

THUCYDIDES AND THE THEORY
OF HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of Political Science

University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

of Political Science

By

James Williams

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Many of the ideas which Thucydides conveys in his History have universal applications. They may be understood by anyone from any period of time and from any place on the earth, regardless of cultural biases. The prevailing theme of the work is war: the forces that create wars, the events that repeatedly occur during war, and finally, the factors which result in war's completion. The study of war requires the study of all of history since, as the text makes apparent, war is a continuous occurrence. This essay is a series of reflections over Thucydides's History. I do not intend to "prove" my claims beyond a shadow of a doubt; instead, I desire to raise issues, instill thoughtful ruminations, and provoke questions. The elucidation of these ideas, mere parts of the sum total of Thucydides's thought, is the goal of this essay.

Thucydides is traditionally distinguished from other ancient Greek thinkers, such as Socrates, Plato, or Aristotle, under the assumption that the latter three are philosophers while Thucydides is a historian. Today, Thucydides is most commonly recognized as "the greatest of the Greek historians" (Connor, 8). Nevertheless, there are complications when one maintains that Thucydides is solely a historian, for nowhere in his narrative of the Peloponnesian War does he refer to the text as a history. Moreover, the text is integrated with speeches which he readily admits he could not remember precisely and thus made "the speakers say what was in my opinion demanded of them by the various occasions" (1:22).

This indicates Thucydides is interpreting, even creating the past; he must have already concluded what the important variables of a situation were, otherwise he would have been unable to know what words the situation required. Finally, at numerous points in the narrative, Thucydides praises or criticizes the actions of various persons. Again, this ability to evaluate the merits or faults of an individual suggests that Thucydides was not merely attempting to record events exactly as they occurred but was engaged in another level of analysis. Thus, it becomes extremely difficult to classify Thucydides' status as a thinker into a discrete category. Regardless, we see that Thucydides interpreted the Peloponnesian War through a particular viewpoint predicated on a discernible moral and philosophical basis. The task of this

essay is to reconstruct and articulate some of the assumptions that underlie Thucydides' History.

Many of the ideas which Thucydides conveys have universal applications. They may be understood by anyone from any period of time and from any place on the earth, regardless of cultural biases. "My essay was not designed to win the applause of the moment but was made to be a possession for all times" (1:22). The prevailing theme of the work is war: the forces that create wars, the events that repeatedly occur during war, and finally, the factors which result in war's completion. Moreover, the study of war requires the study of all of history because, as the text makes apparent, war is a continuous occurrence. This is why the Archaeology begins with the remotest epochs from the past; Thucydides argues that war is a phenomenon which was present in the most ancient ages and will exist forever. Thus, since war is forever with us, Thucydides' various ideas concerning war and the shape of history will always be useful.

This essay is a series of reflections over Thucydides' History. I do not intend to "prove" my claims beyond a shadow of a doubt; instead, I desire to raise issues, instill thoughtful ruminations, and provoke questions. Thus, while there may appear to be a noted absence of answers in this essay, I take my defense from Aristotle himself who claimed that raising questions is far more valuable than providing answers. I have divided the discourse into four parts. Each of these parts is intended to bring us to a better

understanding of Thucydides' viewpoint of history. The first part concerns Thucydides' notion of historical development as expressed in the Archaeology. I will discuss the factors which Thucydides believes causes societies to develop. These factors imply that Thucydides posits a model of historical development by which we can trace the progression of all of history. In the second part, we attempt to determine why Thucydides maintains that the Peloponnesian War is the most important war of all time. This point is important for one reason in particular: the evidence indicates that Thucydides uses the Peloponnesian War as a model to explain the direction all wars follow. Understanding the reason why he believes the Peloponnesian War to be the "climatic war" (Strauss, p. 51), we will be able to understand better the Thucydidean perspective on this war and wars in general. In the third part, we will discuss the precipitous decline of civilization that occurred as the war progressed. This decline was marked by a stunning change in the understading and ability to articulate what constituted right actions. In other words, we may speak of a decline of morality which the war brought about. Fourth, we will seek to elucidate the underpinning cause of the war which seems to lie most in one factor: pride. Pride led to the commencement of the war; pride forced the war to its enormous length and pride led to the host of atrocities committed during the length of the conflict.

The elucidation of these ideas, mere parts of the sum total of Thucydides's thought, is the goal of this essay. If

we more fully articulate the concepts Thucydides expresses, we may come to some knowledge of our own time, of the political order now in place. This age especially calls us to pay special attention to the forces which lead to war since modern war could be the greatest disaster ever perpetrated. Knowledge of Thucydides' version of the Spartan-Athenian conflict is not then, a useless historical exercise; it is imperative. While pride led the Greek civilization to a height unmatched by any society previous to them, it also led to their decline and even their ruin. In short, if Thucydides' assumption that history repeats itself to a greater or lesser degree is correct, we must all become more aware of the lessons Thucydides teaches.

The primary cause of the ultimate Greek War - the Peloponnesian War - was an immense pride displayed by the two primary combatants, Athens and Sparta. Athens refused to relax its determined quest for power; Sparta would never concede to being the second power among the Greek cities. In order for both sides to fulfill self-created conceptions about their power, they pushed the war to its fullest limits. The result was an exceptional war: a war in which man's fullest possibilities to wage and be destroyed by war were exhausted. And in the end, the results for the Spartans were not the spoils which normally accompany a victor, but a substantial weakening, if not a complete destruction, of the essence which made the Spartans, and all of Greece, a great civilization.

In this chapter we will discuss a notion of historical development which underlies the thought of the History. Thucydides speaks of two conditions in history: growth and war. Growth is associated with a condition of peace where political units are allowed sufficient rest to cultivate civilized arts (1:4). War brings about destruction. In what follows, we will explain this condition through a model which consists of three phases. First, we will discuss this model in "general" terms, thus providing us an opportunity to determine the theoretical validity of the model; then we will analyze the model as it is inferred directly from the text.

In order to facilitate our understanding of why pride was the primary cause of the Peloponnesian War, we must realize that pride is the foremost cause of all wars. According to

Thucydides, war organizes history into a distinct pattern. Pride is the driving passion of war. Societies progress because men are continually attempting to better their capacity to fight as a people. As societies move forward, they will attempt to become the foremost power of whatever area they deem necessary. These areas may be large or they may be confined to a track of land no larger than a village. However, there will always be an ongoing struggle to expand power. At some point, societies will come into conflict because the expansion of power always poses a direct or indirect threat. The result will be war.

According to my interpretation of Thucydides, there are three phases in history: progression, war, and the cessation of war. These three phases inevitably repeat each other; human passions and desires force events to follow this pattern forever. Moreover, this pattern will not be altered nor will human ingenuity be able to discover a way in which to prevent war. War is the tragedy of man. Pride is man's tragic flaw. by analyzing this model in greater detail, one phase at a time, we will discover why the Peloponnesian War was inevitable, and why all wars are equally unpreventable.

Phase 1 - At some point in time, there are a number of political units. These political units are formed in order to fill a power void between men. We can not find a direct reference to this in the text, but we can draw it from inference. As the Athenian behavior directly after the Persian War reveals, wherever there is a power void men seek

to fill it. "It is just as much in men's nature to rule those who submit to them as it is to resist those who molest them" (4:61). Thus, men seek power; they will fight for power. This is the first factor which forces mankind to progress.

For as soon as power voids are filled, power hierarchies form. The components of these hierarchies, which are based on the actual ability to wage power or the reputation for power, quickly form alliances in order to increase their capacity to use power. In this, we have units of greater or lesser degrees of strength who form alliances to maximize their power. Immediately, once these hierarchies and alliances are in place, competition between both the political units and the alliances begin. They compete for more power. The unit and the alliance which possesses the most power will attempt to suppress the other units and the other alliances. Every other unit and every other alliance will aspire to the prevailing position in the hierarchy. In other words, an ongoing struggle is continually in motion: the competition for power compels societies to progress.

This phase of the model is inferred directly from Thucydides's articulation of the progress of Greece in the Archaeology. Thucydides sees progression in two areas: 1) the ability of societies to organize so that men can lay aside their arms, and 2) advances in technology. The Athenians were the first people in Greece to lay aside their weapons when performing day to day activities; moreover, they adopted fashionable styles of dress and took a more luxurious mode of

living. Later, in the same paragraph, Thucydides had already shown his contempt for the barbarian way of life. He says, "Indeed this was the greatest movement yet known in history, not only of the Hellenes, but of a large part of the barbarian world - I had almost said of mankind" (1:1).

Phase 2 - Advances in technology enabled the Greeks to progress in terms of the ability to wage war. Improvements in shipbuilding immediately gave rise to an increase in a city's power. Thucydides repeatedly iterates how fifty-oared ships with decks are far superior to the ships previous to them. Thus, advances in technology contribute to the notion that societies do not merely change but that they progress.

At some point, the competition between political units will become so intense that the first steps toward war begins. During this phase, one political unit or perhaps both political units are attempting to seize more power. Clearly, they do not seize power because it is necessary for their survival; they take more power, on one level, because it satiates their pride. There will be a brief period when both sides will attempt to justify going to war; then the war will commence. For a very brief period there will be a rapid progression as both sides prepare for actual battle. Once the battle begins and human life is lost, however, a steep decline in the level of civilization will become perceptible. Organization of all types break down once war commences. Laws lose their force of right, and individuals follow the dictates of law with less frequency. Correct morality becomes

ambiguous. Justice will change its meaning as a war progresses. In other words, war brings on a dangerous, anarchical condition where rapine prevails.

Phase 3 - During this phase, men realize that war is too horrible a condition to live under. They cease fighting when they can no longer hold up against the brutal acts which they see and hear of regularly. War stops because men cannot, because of fear, continue to live with war. Once war stops, progression immediately begins again.

Thucydides contends that the Peloponnesian War was the greatest war ever fought. In particular, he believes the war to be "more worthy of relation than any that had preceded it" (1:1). He suggests that the reason the Peloponnesian War was the greatest war up to its time is due to three factors: 1) the war was drawn out to an immense length, 2) never had there been so much destruction of property and loss-of-life, 3) and during the time of the war, a number of cataclysmic events not wrought by men occurred - such as earthquakes, eclipses, and a plague - suggesting the intervention of gods or a supernatural element (1:22). The question we must now ask is: why do these three factors constitute a great war, indeed, the greatest war? In order for us to understand this supposition, we must first determine what Thucydides would have believed constituted a great war. We will attempt to infer from scattered observations about war in the text and reconcile them with the three factors defined above. In this way, we will determine why the Peloponnesian War was worth the painstaking care Thucydides applied to it.

The Peloponnesian War is unique since the progression which came before the commencement of the war was the most rapid and startling in history. Moreover, the decline which men were willing to endure surpassed all previous precedents. The growth which came before the Peloponnesian War was much greater than the growth before any previous war. Thucydides says, "The preparations of both combatants were in every department in the last stages of perfection" (1:1). Military

histories suggest that seldom in history were there two political units as prepared for combat as the Spartans and Athenians. After the Persian War, the Athenians had completely altered their political goals and their ability to exercise military power. Before the war, the Athenians were not a significant power in Greek affairs. They had not yet transformed themselves into the imposing naval power they were to become, and they possessed no tributaries. At some point after the Persian War, the Athenians sought to dominate Greek affairs and revised their military accordingly. Thus, directly before the Peloponnesian War, the Athenian navy was the most outstanding the world had known both in terms of size and naval science. Also, the Athenians possessed a sizable amount of treasure in their temples. The Spartan army had undergone its usual highly disciplined training and could have most likely defeated any army of its day. Both sides possessed a powerful will to commence the war and see the conflict through to its end. Thus, for these reasons, Thucydides was able to claim that both sides were nearing perfection in their military and political preparations.

Likewise, along with this massive progression, an unprecedented amount of destruction accompanied the war as we have already noted above. Thus, the massive disparities between progression and destruction were the most pronounced ever. The war was exceptional in terms of both the amount of growth and the amount of destruction. We see the unprecedented destruction in such events as the Corcyrans

Revolution, the liquidation of the Ambracian army, and the Athenian defeat at Sicily.

Now let us once again consider the three factors which Thucydides believes make the Peloponnesian War the greatest war, and in particular, the one most worthy of analysis (1:22). First, the war encompassed an immense length of time.

Unlike the Persian War, which was completed in four battles, the Peloponnesian War offers us a substantial amount of time to examine the actions of men. This time also allows us to observe events which have undergone a considerable amount of development. For example, within the Peloponnesian War, two cities experience civil wars, Corcyra and Athens. A large number of individuals acquire and lose power: we are allowed to observe numerous cities changing their attitudes toward allies. Most important, perhaps, is the fact that the length of the war allows us to recognize patterns, which all wars would assume, but we are rarely given the occasion to see. This pattern, the curve of progression and decline outlined above, gives history a form which allows us to predict to a limited degree how events will develop. Thucydides says, "but if it be judged useful by those inquirers who desire an exact knowledge of the past as an aid to the interpretation of the future, which in the course of human things must resemble if it does not reflect it, I shall be content" (1:22).

Second, the immense destruction and death the war wrought causes us to consider another factor which we will amplify further in the following chapter. Destruction and death play

an important role in the greatness of the Peloponnesian War since these factors alter the psychology of men, which results in new attitudes towards values, morals, and authority. For example, before the plague struck Athens, the Athenians were united under their leader Pericles, and the people felt a strong sense of loyalty to the city. We know this to be true based on the following reasons. During his funeral oration, Pericles addresses the city in the first person plural - "we". His speech is not so much a eulogy for the dead but an exhortation to the living to promote and strengthen Athens in any way possible. We assume that Pericles must have believed his audience to be receptive to his remarks; few speakers would attempt to persuade a crowd that he felt would be unmoved by his words. Finally, at the end of his speech, Pericles tells his audience that they may leave; clearly, this indicates he must have felt a position of authority over the crowd. In Pericles's ensuing and final speech, which occurs after the plague ravaged the city, he address in the audience in the second person - "you". The tone of his speech is aggressive; it appears that his audience is poised against him. In this, we see a pronounced change in attitude which death wrought. The citizenry almost solely because of the plague adopts an antagonistic attitude toward their leadership; the power of authority isis subverted. Destruction can thus create changes in the psychology of men; men view traditional standards of right and wrong differently after the death of those close to them. The new attitude is

generally marked by aggressiveness and a new code of behavior resembling barbarity. Nowhere is this supposition confirmed more than in the numerous cruelties perpetrated in the Corcyran Revolution. This forces us to examine death and destruction under a wider application. Since there is certainly almost always death during wars, one can thus expect a change in the prevailing moral code. As already noted, the war was unusually long. Therefore, destruction and death takes on an added dimension even beyond the horror of the loss of property and human life. The way men behave toward one another, their attitudes toward all things, devolves rapidly as war progresses. The length of the Peloponnesian War allows us then to observe the corresponding change in psychology and morality caused by all wars in detail. This factor furthermore contributes to the notion that the Peloponnesian War is a war worthy of painstaking analysis.

Finally, a number of events beyond the control of men occurred during the war. Thucydides says, "Old stories of occurrences handed down by tradition, but scantily confirmed by experience, ceased to be incredible; there were earthquakes of unparalleled extent and violence; eclipses of the sun . . . and there were great droughts in sundry places and consequent famines, and the most calamitous and awful fatal visitation, the plague" (1:23). Thucydides may be suggesting that one supernatural force played a direct role in the war: fortune; fortune is a factor in the greatness of this particular war.

In few other wars prior to the Peloponnesian War did the

role of events beyond the control of men play such a decisive role in the progression of the war. For example, there is evidence to suggest that if the plague had never struck Athens, the Civil War which occurred eighteen years later would not have happened. As we have already seen, the plague made the Athenian citizenry contemptuous of and antagonistic toward authority (2:60). The attitude of the people at this point set the stage for a demagogue - Cleon. Thucydides viewed Cleon with little disguised contempt (3:18); clearly, Cleon's violent disposition reflected the unsettled attitude of the citizens. In other words, the plague had created an environment where a despicable person such as Cleon could succeed, and then, once he attained power, he did everything he could to sustain this environment. Moreover, this self-same environment provided a forum in which faction could thrive. And immediately, faction began to thrive. Conversely, a conservative group of wealthy oligarchs, fearing the power of Alcibiades's oratory, contrived to weaken the anti-Spartan faction and personally disgrace Alcibiades. Their attempt succeeded when they managed to implicate him in the uncertain events surrounding the mutilation of the Hermae. With the destruction of the fleet at Sicily, the environment of factionalism, which first took shape because of the plague, led to the civil war which weakened further the Athenian's chances for victory. Thus, we see the interplay between fortune and its role in human affairs. The vast number of these occurrences, made the Peloponnesian War more useful for discussion than any war which preceded it

The ideas about the greatness of the Peloponnesian War may be summed in the following way. The Peloponnesian War allows us to witness the limits of human potential and human failure. In a single sweep of history, we view man's possibilities to succeed and to fail. In this sense, then, the Peloponnesian War is the ultimate war: victory has never been more glorious; failure has never been more ignominious and complete.

In one of Thucydides' best known passages, he recounts the turbulent events of the Corcyran Revolution. Within the space of days, a city moves from an uneasy state of peace into a condition where anarchy and chaos prevail, accompanied by some of the most barbarous atrocities committed during the war. "Death thus raged in every shape; and as usually happens at such times, there was no length to which violence did not go; sons were killed by their fathers, and suppliants dragged from the altar or slain upon it" (3:65). Although this revolution was one of several during the twenty-seven years of the war, Thucydides takes great pains to record its origin, its progression, and its final outcome. Thucydides employed the events of the Corcyran Revolution in order to create a paradigm or model that would explain some of the salient characteristics of all revolutions. During the course of this movement, Thucydides traces a peculiar development that inflicted all involved with the events. As the revolution moved on, the behavior and attitudes of men changed. Values which at one time would have been considered morally correct were suddenly viewed as inappropriate or even cowardly. Men became more brutal in their actions. In fact, the behavior of the entire city devolved into a state resembling the most heinous barbarism. Even worse, and perhaps the most insidious and horrific occurrence during the Corcyran revolution, not because of its immediate effects but

for the events it would influence in the long term, was the fact that language began to change its meaning. "Words had to change their ordinary meaning and to take those which were now given to them. Reckless audacity came to be considered the courage of a loyal ally; prudent hesitation, specious cowardice; moderation was held to be a cloak of unmanliness; ability to see all sides of a question, inaptness to act on any. Frantic violence became the attribute of manliness; cautious plotting, a justifiable means of self-defense" (3:82). When words change their meaning, behavior changes. In particular, the virtues that sustained Greece as a civilization distinct from the barbarians disappear. When the ability of words to mediate as a civilizing force disappears, civilization disappears. Given the notion that Thucydides seems to use the Corcyran Revolution as a model to explain not merely one but all revolutions, it would also be reasonable to say that Thucydides uses this revolution to elucidate the course that the entire war is taking. In particular, Thucydides infers that war, all wars, destroy the basis upon which virtue is predicated; war removes the societal restraints that sustain virtue during peace. Thus, during a war, we will see a decline in the application of virtues to actions. We may thus speak of a decline of virtue during warfare. War brings on an anarchical condition where the meaning of concepts such as justice, moderation, and wisdom lose their pre-war meanings. Instead, men's actions are guided by their baser passions and impulses, such as greed or

desire for power. In order to explain more fully this point, we will analyze one virtue - wisdom - and determine whether its meaning and the corresponding behavior of men changes because of the war.

Thucydides refers to two wise figures at the beginning of the History, Archidamus and Pericles (1:78, 1:139). Although Archidamus is merely "reputed" to be wise, we will assume that his counsel contains elements of wisdom. These two men, the leaders of their respective cities, Sparta and Athens, share a trait in common which perhaps permits Thucydides to term them as wise men. Namely, both men are actively involved in restraining the spirited impulses their citizens. Although some would argue that this process seems to fall more under the category of the virtue of moderation, we will examine why Thucydides would say that counseling restraint is more properly wisdom than moderation. Moreover, we will further see how this counsel is ignored as the war progresses. During the First Congress of the Peloponnesian Confederacy, a hostile spirit pervaded the speeches of those representing their individual cities. The object of their aggression: Athens, the city verging on the brink of becoming the tyrant of Greece. Among a number of other cities, the Corinthians came forward and delivered a scathing attack upon their archrivals in Attica. Undoubtedly, every Peloponnesian city represented at the conference was prepared to wage war. Nonetheless, when Archidamus came forward, the tone of his speech was unoffensive. His speech does not glorify the strength of the

Peloponnesians; instead, he warns that many misfortunes can transpire during a war, especially if the war is long. His speech is not an exhortation; it is a cautionary reminder. The caution urged in his speech seems to derive less from indecision and an innate slowness to act than a wise estimation of the power they are pitted against. Archidamus says, in a statement to which I believe Thucydides would agree, "For unless we can either beat them at sea, or deprive them of the revenues which feed their navy, we shall meet with little but disaster" (1:81). The final message of Archidamus can be summed in the following way: a proper estimation of the power of Athens is necessary before we can wage war effectively against them.

Pericles likewise attempts to control the passions of the citizens of his city. While he advocated war against the Spartans, he did so only after becoming sure that the power Athens was sufficient to crush the Peloponnesian Confederacy.

The wisdom of Pericles becomes most discernible in the collaries of his war policy. He called for Athens "to wait quietly, to attempt no new conquests, and to expose the city to no hazards during the war" (2:65). Instead, the Athenians did the contrary. In the years after Pericles' death, they performed their greatest blunder, the Sicilian Campaign, which was exactly the opposite the letter of Pericles' policy. Indeed, factions began to seek their goals with decreasing restraint. Thus, Pericles, who by "his rank, ability,

and integrity, was enabled to exercise an independent control over the multitude - in short, to lead them instead of being led by them" (2:65), was able to mediate the interests of the populace he ruled.

It would appear, then, based on the slight commentary Thucydides offers, that the proper or wise action during the early years of the war was to wait and continue estimating the enemy's weaknesses. What happened was exactly the opposite. The Spartans engaged in naval battles against the Athenians, an outrageously stupid thing to do for a city whose primary strength is their army (2:83-85). The Athenians continued the seige of Plataea and attempted several conquests abroad (2:79-80, 3:28-30). We may thus infer a number of things from these actions Thucydides might consider impetuous. As in the Corcyran Revolution, wise counsel is listened to less and less as war progresses. Men are seized with a desire to gain immediate victories; this supposition is confirmed by the numerous campaigns undertaken, such as Cleon's venture to Pylos. Thus, war makes men increasingly restless and impatient. They desire immediate results; they crave immediate gains. Again, as Thucydides noted, patience may come to be seen as a form of cowardice; the ability to look at a question from numerous perspectives may be looked upon as a slowness to act. Let us examine the greatest Athenians blunder committed during the war, a blunder which may be attributed almost exclusively to a lack of wisdom, the Sicilian Campaign. By analyzing the various miscalculations

and errors in logic the Athenians perpetrated, we will discover they fall victims to their own impatience and avarice.

Thucydides claims that from the beginning the Athenians were ignorant of the true power of Sicily (6:6). Alcibiades verifies Thucydides's assertion by grossly underestimating Sicilian numbers, unanimity, and devotion to state (6:17). Also, the Egestaeans further delude the Athenians by filling them with false hopes of considerable monetary support awaiting them in their temples. The Athenians accept these assertions without placing them under close scrutiny, thus undertaking a campaign of the highest magnitude based on misinformation. Moreover, the campaign is founded upon a dubious pretext: speciously, the Athenians attempted to rescue Egesta from Selinus and Syracuse and to protect themselves from a Doric invasion (6:9). Later Alcibiades, however, elucidated the true reason for the campaign and the reason why Athens was willing to risk so much. Athens attempted the venture for no other reason than to conquer Sicily, then Italy, to use these as a springboard to sack Carthage, and then when all was ready, to waste Lacedaemon (6:90). In this, we see the excitement and invention of the Athenian mind. Nevertheless, this daring is blemished by extremely poor decisions made by the leadership. As we have already noted, the Athenians took up the campaign under a false pretext; this would not have been unwise (at least in the sense that it would not have damaged their chances for victory) if it were

clear that the leadership had a common purpose in mind. However, it would seem that a great amount of distrust existed between Nicias and Alcibiades. Indeed, Nicias goes so far as to denounce publicly Alcibiades' youth and ability to formulate moderate policies (6:15). This calls into question the degree to which the leadership had a firmly fixed notion of the goals of the campaign and further what means they would employ to secure success. The numerous mistakes committed before and during the campaign certainly do not end there. Alcibiades should not have been allowed to retain the position of general after being implicated in the Affair of the Hermae. Not only would it have caused unrest in the army when he was dismissed but also it allowed him an opportunity to escape to Sparta. This left Nicias, the senior general, in control of the forces. Furthermore, Nicias should have been dismissed from this post; he had already expressed his aversion to the mission in speeches before the assembly and further revealed his negative attitude concerning the mission's success in letters to the Athenian leadership. Finally, Nicias's moderation, piety, and slowness to act, which the Athenians should have realized was detrimental to a campaign of that nature, led to two huge errors in judgement. First, he allowed the Athenian forces to reside in the Great Harbor of Syracuse far too long. Instead of attacking immediately, as Alcibiades probably would have, Nicias was content with applying a slight amount of pressure to the Syracusans: this only resulted in the citizens of Syracuse acquiring a contempt

for the Athenian forces. With the initial fear of the Athenian navy lost, the Syracusans went on the offensive, terrorizing the Athenians by land and sea. Second, Nicias's piety prevented him from fleeing the harbor at a crucial juncture in the campaign. The Athenians, many of whom were weakened by sickness and hunger at this point, were finally being forced on the defensive. They had lost two skirmishes on land, and the Syracusans were on the verge of sealing off the harbor, thereby effectively preventing an Athenian escape. Nicias, realizing that the weakened condition of his army and his position in the harbor would make his forces extremely vulnerable, elected to fly from Sicily in the night. On the night the army was to make their escape, a lunar eclipse occurred. Nicias interpreted this as an unfavorable sign from the gods, and believing greatly in divination, forced the army to remain in Syracuse another twenty-seven days. The result: the Athenians severely weakened condition allowed the Syracusans to obliterate them completely in Sicily. These blunders, stemming from unwise counsel and unwise decisions, left Athens bereft of most of its navy and the majority of its fighting force.

Clearly, when one compares the Athens under Pericles with the Athens directly before the Sicilian Campaign, one can discern major differences. Although Periclean Athens suffered from the plague, the city had not devolved into the condition it found itself in 415. At least during Periclean Athens, the city was united under one leader, with its goals fairly

defined; furthermore, the decisions made by Pericles were based on sound reason and sound judgement. Later, the city was under the sway of conflicting factions, with each faction attempting to secure their own interests instead of the better interests of the city. The city's administrators founded their choices more on the hope for swift and easy victories instead of reasonable counsel. Clearly, the war in part caused the Athenians to become increasingly less restrained; the result was a precipitous decline in the observance and exercise of virtue which finally brought about the city's defeat.

Thucydides claims that the factor which caused the Peloponnesian War was one which was kept most hidden. He says, "The growth of the power of Athens, and the alarm which this inspired in Lacedaemon, made war inevitable" (1:23). Most commentators, when attempting to construct a model based on Thucydides' History to explain the passion which created wars, usually cite fear as the primary cause of wars. The common interpretation of the passage usually reads like this: Lacedaemon instigated the war; they did so because they were afraid that the expanding power of Athens would, in future years, possess the ability to crush them. Thus, fear must be the emotion which leads to war; the city which feels fear most intensely from their rivals inevitably causes the war.

This interpretation fails to take into account an altogether different way of explaining the passage; this method of argument undermines the assumption that fear is the passion which leads to war. The common interpretation emphasizes Sparta's role in the conflict. Nonetheless, we must not forget that there are two parts to the above sentence. "The growth of the power of Athens" combined with "the alarm this inspired in Lacedaemon" led to an inevitable confrontation. Thus, Athens played just as great a part, if not greater, in the events which led to the hostilities as Sparta. We must analyze further the events surrounding the beginning of the Peloponnesian War in order to re-evaluate the role of the Athenians and the passion and actions which led to the outbreak of this disastrous conflict.

After the Persian War, the Athenians underwent a transformation that allowed them to emerge as one of the two great powers among the Greeks. Before the Persian War, Athens was a relatively insignificant power; after the war, the Athenians aspired to the pinnacle of the Greek world. The transformation was primarily internal: the Athenians, by virtue of their own will, began to create power for nothing more than power's sake. In other words, a spirit pervaded the city which made the acquisition of an empire number one priority. As I will show, the passion buttressing this desire was an immense pride. It was not fear that led the Athenians to create their empire. On the contrary, the Athenians transformed themselves into a powerful city merely to enjoy the privileges which power accorded them.

As I have already noted, Athens before the Persian War was a rather insignificant city. When the Athenians began their startling ascension toward political and military greatness, this caused concern among the Spartans. For three hundred years Sparta had been the most powerful of the Greek cities, due mainly to the strength of its disciplined military. During those three hundred years their supremacy was left, for the most part, unthreatened by neighboring cities. Only foreign invasions from the Medians posed a grave threat. Suddenly, a challenger to their power stood in their midst. When the Spartans saw the Athenians bringing an ever greater number of cities under their dominion, they became fearful of their pre-eminent position in Greek affairs.

Moreover, accompanied by these fears, are even greater concerns of survival. If Athens acquired enough allies, and thereby procured sufficient strength, there would be no reason why they could not invade and destroy Sparta.

This is the crux of the dilemma. Surely Athens was well aware that its rapid ascent to power would force the Spartans to consider was as a means of preventing the Athenians from securing the position of leader of the Greeks. Nevertheless, the Athenians continued to acquire powerful tributaries even though they were aware that powerful Spartan allies such as Corinth were pressing the Spartans to begin a war. Clearly, the Athenians could have prevented the war if they had ceased their relentless search for power and assured the Spartans that those activities would cease. Instead, the Athenians actively continued to take cities under their control, an action they surely knew would have been interpreted as aggressive. Thus, Sparta with justification, was reacting to the Athenian menace; Athens was the city that instigated the conflict. If Athens had not possessed an insatiable thirst for power (3:18), the war would not have come about; the balance of power would have remained decidedly in the Spartans favor. Athens, by constantly "grasping for more" played a larger part than the Spartans in causing the outbreak of the war.

Therefore, if we examine the underlying factors which forced the Athenians to continue their reckless search for power, we will discover the elements which led to the war.

Moreover, perhaps we can construct an argument from the example of the Spartan-Athenians conflict which will explain the forces which lead to the culmination of all wars. The Athenians continued to press for the expansion of their empire despite numerous warnings from the Spartans that this action could lead to conflict. The Athenians surely know that a war could be severely damaging to their own city, and even worse, they could end in defeat. The question then arises: why did the Athenians create a situation - i.e. continue to acquire tributaries - when they knew that this was an aggressive and even dangerous action? Whenever one examines the possibilities of this question, a single answer becomes clear: pride forced the Athenians to maintain their position as empire-builders.

Let us analyze this issue from numerous perspectives. By 434, when war was looming on the horizon, was it necessary for the Athenians to continue to amass tributaries? In other words, was the safety of Athens threatened if they did not possess an empire? Based on the historical evidence, it seems unlikely. The Medians had not made any aggressive overtures since the Persian War, and the Greek cities were content with all but one facet of the political order already in place - namely, the Athenians (1:70). Second, would the Athenians have been impoverished financially if they desisted from taking tributaries? Again, Athens was the most prosperous commercial center of that era. They could have found another means of revenue besides the acquisition of weaker cities.

What factor then, if not pressing necessities of security or money, led the Athenians to the conclusion that empire-building was a necessary activity? The answer: Athens believed their destiny was to become the supreme power of all of Greece. In this sense, they formed an image of themselves as the leaders of Greece and were obliged to fulfill this self-created obligation. Pride prevented them from stopping their quest for power. If they relented -- if they did not succeed in their aims -- they would have considered themselves failures. "A scheme unexecuted with them is a positive loss" (1:70). Thus pride drove the Athenian forward; an inability to fulfill their aims bore an ignominy as harsh as defeat. This is why Athens was willing to risk a confrontation with Sparta; their pride was at stake: the unwillingness to meet a challenge would have caused them to view as a second-rate city and a deficient people. In this sense, pride, more than any other passion, was responsible for the Peloponnesian War. This passion would not allow Athens to cease from their aggressive activities and forced Sparta to take measure against Athens so she would not attain the power in later years to invade successfully the cities of the Peloponnesian peninsula.

Given Thucydides' propensity toward discussing universal or enduring issues between political units, this model explains the primary factor which causes all wars. Consider the history of this century. It was the growth of the power of Germany, bringing alarm to Great Britain, France, and

Russia, which made World War I inevitable. Again, this model can be applied to World War II. The growth of the power of Germany, and the fear this caused in the western democracies, made conflict unavoidable. Consider any war; the paradigm Thucydides creates can be applied to all confrontations between political units of relatively equal strength at any time in history.

When considering the first collary of this statement, one realizes that any growth in power requires a political unit to seek power. Furthermore, when political units search for power, they know they are upsetting the balance-of-power structure which is already in place; any disturbance of this structure will lead to war. At some point, the leaders of a political unit are going to realize that their actions will lead to war. This is the critical juncture. War will be prevented if the political unit relaxes its drive for power; however, as history has shown us, political units do not relax. They refuse to slow because their pride will not allow them to remain in a position within the political order they consider to be low. Thus, war occurs, with all the pain and suffering associated with these conflicts.

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