82.2b).

and “human nature, always ready to act unjustly in violation of laws, showed itself powerless against passion, stronger than justice and the enemy of superiority” (3.84).¹

If these passages are read together with Diodotus’ claim that emotional compulsion is stronger than reason (3.45.1 - 7), it appears that, for Thucydides, *the force of emotion in human nature makes the audience vulnerable to emotional exploitation.*

Two of the debates studied, demonstrate this principle:

The Lacedaemonian assembly disregarded Archidamus’ clear explanation why they should avoid war with Athens and, following Sthenelaidas’ brief exhortation, irrationally chose war while they were at a logistical disadvantage, basically because of their fear of Athens and Athenian expansionism (1.88).

Under the influence of Alcibiades’ rhetoric the Athenians were fired by extreme irrational enthusiasm and decided to sail to Sicily, despite the fact that they knew nothing about the island, its size or its population (6.1.1; 6.6).

In either case, the emotional state predisposed the audience to the more “demagogical” line.

The speaker

In assessing Thucydides’ attitude to and criteria laid down for speakers, the figure of Pericles looms large, as the model and standard against which the other orators were measured.

The criteria for judging the speakers are laid down in the Encomium and by Pericles himself in his last speech, where he enunciates the well-known four qualities of the good statesman (2.60.5 - 6). From these qualities it appears that in Thucydides’ opinion a statesman i.e. a speaker, needs two intellectual and two moral qualities to qualify as “good”: he must have political insight and must be able to expound his understanding in a manner which is intelligible to the audience, characteristics shared by good speakers and demagogues alike. It is his deficiency in the two moral qualities which distinguishes the demagogic speaker, namely lack of patriotism and dishonesty.

¹ Some scholars regard this passage, 3.84 as spurious (Lattimore 1998,171) and there is some debate whether Thucydides had postulated that human nature is depraved from the outset, or whether he thought that men merely act in a depraved manner under pressure of extreme circumstances. The debate is interesting but that part of Thucydides’ view does not impinge on the effect of rhetoric. What is relevant, is the indication that the potential for passion is present in any audience and that it can be exploited by the orator.

Pericles himself had the strength of character, moral stature and integrity which made the Athenians follow him, although he never flattered them or spoke to please them, even being able to gainsay them to the point of anger (2.65.8).

In the discussions of the various speeches it was shown how the other speakers fell short of these standards. Even Archidamus who was patently patriotic and honest and showed a remarkable grasp of the political situation, lacked the ability to overcome the fear of the Lacedaemonians with the result that he was unable to persuade them to his point of view.

From the three debates and from Thucydides' remarks about the various speakers, it can be concluded that the demagogue is characterised by his motives which are *ίδια* and not *δημοσία*, that is, he puts his own interests above those of the community.²

Demagogic rhetoric comes about when an unscrupulous and self-interested orator exploits the emotions of his audience.

The speech

The first characteristic of the demagogic speeches under discussion, is ***manipulation by means of emotion***. The emotions used as the means of manipulation in the three debates were: ***fear*** at the congress at Sparta, ***fear and anger*** in the Mytilenean debate and ***fear and greed*** before the Sicilian expedition.

The second characteristic, which is present in all the demagogic speeches, is ***dishonesty***.

The Corinthians at Sparta traded on the Lacedaemonians' fear of Athens, but they did not mention it even once; the Athenians threatened the Lacedaemonians under a veneer of talk about their navy and their so-called lenience; Sthenelaidas obviously lied when he claimed that he could not hear who had shouted the loudest in the normal Lacedaemonian division procedure and his manoeuvre in separating the two groups was devious; Cleon delivered a rhetorical tour de force while pretending to be a plain man criticising clever rhetoric and rhetorical techniques; the whole Sicilian debate is characterised by pretence, misrepresentation and misconceptions.

The various ***techniques*** used for these purposes include vituperation and slander (*διαβολή*, the term used by Diodotus and Alcibiades), discrediting the opposition, flattery, evasion, pretence, omission of facts, exaggeration, inconsistency, deliberate silence about certain points and making points by implication.

² The community can be the *δημος* of his own city, but as in the case of the first congress at Sparta, it can also include a wider conglomeration of states.

The perversion of language which Thucydides described in 3.82 – 3 can be added to these techniques. Changing or twisting the normal meanings of words to fit a partisan agenda, is an extreme case of dishonesty. Thucydides explained that the whole process was based on deception because the speakers wanted to keep up appearances, “και τήν ειωθυίαν – των ονοματων ες τα έργα αντηλλάξαν τη δικαίωσει” (In self-justification they inverted the usual verbal evaluations of actions) (3.82.4).

So -

The speeches which were studied, suggest that in Thucydides’ opinion, demagogic rhetoric is used by a speaker to further his own interests at the cost of the community, trading on the susceptibility of human nature to emotional impulses. His mode of operation is intrinsically dishonest and to achieve his purpose he uses different techniques, specifically tailored to the mood and composition of the audience.

It is reiterated that the techniques do not define demagogic rhetoric, but are only tools used by the demagogue.

2. THE POST-PERICLEAN SPEECHES SEEN AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF THE HISTORY AS A WHOLE

The History³

Thucydides’ History describes what he regarded as the errors which cost Athens the war, despite her initial advantage. His record of these errors is really an argument for the correctness of Pericles’ insight as against that of the “successors” (cf 2.65. 6 – 11), which he expressed in his remarks about the post-Periclean politicians and in his interpretative versions of their speeches.

Democracy was presented by Pericles as co-operative government by all citizens (2.37.1 - 3) but it later came to mean dominance by the δημοσ. “οι δε ύστερον ... ετραποντο καθ ηδονας τω δήμω και τα πράγματα ενδιδόναι” (but the successors of Pericles ... were ready to surrender to the people even the conduct of public affairs to suit their whims) (2.65.10). Democracy had endowed Athens with strength beyond that of her rivals, yet, because of political divisions it later robbed her of that strength (2.65.11). In these portions of the Encomium Thucydides makes it

³ This section 2.1 follows the Introduction by J H Finley Jr to the 1951 edition of the Crawley translation of the History.

clear that the changes for the worse occurred because of the deterioration in the calibre of the Athenian leadership.

In the sphere of the war too, there was a marked change. In contrast with Pericles, whose view of the war was defensive (2.65.7), the extreme democrats wanted a war of conquest (5.43). These leaders were partly motivated by self-advancement and partly by the fear of oligarchs abroad. This fear was already revealed in the Mytilenean debate (3.37.2; 39.6 - 8).

With the rise of Alcibiades, the war of conquest began openly (5.43; 6.16 – 18). In the Sicilian debate the change in the Athenian approach is evident in the confidence of Alcibiades and helplessness of Nicias, who appears to be the heir of Periclean moderation, although his moderation may have been inspired by self-interest (5.16) and by his own over-cautious temperament.

Thucydides' presence in the speeches

To venture comment on Thucydides' programmatic statement in 1.22.1, is to enter a minefield of learned opinion, but my view is that if the text is read on its own, it simply says that the speeches are not verbatim reports but contain a certain amount of interpretation.

If the speeches in the Mytilenean and Sicilian debates are read in the light of this "simplistic" version of Thucydides' statement, they show clearly how Thucydides saw the deterioration in the Athenian leadership after Pericles. The speeches have been analysed in detail and their characteristics noted but in conclusion the debates will now be compared in broad terms with the standards set by Pericles:

In the Mytilenean debate there is no leader who stands out from the others as Pericles did. The concluding section of the debate makes this clear: "ρηθειςων δε των γνωμων τουτων μάλιστα αντιπάλων προς αλληλας ..." (These opinions which were expressed were fairly evenly matched...) (3.49.1) The Athenians then entered into a contest between them and ended off with a decision won by a narrow margin. Despite Cleon's persuasiveness (3.36.6) he was not strong enough to win the day.

Thucydides interprets Cleon's character by portraying him as a strident orator, doubting reason (3.37.1 – 4), who, unlike Pericles had no wish to repress emotion (3.40.7).

Diodotus is not identified beyond his name and his father's name and his speech is partly an expression of Thucydides' opinion, but mostly a model refutation of Cleon, which, as was shown

in the discussion, had to include some demagogic aspects, because of the nature of the audience (3.43.3).

Where Cleon was more overt in his methods, Alcibiades in the Sicilian debate, is shown to be subtle, making his points by using the subconscious feelings of his audience. He manages to evade some serious accusations against him; he discredits Nicias in extremely clever ways, simply by patronising him and copies Pericles, not in word, as Cleon did, but by the tone of the final part of his speech. He stands in contrast to Pericles mostly through his lack of integrity and his instability. One thing which Alcibiades could not say was, “ἐγὼ μὲν ὁ αὐτός εἰμι καὶ οὐκ ἐξίσταμαι” (2.61.2).

The speech of Nicias is a skilled piece of characterisation. It shows how the erstwhile successful general tries by subterfuge to keep the Athenians from sailing to Sicily in order to maintain his reputation as a successful στρατηγός. He is convinced, and rightly so, that the Athenians are rushing into a hazardous enterprise without proper consideration but he is no demagogue, he is not even a good orator. Before the end of his speech he loses his temper and starts abusing Alcibiades and his followers, a charge that Alcibiades duly turns to his own advantage, in order to appear magnanimous. The picture of the “timorous advocate of moderation” who is not quite honest, is so well drawn that it shows just how perceptive Thucydides was and how well he interpreted the circumstances of a debate at which he could not have been present himself.

Finally –

From the above it is postulated – first that Thucydides did include a considerable amount of interpretation in the speeches in the Mytilenean and Sicilian debates and second that he used these speeches to indicate in detail just how much the political situation in Athens had deteriorated after the death of his model statesman who had been ὁ πρῶτος ἀνὴρ in a city which was actually a democracy.

ANNEXURE A

- 6.11.2 The Siceliot as it seems to me ... δ' άν
 would be even less dangerous to us ... έτι αν
 if the Syracusans should acquire rule over them ... ει άρξειαν
- 6.11.3 For now they might come against us singly ... καν έλθοιεν
- 6.11.4 The Hellenes there would be most in awe ... εκπεπληγμένοι ειεν
 if we should not come ... ει μη αφικοίμεθα
 if we should quickly depart ... δι' ολίγου απέλθοιμεν
 if we should suffer a defeat ... ει δε σφαλείμεν τι
 they would join our enemies here in attacking us ... μετα των ενθάδε επίθοντο

ANNEXURE B

Irresponsibility

- 6.9.1 We ought not, on such slight deliberation about matters of great importance, to undertake a war that does not concern us.
- 6.9.3 not to hazard present possessions for things that are unseen and in the future ... your haste is untimely and what you are striving for, not easy to attain.
- 6.10.2 The treaty affords no security ... (for so *certain men here and among our enemies* have managed it).
- 6.10.4 If they should find our power divided ... the very thing we are now so anxious to bring about.

Irrationality

- 6.10.1 You, leaving behind many enemies, are bent upon (επιθυμειν) ... bringing upon you more enemies.
- 6.10.5 resolve not to run into danger while the state is still among the waves.
... not reach out after another empire before we have secured that which you have
- 6.11.5 Because you have got the better of the Lacedaemonians beyond your expectations, you despise them and now even aim at the conquest of Sicily.
- 6.11.6 You have no right to be elated at the misfortunes of your opponents; only when you have mastered their spirits, should you feel confidence.

Foolishness

- 6.11.1 It is folly (ανόητον) to go against men when victory will not bring control and failure will not leave matters as before.

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