

The Peloponnesian War (& Introduction to Thucydides)

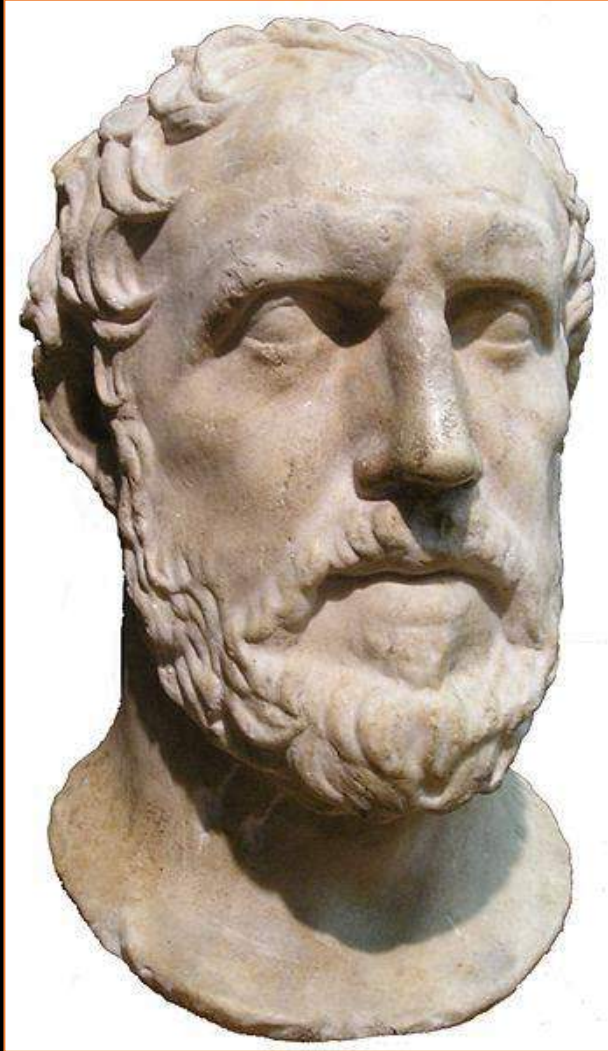
(Part 1 of 2)

The Peloponnesian War (431-404 BCE)

- Delian League (Athens and its allies) versus Peloponnesian League (Sparta and its allies)
- Source for the war: Thucydides' *History*
- Ends in Athenian defeat by Sparta
- → Rule of the Spartan Oligarchs at Athens



Thucydides (ca. 460-400) and the *History*



kinesis

to anthropinon

to mythodes

Thucydides' proem to *History of the Peloponnesian War* (1.1)

Thucydides, an Athenian, **recorded** the war between the Peloponnesians and the Athenians, writing how they waged it against each other and **beginning his work as soon as the war broke out** in expectation that it would be a major one and notable beyond all previous wars, basing this assumption on the fact that both sides came to it **flourishing in overall preparedness and on seeing that the rest of the Hellenes were aligning themselves with one or the other**, some immediately and others at least intending to. This was certainly the **greatest disturbance (*kinesis*)** to affect the Hellenes and a considerable number of barbarians – one might say the majority of mankind. (trans. Lattimore)

Thucydides' Proem Continued (1.1)

“While it is impossible, because of the amount of time elapsed, to discover clearly what happened in the previous era or the still more remote past, I believe – using the evidence (*tekmêrion*) that I have come to trust by investigating as far back as possible – that earlier events were not on the same scale either regarding warfare or in other respects.”

The Method and Style of Thucydides

- **Truth and Accuracy** → “... the search for truth strains the patience of most people, who would rather believe the first things that come to hand.” (1.22)
- **Autopsy scrutinized**: “And as for the real action of the war, I did not think it right to set down either what I heard from people I happened to meet or what I merely believed to be true. Even for the events at which I was present myself, I tracked down detailed information from other sources as far as I could.” (1.22)
- **Speeches**: “I have made each speaker say what I thought the situation demanded, keeping as near as possible to the general sense of what was actually said” (1.22)

The professed legacy of the *History*

“This history may not be the most delightful to hear, since there is no mythology in it. But those who want to look into the truth of what was done in the past – which, given the human condition, will recur in the future, either in the same fashion or nearly so – **those readers will find this *History* valuable enough, as this was composed to be a possession for all time and not be heard for a prize at the moment of a contest.**”
(1.22, trans. Woodruff, adapted)



Thucydides on the Causes of the War

The truest cause [*prophasis*], but least publicized, I consider to be the fact that the Athenians, becoming great and alarming the Spartans, forced them into war (1.23-24).



The Funeral Oration of Pericles

“As a didactic speech, the funeral oration does **not so much console as explain and exalt.**”
(Nicole Loraux, 1981: 83)

“In an abrupt break with the tradition of the funeral oration, **it is precisely not the services of Athens to the rest of the Greek world, but the uniqueness of its domestic life that is glorified.**”

(H. Strasburger 1956 [repr. 2009: 210])



Pericles' Funeral Oration



Because our ancestors have always lived in this land, they have so far always handed it down in liberty through their valor to successive generations up to now ... We ourselves who are here now in the prime of life have expanded most parts of the empire [*lit.* “the city-state”]; and we have furnished the city with everything it needs to be self-sufficient both in peace and war.” (2.35-36)

Pericles' Funeral Oration

“We have a form of government that does not try to imitate the laws of our neighboring states. We are more an example (*paradeigma*) to others than imitators of others. In name, it is called democracy, because it is managed (*oikein es*, “run with a view to”) not for a few, but for the majority ... We are free and generous not only in our public activities as citizens, but also in our daily lives: there is no suspicion in our dealings with one another” (2.37).



Who Are We, Athens?

1. “We are lovers of nobility with restraint, and lovers of wisdom without any softening of character.” (Thuc. 2.40, Woodruff)
(Philakaloumen te gar met’ euteleias kai philosophoumen aneu malakias)
2. “We love fine things but are not extravagant, and we love learning but are not effete.” (Mynott)
3. “For we also give ourselves to bravery, and yet with thrift; and to philosophy, and yet without mollification of the mind.” (Thomas Hobbes, 1628)



“Feast your eyes every day upon the actual power of the city, become her lovers (*erastas*)” (2.43)

Pericles on Athenian Women (and compare this coming Friday's lecture)

“If I am to make mention also of a woman’s special virtues, for those who will now be widows, I can reduce it all to one short message. You will be honored if you do not fall short of what is natural for your sex, as will she who is least invoked in male conversation, for praise or blame.” (Thuc. 2.45, trans. Mynott)

The Plague at Athens



The Plague at Athens

“No one could remember a disease that was so great or so destructive of human life breaking out anywhere before. Doctors, not knowing what to do, were unable to cope with it at first, and no other human knowledge was any use either ... Prayers in temples, questions to oracles – all practices of that kind turned out to be useless also, and in the end people gave them up, defeated by the evil of the disease.” (2.47)

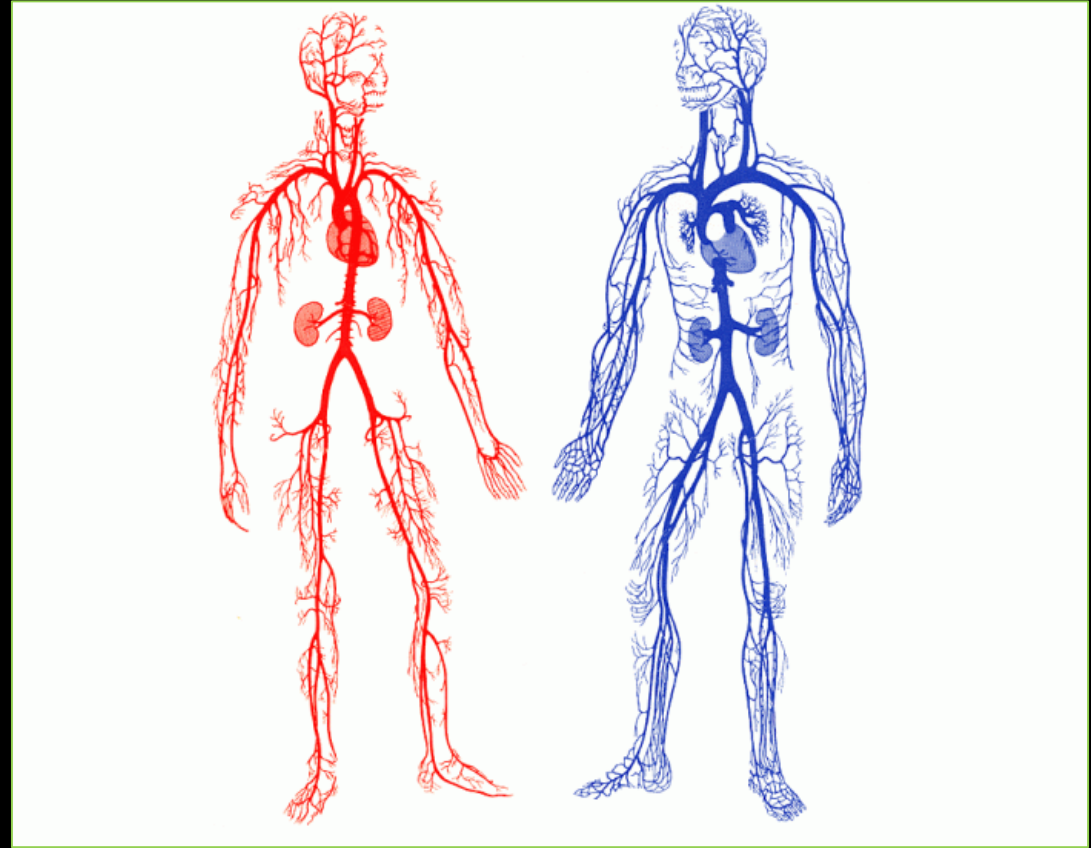
Nomoi (customs) and *Phusis* (nature)

The Plague as a Study in Thucydidean Method

“Now, **let each** man, doctor or layman, **speak about it according to his understanding**, what its origin is likely to have been and whatever causes of **so great a change** he thinks are sufficiently powerful to bring about **disturbance**. **I will say** what it was like in its course and describe here, **as one who had the plague myself and saw others** suffering from it myself, the symptoms by which **anyone who studies it cannot possibly fail to recognize it with this foreknowledge**, if it ever strikes again.” (2.48)

Visible and Invisible?

“After these [fever, red eyes, coughing up of blood], sneezing and hoarseness ensued, and soon the trouble descended into the chest with violent coughing ... For the illness first settled in the head and made its way through the entire body beginning at the top, and if anyone survived beyond the most serious effects, the attack on his extremities at least made a mark.”
(2.49)



Nature and Beyond Nature

“What showed more clearly than anything else that it was different from the diseases that are bred among us was this: **all the birds and beasts that feed on human flesh either avoided the many bodies that lay unburied, or tasted them and perished ...** The greatest misery of all was the dejection of mind in those who found themselves beginning to be sick, for as soon as they made up their minds it was hopeless, they gave up and made much less resistance to the disease” (2.50-51).



Plague Anomy (lawlessness)

“The great **lawlessness** that grew everywhere in the city began with this disease, for, as the rich suddenly died and men previously worth nothing took over their estates, people saw before their eyes such quick **reversals** (*metabolê*) that they dared to do freely things they would have hidden before ... And so, because they thought their lives and their property were equally **ephemeral**, they justified seeking satisfaction in easy pleasures” (Thuc. 2.53, trans. Woodruff).



Shaping Memory: *Loimos* or *Limos* (Plague or Famine)

“During the misfortune, as was natural, they also remembered the following verse, the old men claiming that long ago it was recited: ‘A Dorian [i.e., Spartan] war will come, and with it plague.’ Now there was the contention among people that those of old did not use the word ‘plague’ (*loimos*) in the verse but ‘famine’ (*limos*), but under the circumstances, the opinion naturally prevailed that plague was mentioned; **men shaped their memories in accordance with that they experienced (*epaschon*).** And yet, I suppose, if another Dorian war breaks out after this one, and it happens there is famine, they will probably recite accordingly.” (2.54)

The Mytilene Debate



Cleon's Speech (for punishment)

“I have often seen that a democracy is not capable of ruling an empire, and I see it most clearly now, **in your change of heart** ... You do not see that your empire is a tyranny, and that you have unwilling subjects constantly plotting against you” (3.37).

“You consider proposals for the future on the basis of **fine speeches** ... As for **action** in the past, you think that what has been done before your own eyes is less certain than what you have heard in speeches” (3.38)

Diodotus's Speech (against punishment)

“Our dispute, if we are sensible, will concern not their injustice to us, **but our judgment as to what is best for us**. Even if I proved them guilty of terrible injustice, I still would not advise the death penalty for this unless that was **to our advantage**” (3.44).

“Poverty compels the poor to be daring, while the powerful are led by pride and arrogance into taking more than their share. Each human condition is dominated by some great and incurable passion (*orgê*) that impels people to danger. Hope and passionate desire (*erôs*), however, dominate every situation” (3.45).

