

Speech and Narrative in Thucydides' *Histories*

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## Introduction

It is my hope in this thesis to provide some clarity about why Thucydides chose to include the speeches in his text, as opposed to focusing on the merit of the speeches, which earlier writers from Plutarch to W. H. Auden have elaborated much better than I ever could. In the course of the *Histories*, Thucydides places speech (narrowly defined here as direct speech) in contrast to narrative in order to create an emotional response in the reader. This thesis will explain the relationship between speech and narrative in the *Histories*. I will argue that Thucydides uses the speeches to comment upon the narrative and to insert perspectives that would be missing from the narrative otherwise, so that the reader will have the emotional reactions that Thucydides wishes to inspire.

The thesis will examine this question in three ways. The first chapter will explain the speeches from a narratological perspective. It will examine the focalization techniques Thucydides uses throughout the text, taking the Plataean debate in book 3 as its example. The next chapter is on the role of debate within the *Histories*. With the debates in book 6 at Athens and Syracuse as a model, it will explain the function of paired speeches in the text. In particular, it will examine how the paired speeches in book 6 create context for the narrative of the Sicilian expedition. The last chapter will trace Nikias throughout the text and attempt to reconcile the tension between the Nikias character in the text and the Nikias character Thucydides describes in the eulogy at the end of book 8. In doing so it will demonstrate how the speeches are used to resolve tensions within the story and to allow the author to integrate character development which is

important for our understanding of the text but otherwise absent from a strictly narrative retelling of the events of the war.

While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to explain the history of Thucydidean scholarship, a small amount of context is in order. Major debates about the composition of the text, the genuine status of the speeches, and Thucydides' relationship to Herodotus influence this paper only at the margins. I have attempted to remain agnostic on these issues wherever they did not directly affect my argument. The issue of the status of the speeches is the most pressing of these for our purposes. The current scholarly consensus is that some of the speeches are likely based on genuine models, such as the funeral oration, although they are clearly presented in Thucydides' paraphrase and not an approximation of the original form. Others, such as the Athenian speech at Sparta in book 1, are useful fictions which are not rooted in any genuine speech. As recently as the 1970s, no less a Thucydidean scholar than Kagan argued that the speeches were an accurate representation of what was said in each instance (1975, 71-94). Kagan argued, among other things, that if we cast away the truth-value of the speeches, then we may as well cast away the truth-value of the whole *Histories*. For the purposes of this thesis, it is irrelevant whether or not the *Histories* has any more truth-value than Lucian's aptly-named *True History*. I will say here, though, that I do not think that couching authorial remarks as speeches nested within a more or less accurate historical narrative is inconsistent with the idea of presenting an accurate historical record. In the third chapter of this thesis I will explain how, for instance, Thucydides felt the need to intervene on behalf of Nikias' legacy, and so

he reported the (unflattering) events of history in the narrative and counterbalanced them with the (more sympathetic) speeches and eulogy. In short, the speeches' truthfulness (i) need not be consistent from speech to speech, (ii) is not indicative of the truthfulness of the narrative, and (iii) does not affect the text as a work of literature, which is the context I am considering it in.

A brief aside is in order before the main argument. In order to understand the role of the speeches in the *Histories*, it is useful to understand the situation of the speeches in the text, and the logic of their placement in the narrative. Let us consider the structure of speeches in direct discourse in the text, from their introduction to the return to the narrative afterwards.

Almost all direct statements in the *Histories* are organized in three parts: (i) an introductory verb phrase, (ii) the direct statement itself, and (iii) the terminal verb phrase. We may refer to these as V1, DS, and V2 respectively. The briefest example of this structure in the text is the message of the Corinthians at Sybota in 1.53:

πέμψαντές τε ἔλεγον τοιάδε. ‘ἀδικεῖτε, ὧ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, πολέμου ἄρχοντες καὶ σπονδὰς λύοντες: ἡμῖν γὰρ πολεμίους τοὺς ἡμετέρους τιμωροῦμενοις ἐμποδῶν ἴστασθε ὄπλα ἀνταιρόμενοι. εἰ δ’ ὑμῖν γνώμη ἐστὶ κωλύειν τε ἡμᾶς ἐπὶ Κέρκυραν ἢ ἄλλοσε εἴ ποι βουλόμεθα πλεῖν καὶ τὰς σπονδὰς λύετε, ἡμᾶς τούσδε πρώτους λαβόντες χρήσασθε ὡς πολεμίους.’ οἱ μὲν δὴ τοιαῦτα εἶπον.

The V1 in this short speech is πέμψαντές τε ἔλεγον τοιάδε. This phrase gives us the circumstances of the speech with the circumstantial participle πέμψαντές, establishes the speaker (this focalizes the speaker), and provides a break between the narrative and the speech itself, since τοιάδε stands in for the whole speech to follow. The DS follows just as it would in any longer speech. The V2 provides a transition back to the narrative. τοιαῦτα stands in for the DS, εἶπον reminds us who was speaking (indicating that the speaker was focalized, as opposed to the narrator), and the narrative picks up where it left off after this verb phrase (this resumes the voice of the primary external narrator). The V2 gives context to the rest of 1.52.3 before the narrative moves on to its next topic. Sometimes a genitive absolute (such as at 1.53.1 after the Athenian response to this Corinthian message) or another circumstantial participle will be the V2, which makes the circumstantial role of the V2 in relation to the following narrative more clear. Of the 57 instances of direct speech in the Histories, 42 follow the pattern established above. 12 more vary from it by omitting either the V1 or V2, and 3 others stand apart from the rest in other ways. The V1, DS, V2 structure is so common that we may consider it formulaic in the text.

Now let us turn to examine the V1 and V2 more closely. Almost all V1 phrases use one of four verbs: παραινέω, λέγω, εἶπον, παρακελεύομαι.<sup>1</sup> παραινέω

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<sup>1</sup> Speeches are almost always introduced in the infinitive or aorist. ἔλεγε occurs 22 times, ἔλεξε 5, ἔλεγον 19, and λέγει only 4. Brasidas gives a one sentence exhortation to his men in 5.10 which does not follow the V1, DS, V2 structure, and there are no other speeches using λέγει. This makes sense, since most of the reported action in the text is in the past, as Thucydides is recounting events after they happen.

is used for speeches in the assembly or in debates. παρακελεύομαι is used exclusively by generals giving speeches to their troops. λέγω is the most common speaking verb in the text and can be used in any context. εἶπον is uncommon in V1 phrases, but is not linked to any particular type of speech. The most common formula for any given V1 is ὁ δέ [speaker] [verb] τοιάδε, and this covers a large majority of the V1 phrases in the text. Circumstantial participles are a common addition to V1 phrases as well, such as in the example above (1.53). Most V1 phrases are part of a longer sentence introducing the speaker or providing further context. The introduction of Athenagoras at the Syracusan debate gives a useful example of this style of V1.

παρελθὼν δ' αὐτοῖς Ἀθηναγόρας, ὃς δήμου τε προστάτης ἦν καὶ ἐν τῷ παρόντι πιθανώτατος τοῖς πολλοῖς, ἔλεγε τοιάδε (6.35.2).

This V1 gives us a circumstantial participle, παρελθὼν, a continuative δέ, the name of the speaker, a relative clause explaining his role in Syracuse, and then the speaking verb and the τοιάδε to stand in for the speech. The purpose of the V1 is clear from the Athenagoras example. It provides background for the speech so that it is clearly situated within the narrative. The situation is rather like a Russian nesting doll. The narrative is the largest doll, with the V1 and V2 inside of it, and the DS inside of them.

The essential purpose of the V2 is to balance the V1 and carry us back up to the level of the narrative after the DS. V2s have less variation than V1s throughout the text. Almost all of them use the verb εἶπον, with the major exception being generals' speeches, which usually end with a participle form of

παρακελεύομαι. A handful of instances with λέγω do occur. The V2 after Athenagoras' speech provides a good example of the role of a V2 in the text. τοιαῦτα δὲ Ἀθηναγόρας εἶπεν (6.36.1). τοιαῦτα stands in for the speech, a continuative δὲ indicates that we are talking about the same person and topic as in the DS, and the speaker and a speaking verb close off the idea. In this way the entire V1, DS, V2 structure is a ring structure. It begins with the speaker and a speaking verb and ends with the speaker and a speaking verb. The entire unit of direct speech is self contained within the larger narrative. Modern editors show this by making the V1 the last sentence of a section, the DS its own section (or sections), and the V2 the first sentence of a new section. This division of the text emphasizes the continuity between the V1 and what precedes it and the V2 and what comes after.

More will be said about the narratological significance of the focalization that takes place in speeches in the first chapter, and on the role of the “nested” structure of the speeches in the second chapter. With the nature of a speech established, we can briefly define the narrative. The narrative is the meat of the text, the descriptions of events in the fabula in the voice of the primary external narrator. Speeches, are of course, part of the narrative in the sense that the text is a narrative, but here we are defining narrative exclusively rather than inclusively. Indirect speech, a gray area, will be largely excluded from this study, but where it is important it will be treated as speech or narrative in an *ad hoc* fashion.

## I. Speaker and Audience in the *Histories*

The story of Thucydides' *Histories* is made available to the reader through the perspective of the primary narrator (Thucydides) and of the characters within the text as embedded secondary focalizers. For instance, at the Plataean debate (3.52-68), the perspective shifts from the perspective of the narrator, to the Plataeans and Thebans, to the Spartans. Thucydides focalizes characters both within the narrative as speakers and actors and also within the speeches (a sort of subfocalization) so that the reader confronts the participants in the Plataean debate from the narrator's perspective, as well as their own perspectives. The effect is a blurred line between narration and experience in some portions of the text. This chapter will explain the precedents for and uses of Thucydides' focalization techniques, then perform a close reading of the Plataean debate to demonstrate the relevance of focalization theory to reading and understanding the *Histories*, and finally close by explaining how this use of complex focalization contributes to the use of the speeches as commentary on the narrative and the text as a whole.

### Focalization in Greek Historiography

To begin, let us consider some different methods of focalization which an author might use in a history.<sup>2</sup> One could present the events from the perspective of an internal primary narrator, as Lucian does in the *True History*, which, though not a history as such, copies some aspects of the form of history (Bartley 2003,

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<sup>2</sup> The question of whether histories are focalized in the same way novels are has been addressed by Irene de Jong, following Roland Barthes' analysis (de Jong 2014, 167 and Barthes 1978, 79). In a nutshell, the narrative techniques of history and novel are not so different, at least for Classical Greek authors.

226-227). Or one could present the events from the perspective of an external primary narrator, as Thucydides and Herodotus do in their *Histories*. Other techniques, such as the predominant use of internal secondary narrators, are uncommon in historical narratives, although they are common in philosophical narratives. Consider the Platonic dialogues, in which Socrates and other characters are focalized throughout the text, as a roughly contemporary example of internal secondary narration. The use of an external primary narrator is characteristic of Herodotus, Thucydides, and their later imitators, and became a staple of historiography in antiquity (de Jong 2014, 170-172).

Herodotus is the most obvious role model for Thucydides in this type of focalization, but others exist as well. The Homeric narrative, for instance, has an external primary narrator. The beginning of *Odyssey* book 8 is an example of this type of narration in Homer:

ἦμος δ' ἠριγένεια φάνη ῥοδοδάκτυλος Ἥως,  
ὄρνυτ' ἄρ' ἐξ εὐνῆς ἱερὸν μένος Ἀλκινόοιο,  
ἄνδ' ἄρα διογενῆς ὄρτο πολίπορθος Ὀδυσσεύς.

Unlike the speeches, which have secondary focalizers, this section appears to the reader as though filmed by a camera, rather than from the perspective of any particular viewing character. It is the same type of primary external narration as in Herodotus or Thucydides, in their normal narrative. Drama, another influence on Thucydides' writing, does not use this technique, since the lines are spoken by

secondary narrators, but epic offers a strong role model for the historians.<sup>3</sup>

Herodotus has used the same technique as Homer to narrate the events of his *Histories*. In section 1.6, for instance, Herodotus tells us that the accounts he gives come from the Persians and Phoenicians, but he presents them in the voice of the external primary narrator. In 1.6.1, we see a narrative from this perspective:

Κροῖσος ἦν Λυδὸς μὲν γένος, παῖς δὲ Ἀλυάττειο, τύραννος δὲ ἐθνέων τῶν  
ἐντὸς Ἄλλου ποταμοῦ, ὃς ῥέων ἀπὸ μεσαμβρίας μεταξὺ Συρίων τε καὶ  
Παφλαγόνων ἐξιεῖ πρὸς βορέην ἄνεμον ἐς τὸν Εὐξείνιον καλεόμενον  
πόντον.

The narrative is presented from the point of view of Herodotus as an external primary narrator, so that the characters described (Croesus) are presented from his perspective.<sup>4</sup> This style of narrative is the same as the one which Thucydides uses. Like Herodotus, he has conducted an inquiry. Many of his stories will come from others, but he reports them in the same fashion as the events which he saw himself. The unmarked narrative passages of the history will follow this form of focalization. Consider this section of 2.66 by way of example: οἱ δὲ

Λακεδαιμόνιοι καὶ οἱ ξύμμαχοι τοῦ αὐτοῦ θέρουσ ἐστράτευσαν ναυσὶν ἑκατὸν ἐς  
Ζάκυνθον τὴν νῆσον, ἣ κεῖται ἀντιπέρας Ἡλίδος. The Spartans and their allies  
are presented from the external narrator's perspective and not their own, as they

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<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Irene de Jong chose to exclude drama altogether from her large scale study of narratology, arguing that drama is not narrative in the way that epic or history are (de Jong 2004, 7).

<sup>4</sup> Of course, authorial asides, speeches, and other changes in narrative strategy occur in Herodotus, but the narrative is primarily one with an external primary narrator.

might be in a drama. The narrative works much like it does in unmarked passages of Herodotus. We can see, therefore, that Thucydides' narration follows the same technique as Homer and Herodotus, presenting the story through an external primary narrator.

#### Focalization as a tool for characterization in the *Histories*

Now we may examine the role of Thucydides as a narrator in the text. Although he presents the story in an impersonal manner using an external primary narrator, we cannot forget that this narrator is inseparable from Thucydides.<sup>5</sup> He claims the text explicitly for himself not only in the proems (1.1 Θουκυδίδης Ἀθηναῖος ξυνέγραψε, and 5.26 γέγραφε δὲ καὶ ταῦτα ὁ αὐτὸς Θουκυδίδης Ἀθηναῖος ἐξῆς), but also in the reference to the summers and winters throughout the text (such as 6.7.4, καὶ ὁ χειμῶν ἐτελεύτα, καὶ ἕκτον καὶ δέκατον ἔτος ἐτελεύτα τῷ πολέμῳ τῷδε ὃν Θουκυδίδης ξυνέγραψεν), and in doing so reminds the reader throughout the *Histories* whose text this is.

But the narrative is still an impersonal one, as revealed most obviously by Thucydides' way of speaking about himself in the text. In 4.104-106, for instance, Thucydides recounts his own actions as a commander.

οἱ δὲ ἐναντίοι τοῖς προδιδοῦσι, κρατοῦντες τῷ πλήθει ὥστε μὴ αὐτίκα τὰς πύλας ἀνοίγεσθαι, πέμπουσι μετὰ Εὐκλέους τοῦ στρατηγοῦ, ὃς ἐκ τῶν

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<sup>5</sup> Indeed, there is no such thing as a true “third person” narration. Implicit in the external narration is that the author is writing the text. To quote Bal, “‘I’ and ‘he’ are both ‘I’” (Bal 2009, 20). No utterance is distinct from the person who utters it, no matter how much an author might wish to obscure this fact.

Ἀθηνῶν παρῆν αὐτοῖς φύλαξ τοῦ χωρίου, ἐπὶ τὸν ἕτερον στρατηγὸν τῶν ἐπὶ Θράκης, Θουκυδίδην τὸν Ὀλόρου, ὃς τάδε ξυνέγραψεν, ὄντα περὶ Θάσον (ἔστι δὲ ἡ νῆσος Παρίων ἀποικία, ἀπέχουσα τῆς Ἀμφιπόλεως ἡμίσεος ἡμέρας μάλιστα πλοῦν) , κελεύοντες σφίσι βοηθεῖν (4.104.4).

Here we see Thucydides introduce himself as a character as though the reader were unfamiliar with him<sup>6</sup> and remind us that he wrote the *Histories*, as though we could possibly forget. Thucydides consistently uses impersonal language to refer to himself as a general, reserving more personal language for his authorial remarks (such as ἡγοῦμαι in 1.23.6). He makes a clear divide between Thucydides the character and Thucydides the narrator, and this divide remains in place throughout the text. Thucydides does interject himself into the narrative in his role as narrator, but not when he recounts his deeds as a general during the war.<sup>7</sup>

Now let us consider how Thucydides uses focalization as a tool for the explanation of the characters' motivation. Thucydides uses focalizing words like βούλεται to allow the reader access to the mind of a character, focalizing them as secondary narrators, so that we gain access to a perspective which we would otherwise lack. Note that there is a distinction between Thucydides explaining a character's actions from the primary narrator's perspective and their thoughts from the secondary narrator's perspective. We might take ὁ μὲν Νικίας τοιαῦτα εἶπε as an example of the former and [Ἀλκιβιάδης] βουλόμενος τῷ τε Νικία

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<sup>6</sup> The patronymic is the normal mode of introducing a new character in the *Histories*.

<sup>7</sup> Authorial notes are interspersed throughout the text, such as the digression at 3.82-83 about stasis.

ἐναντιοῦσθαι as an example of the latter (both from 6.15). βουλόμενος is a focalizing word because it indicates that what follows is from Alcibiades' perspective, even if this occurs in the main narrative of the *Histories*. In 6.15 Thucydides uses a mix of primary and secondary narration to show the readers the type of man Alcibiades is and why he chooses to support the Sicilian expedition. The above quoted βουλόμενος gives us secondary narration about Alcibiades' own thoughts. The narrative continues from there in the primary narrator's voice:

ὧν γὰρ ἐν ἀξιώματι ὑπὸ τῶν ἀστῶν, ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις μείζουσιν ἢ κατὰ τὴν  
ὑπάρχουσαν οὐσίαν ἐχρῆτο ἕς τε τὰς ἵπποτροφίας καὶ τὰς ἄλλας δαπάνας.

This primary narration explains Alcibiades' motivations and character as a supplement to the secondary narration. The focalization of Alcibiades allows Thucydides to give the reader a more intimate understanding of his motivations, and causes the reader to have an emotional reaction to Alcibiades which would otherwise be lacking (we might react to the narrative, but not the man himself).

The focalization of a character as a secondary narrator is not merely a tool to explain motivation, but also a way to elicit an emotional reaction from the reader. The vividness of the narrative, noted since antiquity (Plutarch, *The Glory of the Athenians* 347a-c), adds nothing to the value of the *Histories* as a testament to the events of the war, but it means everything for the reader's reaction to it. Rood criticizes the distinction between Thucydides' work as literature and history as one which the author himself would not make (1998, 4). One cannot doubt that history can have literary value (Gibbon), or that literature can convey historical information (*Les Misérables*). It is certainly true, however, that some passages

were written to elicit an emotion as well as to inform about the events of the war. The assessment of Antiphon in book 8, for instance, contains neither passage of time in the fabula nor new events in the fabula, only an emotional description of the man and his value. No passage is solely emotional or informative, but even among shades of gray on a gradient, some items appear closer to black or white. The focalization of certain characters is one of the tools Thucydides uses to create these emotional reactions in the reader. If we consider the last speech of Perikles, for instance, the reader's foreknowledge of Perikles' impending death and appreciation for his prescience leads to such a strong element of dramatic irony that the reader cannot help but be anxious for the future of the city. The vividness of Perikles' speech (2.60-64) is much greater than the vividness of the narrator's judgement of him in 2.65. Consider Perikles' words at 2.61.2:

καὶ ἐγὼ μὲν ὁ αὐτός εἰμι καὶ οὐκ ἐξίσταμαι· ὑμεῖς δὲ μεταβάλλετε, ἐπειδὴ  
 ξυνέβη ὑμῖν πεισθῆναι μὲν ἀκεραίοις, μεταμέλειν δὲ κακουμένοις, καὶ τὸν  
 ἔμὸν λόγον ἐν τῷ ὑμετέρῳ ἀσθενεῖ τῆς γνώμης μὴ ὀρθὸν φαίνεσθαι, διότι  
 τὸ μὲν λυποῦν ἔχει ἤδη τὴν αἴσθησιν ἐκάστῳ, τῆς δὲ ὠφελίας ἄπεστιν ἔτι  
 ἢ δῆλωσις ἅπασι, καὶ μεταβολῆς μεγάλης, καὶ ταύτης ἐξ ὀλίγου,  
 ἐμπεσοῦσης ταπεινῆ ὑμῶν ἢ διάνοια ἐγκαρτερεῖν ἃ ἔγνωτε.

He explicitly tells the Athenian people (and the reader) that he is the only unchanging man in the war. He has the strength to maintain the course of the war, a strength which the other citizens lack.<sup>8</sup> These are ringing words, as Perikles

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<sup>8</sup> While historical parallels to Perikles abound, I am reminded especially here of Thomas Sankara, the leader of Burkina Faso. The willingness of the people to

holds nothing back for fear of angering the people, but tells them the way things stand. Now look to 2.65.5-6, which is narrated by the external primary narrator:

ὅσον τε γὰρ χρόνον προύστη τῆς πόλεως ἐν τῇ εἰρήνῃ, μετρίως ἐξηγεῖτο  
καὶ ἀσφαλῶς διεφύλαξεν αὐτήν, καὶ ἐγένετο ἐπ’ ἐκείνου μεγίστη, ἐπειδὴ  
τε ὁ πόλεμος κατέστη, ὁ δὲ φαίνεται καὶ ἐν τούτῳ προγνοῦς τὴν δύναμιν.  
ἐπεβίω δὲ δύο ἔτη καὶ ἕξ μῆνας: καὶ ἐπειδὴ ἀπέθανεν, ἐπὶ πλεον ἔτι  
ἐγνώσθη ἡ πρόνοια αὐτοῦ ἢ ἐς τὸν πόλεμον.

Much the same point is made, that it is by Perikles’ greatness that the city was guided to success during the war, and that he was well missed after he was gone. Yet the impersonal nature of the primary narration, even when the narrator clearly admires of the subject of his narration, means that there is a less vivid emotional reaction when compared to the entirely personal address by Perikles in secondary narration. We see then that even when Thucydides treats the same material in speech and narrative it may be to different ends. The speech, focalized on the speaker as a secondary narrator, is an event within the fabula which inspires a reaction from the reader the same way the deeds in the fabula inspire reactions.<sup>9</sup>

The narrative descriptions, focalized on the primary narrator, do not have the

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change their course as the path of decolonization grew more difficult, while Sankara kept the ship of state fixed on the goal of total independence from France, certainly calls to mind μεταμέλιν δὲ κακουμένοις. And the fondness with which the people of Burkina Faso look back on his memory recalls what Thucydides tells us of Perikles, καὶ ἐπειδὴ ἀπέθανεν, ἐπὶ πλεον ἔτι ἐγνώσθη ἡ πρόνοια αὐτοῦ ἢ ἐς τὸν πόλεμον. The excellent 2006 documentary *Thomas Sankara, l'homme intègre*, (Suffield, 2006) brought this parallel to my attention.  
<sup>9</sup> Here the fabula is the sequence of events as they happened in the historical (or fictional) universe, and the story is the sequence of events as presented in the text (de Jong, 77).

same rhetorical effect. They have no place in the fabula, and they do not advance the narrative. The text is literary and historical, but some passages are more of one than of the other.

I will discuss dramatic irony further in another chapter, but suffice to say it is one of the most pervasive literary devices in the *Histories*. Since the reader knows the outcome of the war before reading the text, the ambitions and hopes of the characters must be read in a tragic light. The speeches exhibit dramatic irony the most keenly, because unlike the primary external narrator, the secondary internal narrators do not know the future. Sometimes the lines of the knowledge a character could possibly have are blurred, with certain speeches being prescient beyond human abilities.<sup>10</sup> Speeches such as Perikles' last speech can reflect future events in a tragic light. For instance, at 2.62.2:

καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν ὅστις τῆ ὑπαρχούσῃ παρασκευῇ τοῦ ναυτικοῦ πλέοντας  
ὑμᾶς οὔτε βασιλεὺς οὔτε ἄλλο οὐδὲν ἔθνος τῶν ἐν τῷ παρόντι κωλύσει.

Of course, in book 8 it will be the threat of Phoenician ships brought in by the Persian king that will make the war untenable for Athens. Here, and many other places in the *Histories*, the speeches provide an irony that the narrative cannot. Perikles died long before the Persian involvement in the war, and so there is a tragic dimension to his comments, while Thucydides lived to see those events, and so his remarks are not tragic but descriptive (Bal 2009, 165). This shows the

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<sup>10</sup> Prolepsis is relatively common in the *Histories* within the speeches and in the narrative. See Hermokrates' speech at 6.33-34 as another example of a reference to later events at an earlier point in the *Histories*.

power of internal secondary narrators to create irony in the text; without their limited perspective (as opposed to the unlimited perspective of the external primary narrator) there would be no dramatic irony in the *Histories*. This dramatic irony is essential to the text because it is part of the collective emotional experience in 5<sup>th</sup> century Athens (Visvardi 2015, 34-35). The collective emotion present in Athens during the war is an essential part of the *Histories*, and Thucydides tries to capture by adopting dramatic irony as a technique from drama, which as an art form played a large role in defining collective emotion in Athens during the war (Visvardi 2015, 44-49).

#### Focalization at Plataea (3.52-3.68)

Let us now turn to a close reading of the Plataean debate (3.52-68) with special attention to the focalization techniques Thucydides uses in this portion of the text, progressing through the passage section by section.

The Plataean debate takes place after the Spartans induce a surrender of the city. The explanation of the Spartan attack on the city and the Plataean surrender takes place in the narrator's voice as an unmarked passage of narrative. The decision to hold a public trial, however, comes from the focalized Spartan commander. The diction surrounding his decision making moves the reader from the narrator's perspective to that of the commander. γνοῦς and ἐβούλετο are the words that show this focalization. Rather than simply tell us in the narrator's voice that the Spartans wish to take the city peacefully in order to hold it after an agreement is reached with the Athenians, Thucydides tells us that the commander perceived the weakness and wished to avoid taking the city, with the explanation

following as part of the focalization of this commander and his decision making. This emphasizes the personal nature of the choice to hold the trial, whereas putting it in the narrator's voice would make the decision rest on the Spartans as a whole. The text as written attributes the decision and responsibility to the individual commander. The rest of 3.52 is description in unmarked (focalizing the external primary narrator) narrative.

In 3.53 the Plataean speech begins. This speech is temporally complex, leaping back and forth from the Persian wars to the present as the speakers explain their plight: they ask, *καὶ δίκαιον ἡμῶν τῆς νῦν ἀμαρτίας, εἰ ἄρα ἡμάρτηταί τι, ἀντιθεῖναι τὴν τότε προθυμίαν* (3.56.5). This temporally complex narrative has a strong rhetorical effect, since it forces the Spartans to approach the present events in the context of another time when the Plataeans were seen as some of the great heroes of Greece. It would have been unthinkable in Pausanias' day to turn over the Plataeans to the medizing Thebans, and the speech seeks to instill the same aversion to rewarding medizing behavior in the Spartans present. It also demonstrates to the reader that no matter how great the deeds of the past, humans nature is really concerned with the present and the future. If this were not the case, then the Spartans would have spared the Plataeans. The speech advances Thucydides' goal of separating speech and deed precisely because of the beautifully executed appeal to the heroic past and the tragic events of the present.

But to return to focalization, this speech represents one of the most common types of focalization in the text. The speaker is focalized and the primary narrator's voice is absent within the speech itself. This speech is different from

most others though in that it has two speakers, Astymachus and Lacon. Naturally the focalizing words in the speech are plural, such as φοβούμεθα (53.2), but the rhetorical effect of these plural verbs is that the speech seems to be focalized on the whole body of Plataeans rather than on Astymachus and Lacon specifically. Whereas other speeches in the text can be quite personal, since they reflect the wishes of the speaker, in this speech it is unclear who is speaking (there is no indication of what is said by Astymachus and what is said by Lacon), and the effect is to remove the speech from any one character and to project it onto Plataea as a whole. This generalizing effect is strengthened because the speakers are not familiar characters: they are known only as representatives of the Plataeans. The speech is not truly focalized onto any particular character of the text. Thucydides may have done this in order to emphasize that the fate of an entire city rests on this defence, but also perhaps to allow his own thoughts to fill the speech without putting them in the mouth of any one Plataean (in an impersonal fashion more like the narrative than most of the other speeches).

Consider section 53.4:

χαλεπῶς δὲ ἔχει ἡμῖν πρὸς τοῖς ἄλλοις καὶ ἡ πειθῶ. ἀγνώστες μὲν γὰρ ὄντες ἀλλήλων ἐπεσενεγκάμενοι μαρτύρια ὧν ἄπειροι ἦτε ὠφελούμεθ' ἄν: νῦν δὲ πρὸς εἰδότας πάντα λελέξεσθε, καὶ δέδιμεν οὐχὶ μὴ προκαταγνόντες ἡμῶν τὰς ἀρετὰς ἥσους εἶναι τῶν ὑμετέρων ἔγκλημα αὐτὸ ποιῆτε, ἀλλὰ μὴ ἄλλοις χάριν φέροντες ἐπὶ διεγνωσμένην κρίσιν καθιστώμεθα.

These remarks describe the tenuous position of the Plataeans first and foremost, but they also secondarily describe the problems of writing a history. One of

Thucydides' great challenge is to persuade the readers (as we can see from his lengthy methodological excursus in book 1). Moreover, like the Plataeans, Thucydides faces an audience who are familiar with him (either personally or as a character in the *Histories*), and this means that he faces an audience who have already judged him and his work before they read the text. And furthermore, the idea that the Plataeans must submit to others (ἄλλοις) in order to receive justice is also a problem for Thucydides. He must use the histories to persuade those who were not there (the posterity he refers to in 1.22.4, ἐς αἰεὶ) and submit his life's work to the judgement of a third party (future readers) for validation. We can see, therefore, that Thucydides has focalized this speech in an impersonal way at least partly so that he can provide a commentary on the text as a whole while he advances the narrative at the same time. The line between the nominal speakers and the author is blurred. The clarifying technique of explicit focalization is a tool here to make the text more ambiguous.

In section 54 the speakers begin in earnest to try to persuade the Spartans to spare Plataea. In 54.5 the speech takes a turn for the personal, imploring the Spartans not to forget the help the Plataeans offered them when the Helots seceded at Ithome. This is the first, but not the last, instance of the Plataean speaker inviting the reader to consider the Spartan perspective directly. At the end of section 54.5 the Plataeans use a technique which would resemble focalization if

it occurred in the narrative, although because it is part of the domain of secondary narration it remains focalized on the Plataean speakers:<sup>11</sup>

καὶ ὑμῖν, ὦ Λακεδαιμόνιοι, ἰδίᾳ, ὅτεπερ δὴ μέγιστος φόβος περιέστη τὴν Σπάρτην μετὰ τὸν σεισμόν τῶν ἐς Ἰθώμην Εἰλώτων ἀποστάντων, τὸ τρίτον μέρος ἡμῶν αὐτῶν ἐξεπέμψαμεν ἐς ἐπικουρίαν: ὧν οὐκ εἰκὸς ἀμνημονεῖν (54.5.5).

The words ὑμῖν and ἰδίᾳ begin the section on a personal note. Thucydides uses σύ infrequently compared to Herodotus,<sup>12</sup> which means that the section is marked for its directness from the beginning. This is similar to the way that the narrative would use focalization by drawing the reader's attention to the speaker as a character. The phrase μέγιστος φόβος περιέστη τὴν Σπάρτην blurs the line between what the speaker knows and what the listener feels. Although the Spartan judges may or may not have experienced that fear, they stand in for all Spartans in this speech, as will become clear later on. Therefore the Plataeans are projecting the Spartans' thoughts at that point in the fabula of their speech for the reader. The closing words of the section, ὧν οὐκ εἰκὸς ἀμνημονεῖν, also resemble focalization in some respects. The phrase is a command, imploring the judges to recall Plataean aid. But it is also a window for the reader into the mind of the

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<sup>11</sup> We might call this sub-focalization, since the effect is so similar to that of proper focalization within the narrative. There are wheels within wheels in Thucydides' narrative.

<sup>12</sup> For Thucydides the minimum occurrences per 10,000 words is 11.786 uses of σύ, while for Herodotus it is 21.574. For reference, Xenophon has a minimum usage of 24.055 times per 10,000 words in the *Hellenica*. Plato, the orators, and the dramatists have much higher usage rates, but this is more likely a function of genre than style.

Spartans, who are experiencing the recollection of these events at the same time as the reader. If focalization is, metaphorically, the act of moving the camera through which the reader views the narrative, then these two phrases have a similar effect on the reader, although the narrator has not changed. This passage does not show a change in focalization as such, but it does show how Thucydides manipulates the readers' perspective through the speeches.<sup>13</sup>

Moving ahead to section 58, we see an instance of focalization within the speech of the Plataeans. They evoke Pausanias, and his decision to inter Spartan dead at Plataea. Παισανίας μὲν γὰρ ἔθαπτεν αὐτοὺς νομίζων ἐν γῆ τε φιλία τιθέναι καὶ παρ' ἀνδράσι τοιοῦτοις. The use of νομίζων here to indicate the thoughts of Pausanias as he buried the dead is exactly the same phenomenon we see when the primary narrator focalizes characters. Here Thucydides has created a level of secondary narration within secondary narration (subfocalization), which reveals the complexity of the Plataean rhetoric and Thucydides' willingness to use the same narratological techniques in the speeches as in the narrative. The former demonstrates the quality of the Plataean speech<sup>14</sup>, and the latter shows the freedoms Thucydides took in the composition of his speeches.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> This is a familiar rhetorical technique in ancient and subsequent oratory, of course, but I argue that Thucydides has not composed his speeches merely to follow the tropes of oratory and to display the persuasiveness of the speaker in the narrative, but also so that those tropes work towards the persuasive goals of the *Histories*.

<sup>14</sup> In McLeod's words: "The richest resources of Thucydides' style are employed as the Plataeans try in vain to make a bridge between the past and the present" (1977, 237).

<sup>15</sup> Perhaps the Plataeans *ought* to have focalized Pausanias, regardless of what may or may not have been said.

In section 60 the Thebans are focalized by the primary narrator. A short piece of indirect speech in 60, οἱ δὲ Θηβαῖοι δείσαντες πρὸς τὸν λόγον αὐτῶν μὴ οἱ Λακεδαιμόνιοί τι ἐνδῶσι, παρελθόντες ἔφασαν καὶ αὐτοὶ βούλεσθαι εἰπεῖν, explains how and why the Thebans gave their speech. A word on the temporal narratological devices is in order before we proceed to the direct speech of the Thebans itself. Unlike the Plataeans, whose speech “circles endlessly” (Hornblower 1991,445), the Theban speech is straightforward and the story follows the fabula fairly closely, proceeding more or less in order from the Persian wars down to the present. Hornblower calls the Theban speech “clearer and more logical” and says of the straightforward progression of the story alongside the fabula: “the effect is that of a nail driven smartly into a coffin” (1991,444). I mentioned above that the Plataean strategy, though complex, is effective at keeping the medizing crimes of the Thebans in the reader’s mind, and this Theban strategy is equally effective at mitigating those crimes. The Thebans acknowledge their shortcomings before launching into a criticism of the Plataeans, so that by the end of their speech the Plataeans’ complaints seem irrelevant. This does not mask the shortcomings of the Thebans rhetoric, however, which is sometimes clumsy (the start of their speech at 3.61.1 is awkward: τοὺς μὲν λόγους does not refer to preceding speech but to the current one) and other times counterproductive (they call themselves medizing four times: 3.62.2, 3.63.1,

3.64.1, and 3.64.5).<sup>16</sup> Yet the inferior speech wins the day, which reinforces the gap between reason and action or word and deed in the text.

The Theban speech is narratologically fairly simple, but there is one instance of the same type of secondary focalization within secondary focalization seen above, in 3.65.2:

εἰ δὲ ἄνδρες ὑμῶν οἱ πρῶτοι καὶ χρήμασι καὶ γένει, βουλόμενοι τῆς μὲν  
ἔξω ξυμμαχίας ὑμᾶς παῦσαι, ἐς δὲ τὰ κοινὰ τῶν πάντων Βοιωτῶν πάτρια  
καταστῆσαι, ἐπεκαλέσαντο ἐκόντες, τί ἀδικοῦμεν;

The use of βουλόμενοι is similar to its use in the narrative; Thucydides will often briefly focalize a character or group of characters in order to explain something in the narrative. Yet here the Thebans have focalized οἱ πρῶτοι ἄνδρες, encouraging the listener (or reader) to adopt their stance for a moment to see why the Thebans came to intervene in Plataea. This is relatively more sophisticated than the rest of the Theban speech, which prefers direct address and straightforward narration to focalization or temporal manipulation. The rest of the Theban speech progresses without any special narratological interest.

At the end of the Plataean debate episode, in section 3.68, the Spartans reach their decision. οἱ δὲ Λακεδαιμόνιοι δικασταὶ νομίζοντες τὸ ἐπερώτημα σφίσιν ὀρθῶς ἔξειν, εἴ τι ἐν τῷ πολέμῳ ὑπ' αὐτῶν ἀγαθὸν πεπόνθασι (3.68.1).

The Spartan judges are focalized here by νομίζοντες, and the futility of the debate

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<sup>16</sup> Paula Arnold-Debnar (1996) thoroughly refutes the claims of Macleod (1977) and others who have tried to argue that the Theban speech is superior to that of the Plataeans.

is revealed. Despite the impassioned speech of the Plataeans, with all its rhetorical and narratological complexity, and despite the failings of the Theban speech, the Spartans have not deviated from their intended course of action. As elsewhere throughout the text, the debate has failed to change the events surrounding it.<sup>17</sup> The Spartans proceed to ask the Plataeans the same question as before, focalized by the primary external narrator as [Λακεδαιμόνιοι] ἡγούμενοι τῆ ἑαυτῶν δικαία βουλήσει ἔκσπονδοι ἤδη ὑπ' αὐτῶν κακῶς πεπονθέναι. So the debate and the massacre of the Plataean citizen men are completed, and the narrative abruptly shifts to Lesbos in the next section.

#### Conclusions: The Reasoning Behind Thucydides' Narrative Choices

The debate at Plataea shows two of the functions of the speeches in the *Histories*, namely the rhetorically powerful effects of the speeches on the reader and the freedom to make commentary on the narrative through the vehicle of the speeches. It is one of the episodes of the *Histories* which most clearly displays how deftly Thucydides changes focalizations in order to control the reader's perspective on the narrative, particularly because of the changes in focalization within speeches. While the phenomenon of secondary internal narrators focalizing others in their speeches is not unique to the Plataean debate, it is exhibited

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<sup>17</sup> The Syracusan debate in book 6 is another example of this phenomenon. After two speeches, a general decides that the city will prepare for war with no regard for either speaker. Another example is the Camarinan debate (6.74-88), in which the Athenians and Syracusans speak, and then the Camarinans make a decision that does not depend on the debate at all (6.88). Diodotus' defeat of Kleon and the subsequent change in policy about Mytilene is really the only counter example.

especially clearly here. Other examples include the Corcyrean address to the Spartans 1.69.3:

καὶ λανθάνειν μὲν οἰόμενοι διὰ τὸ ἀναίσθητον ὑμῶν ἦσσαν θαρσοῦσι,  
γνόντες δὲ εἰδότας περιορᾶν ἰσχυρῶς ἐγκείσονται.

Here we see the Corcyrean focalize the Athenians within his speech using οἰόμενοι and γνόντες, but this is an isolated incident compared to the large scale focalization by secondary narrators at Plataea. This phenomenon is employed throughout the text, but to its most striking effect by the Plataeans. The narratological complexity may be one reason why the ancient commentators found the Plataeans' speech one of the finest in the text (Debnar 1996,95). Moreover, the internal audience of Thebans must have found it a fine speech, since the Thebans feel the need to reply in their own defense. The fact that the Spartans pay no heed to the Plataean speech is not a mark against its persuasiveness, since they had made up their mind before the debate. As at the end of the Syracusan or Camarinian debates in book 6.88, the events in the narrative after a debate often do not follow from the outcome of the debate itself, but rather from the wishes the audience had preconceived.

But the rhetorical power of the Plataeans' speech aside, let us consider the debate as commentary on the narrative. Within the fabula of the *Histories* the speeches are discrete events in the same way the deeds are. The debates are on equal footing with the battles, for instance. Within the text, however, the amount of detail devoted to events in the fabula varies considerably. As Rood points out, much more of the text is devoted to the events at Pylos than to other, larger battles

(1998, 24), which frustrated Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*De Thucydidis* 13-14). Similarly, much more time is given to the Plataeans' defense of themselves than to other seemingly more influential speeches on the outcome of the war (many important decisions of the Athenian assembly are omitted entirely). Since the amount of text devoted to event *A* in the text is unrelated to the amount of time *A* takes to transpire in the fabula, it seems likely that the amount of text Thucydides devotes to *A* is a reflection of his judgement of how they reflect the larger lessons of the war.

The Plataean debate, for instance, is a reflection of the futility of reason in the face of the conflict (Rood 1998, 43). Despite the entirely reasonable claims of the Plataeans, who appeal to the piety and good sense of the Spartans, and despite the incompetence of the Thebans which reinforces the Plataeans' points (Debnar 1996, 101), the Spartans do what they intended to do all along. Reason, as such, does not enter into their decision making. Word and deed are divorced from one another. This theme resurfaces throughout the *Histories*, from the Athenians' disregard for Perikles' last speech to the futility of the Melian dialogue.

The reason why the speeches can comment on the narrative is because they are offset from the events in the fabula. The speeches are nested within the text (Morrison 2006, 259), which gives them an element of distance from the events they predict or react to. The Plataean debate, for instance, is isolated in time and space from the narrative surrounding it on either side. Because of this isolation the implications of the debate for the war more broadly are fairly subtle. Thucydides avoids drawing connections explicitly between Plataea and other

events in the narrative, such as the Sicilian expedition, although the gap between word and deed in the former has grave implicit implications for the latter.

Similarly, the commentary on the text as a whole is isolated from the explicit discussions of the text in book 1 (or even the summer/winter formula), and so the connection between the Plataeans' struggle and the problems facing the historian are also implicit and not explicit.

In this chapter we have seen the precedents for Thucydides' manipulation of focalization in earlier Greek literature, how Thucydides uses this tool in the *Histories*, and how the focalization allows him to create both an emotional reaction to the events at Plataea and a commentary on the gap between word and deed in human affairs. The form of the speeches, as narration focalized on secondary internal narrators, and the content, as isolated commentary, is consistent throughout the text, and the conclusions I have made about Plataea in book 3 apply more broadly to the course of the *Histories* as well.

## II. The Role of Debate in the *Histories*

Throughout the *Histories*, Thucydides presents pairs or sets of speeches as debates. Like the other speeches in the text, they comment on the narrative, and reflect Thucydides' conceptions of what people ought to have said or done, as he explains in 1.22. The debates allow Thucydides more freedom to comment on the ideas and actions of different characters in the text than single speeches do, such as those given by generals before battles. Oftentimes Thucydides is critical of both sides of a debate, or finds merit in different arguments, and uses the debates to show the readers the strengths of either side. He also uses the debates to create a sense of irony. The speeches create this effect for readers who know the outcomes of the debates and the actions that follow by exploiting the gap in knowledge between the speaker and the reader. This chapter will examine two of the most prominent debates in the text, the Athenian and Syracusan debates in book 6, with respect to the arguments presented and the commentary they offer on the text. It will attempt to explain the rhetorical, stylistic, and argumentative choices Thucydides makes in the speeches within the debates. In doing so it will show that the debates allow Thucydides to weigh the relative strengths and weaknesses of democracy and to create a sense of dread in the reader before the fighting in Sicily begins.

The two debates in book 6 deserve special consideration as the only two debates about the same subject for which we have full speeches on either side, and because they frame one of the pivotal events of the text. Thucydides offers us a debate first in Athens, then in Syracuse, and uses both to explain and discuss the

merits (however few there may be) and dangers of the Athenian invasion of Sicily. The paired debates are similar in many ways. Many readers have interpreted the speakers, Nikias and Alcibiades at Athens and Hermokrates and Athenagoras at Syracuse, as parallels for one another.<sup>18</sup> Nikias and Hermokrates are both prudent, risk averse, conservative, and older than their opponents. Alcibiades and Athenagoras are more daring, hungry for glory, and younger than their opponents. This is not to say that the two sets of debaters are perfect replicas of one another, but they are something like versions of one another seen through a glass darkly. Indeed, as mentioned above in chapter 1, all of Syracuse is on the one hand strangely similar to Athens (ὁμοιοτρόπως, as Nikias says at 6.20.3) while on the other strikingly different.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> As Bloedlow points out (154-156), Athenagoras has been compared to Alcibiades and Kleon by different readers of the text since antiquity. His role, however, as δήμου τε προστάτης (6.35) cannot be enough to equate him with Alcibiades or Kleon. Kleon is one of the driving forces in Athenian democracy during the war up to his death, as Bloedlow notes (153). Although there are rhetorical similarities between the two, as Dover has noted ad loc. with reference to 3.36.6 and 6.35.2, Kleon (and Alcibiades as well) sees the people as liable to manipulation by clever speeches, whereas Athenagoras sees the people as a check on abusive speakers: κρῖναι δ' ἂν ἀκούσαντας ἄριστα τοὺς πολλοὺς (6.39.1). Alcibiades and Kleon see the people as a tool to manipulate, whereas Athenagoras does not say as much, whether he is a true democrat or only self serving. With this in mind, the parallel does not hold up to scrutiny, although some similarities are undeniable.

<sup>19</sup> Andrews, (2), Bloedlow, (157), and Hornblower, (21-22), as well as many other writers have all commented on this. It is surprising that a Dorian city like Syracuse would appear so similar to Athens when we are first introduced to it. On the other hand, the debate reveals little about the inner workings of the Syracusan state or the culture of the Syracusans, so perhaps the shockingness of the similarity has been overblown. Moreover, presenting Syracuse as a distant mirror to Athens allows Thucydides to comment on the Athenians more easily, which seems to be more important to the Syracusan debate than the actual discussion at Syracuse. The actual nature of democracy in Syracuse is presented differently by

But aside from the men involved, the situation of the debates in the text is similar in both cases. We could consider these debates to be “isolated nesting” speeches, to use the terms coined by Morrison (2006, 259). He defines isolated nesting speeches as those which are cut off from the immediate action before and after the speech in the narrative (isolated) and set between a preamble and a postscript (nesting). This framework is useful for considering the debates in the context of the narrative because it explains the relationship of the narrative immediately surrounding the direct discourse, and the relationship of the entire debate unit (preamble, debate, postscript) to the text as a whole. For instance, the debate at Athens is the first event in the summer of 415. The debate proper begins after Nicias has been given the command, which he does not want. The debate does not follow logically from the events of the preceding winter.<sup>20</sup> After the debate the situation with the Herms is the new focus of the narrative (6.27), which further isolates the debate and its postscript from the narrative, since the narrative does not follow directly from the events of the postscript thematically. The Syracusan debate is also isolated from the narrative, with the preamble coming halfway through section 6.32 when the Athenian ships are massing at Corcyra, hundreds of miles away. After the debate in section 6.42 we return to the action at Corcyra as though nothing had happened. The transition at 6.42.1, οἱ δ’ Ἀθηναῖοι ἤδη, emphasizes that the action in the narrative before and after the debate is uninterrupted, which creates a feeling that the debate is isolated from the “main”

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Thucydides, Aristotle, and Diodorus Siculus, and the truth is probably impossible to recover (Rutter, 150-151).

<sup>20</sup> Book 6 itself begins as a surprising non-sequitur from the end of book 5.

timeline of book 6. It is anachronic, isolated within the fabula with respect to time (Bal 2009, 85-88) In this way the two debates are set up as parallels to one another due to their nesting isolated placements in the narrative.

### The Debate at Athens

We must ask ourselves why Thucydides sets up the debate at Athens as he does. His characterization of Nicias as an almost tragic figure deserves consideration. Nicias is absolutely correct about the fate of the expedition to Sicily, to the point that his remarks are nearly proleptic, but fails to prevent the disaster from happening. This creates a strong element of dramatic irony, not unlike in a tragedy, as the reader knows that Nicias (and the Athenian army) will die in Syracuse. The debate also foreshadows Alcibiades' betrayal of the city. His anti-democratic rhetoric presages his defection to the Spartans after the affair with the Herms, another instance of near-prolepsis. A likely explanation is that one of the fundamental purposes of the debates in book 6 is to allow Thucydides to comment on the futility of invading Sicily. One device, which he uses to make his readers feel the dread that the Athenians themselves may have felt because of the invasion, is to exploit the knowledge of the reader as compared with the knowledge of the speaker. It is a strategy which is certainly familiar to Thucydides, given its prominence in tragedy,<sup>21</sup> and it is highly effective in this first debate.

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<sup>21</sup> As an example, recall Oedipus pledging to discover the killers of Laius as though he were his own father in *Oedipus the King* (264). The level of subtlety is about the same, since readers know the truth in either case, while the character is walking blindly towards disaster.

Another question posed by the debate is why Thucydides places much of the burden for the expedition on Nicias by giving him two opportunities to stop the assembly from voting for it (a point which is addressed more in chapter 3). This may be a criticism of Nicias, who comes off as ineffective throughout the expedition as well. Moreover, it is a criticism of the Athenian democracy, on which the burden truly lies. The flaws of democracy that Alcibiades describes in Syracuse really do exist in Athens. Consider his words at 17.3:

καὶ οὐδεὶς δι' αὐτὸ ὡς περὶ οἰκείας πατρίδος οὔτε τὰ περὶ τὸ σῶμα ὄπλοις ἐξήρτυται οὔτε τὰ ἐν τῇ χώρᾳ νομίμοις κατασκευαῖς: ὅτι δὲ ἕκαστος ἢ ἐκ τοῦ λέγων πείθειν οἶεται ἢ στασιάζων ἀπὸ τοῦ κοινοῦ λαβὼν ἄλλην γῆν, μὴ κατορθώσας, οἰκήσειν, ταῦτα ἐτοιμάζεται.

Alcibiades, after plotting a hugely dangerous public excursion to Sicily for his own benefit, abandons his homeland and flees to Sparta when partisan plotting turns against him. The characterization of Syracuse is really a commentary on the state of affairs in Athens that lead up to the Sicilian expedition. The ὄχλος ξυμμείκτος is not to be found across the sea, but right in the Athenian agora. Thucydides has had Alcibiades say τὰ δέοντα, but also offer the reader a criticism of the foolishness of the assembly in the same breath.

With the situation of the debate at Athens established, let us look more closely at the speeches. Nicias speaks first. He ἀκούσιος μὲν ἡρημένος ἄρχειν... παρήνει τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις τοιάδε (6.8). παρήνει is one of the most common verbs to

introduce a speech in Thucydides.<sup>22</sup> Nikias opens the debate by denying that he is afraid (ἦσσον ἑτέρων περὶ τῷ ἑμαυτοῦ σώματι ὀρρωδῶ), and explaining that he will speak honestly (6.9.2). In other words, he establishes his own courage so that his enemies cannot call him a coward, and reminds the assembly of his good character so that they will listen to his advice. Fear is a recurring theme in the debates of book 6. Nikias is the only speaker to use ὀρρωδέω, but φοβέω appears in every speech except that of Athenagoras (and even Athenagoras still uses the word δειλός). Nikias' word choice here sets him apart from the other speakers, despite the common thematic link of fear between their speeches. In 6.10 he begins to explain the problems with the proposed expedition. In 6.10.1 he warns that the Athenians will be leaving behind many old enemies in order to seek out many new ones. This is the same point Athenagoras will later make in 6.36.4 to argue that the Athenians could not be so foolish as to invade Sicily. In 6.10.2 he cautions against having faith in the σπονδή with the Peloponnesians. His reasoning is that the treaty is a truce in name only (ὀνόματι), since it is being violated, and that σφαλέντων δέ που ἀξιόχρεω δυνάμει ταχεῖαν τὴν ἐπιχείρησιν ἡμῖν οἱ ἐχθροὶ ποιήσονται, which seems like sound advice. Criticizing the peace, however, seems to undermine his own credibility, since he is its architect. Since Nikias' legitimacy relies heavily on his reputation as a general and the architect of the truce, this undermines his authority. Nikias goes on to remind the assembly there are outstanding conflicts within the empire that demand resolution. In 6.11

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<sup>22</sup> Of the 5 speeches in these debates, it is used for this speech and those of Alcibiades and Hermokrates. It also introduces Perikles' speech at 1.139 and Archidamus' speech at 2.10.

he argues that Sicily is too large for the Athenians to hold, and that a powerful Syracuse would be a counterbalance to Spartan power. In 6.12 he argues that the city needs to recover from the plague. All of these are good reasons not to invade Sicily, and if the assembly were only moved by facts and figures then Nikias would win the debate. Seldom is that the case in the *Histories* though.

Unfortunately, Nikias turns to a line of argument that loses him the debate. In 6.12 he criticizes Alcibiades' character, and this argument will be turned on him in a moment. But more importantly, in 6.13 he notes that Alcibiades has packed the assembly with young men (οὗς refers back to the young men from 6.12), and calls on the older men to correct them. φοβοῦμαι, he remarks, bringing in the recurring theme of fear again. It seems that, if the voting body is comprised of a majority of young men, then alienating young men by attacking their youthful inexperience is not a sound way to win votes. This point also sets the foundation for an effective counter argument by Alcibiades.

So now consider Alcibiades' speech. In 6.15 Thucydides explains his character as ambitious (παρανομία and διάνοια are used to describe him in 6.15.4) and potentially ruinous to the state. With his character so colored, we cannot read his speech neutrally. He begins by defending his character from Nikias' attacks and asserting that even if the Athenians lost the battle at Mantinea after his advice created those circumstances, it was still a good plan to begin with (6.16). This is in direct tension with the narrative. At 5.61 Thucydides told us that the battle of Mantinea was a disaster, and in his assessment at 5.73.3 he blames that battle for the Spartans' renewed willingness to wage the war. In other words, only a book

earlier Thucydides blamed the continuation of the war on what Alcibiades is now trying to portray as a good plan. On the questionable merits of the plan for the battle of Mantinea, Alcibiades seeks to establish himself as legitimate and defeats an important part of Nikias' speech (the personal attack). This reflects a tendency for the speakers in these debates to establish themselves based on their past successes, as Nikias did above when he reminded the assembly of his courage as a general.

6.17 begins with a hopeful tone. καὶ νῦν μὴ πεφόβησθε αὐτήν [youth], Alcibiades urges the assembly. This is the only reference to fear in his speech, which makes sense since his general message is to encourage the Athenians to be bold rather than to give in to fear (or good sense). He continues in 6.17 to criticize the Sicilians. First in 6.17.2 he calls the people of Sicily ὄγλοι... ξυμμεῖκτοι, a decidedly anti-democratic term. He goes on in 6.17.3: ἕκαστος ἢ ἐκ τοῦ λέγων πείθειν οἶεται ἢ στασιάζων ἀπὸ τοῦ κοινοῦ λαβὼν ἄλλην γῆν. This is an anti-democratic sentiment too. Alcibiades' low opinion of the motivations of the citizenry implies a low opinion for the motivations of the *demos* in general, since the fault lies with the citizenry as a political force and not Syracusan citizens in particular. If this is true in Syracuse, why would it not be true in Athens? It seems Thucydides has put a sharp criticism of democracy in the mouth of the populist in this debate (as opposed to his more conservative opponent), so that it slips by the Athenian people (who hear only what they wish to hear), but should not escape the reader.

After attacking the abilities of the Sicilians to resist an invasion he makes that favorite appeal, οἱ γὰρ πατέρες ἡμῶν... There is little chance that the Athenians will not back him, now that he has made an appeal to the heroism of the preceding generation.<sup>23</sup> In 6.18 he points out the duty to the allies and says that the empire is maintained by παραγιγνόμενοι προθύμως. Critically, in 6.18.6 he attacks Nicias for trying to divide the young and the old (recalling the καὶ νῦν μὴ πεφόβησθε αὐτήν, ἀλλ' ἕως ἐγὼ τε ἔτι ἀκμάζω μετ' αὐτῆς in 6.17.1). He says: νομίσατε νεότητα μὲν καὶ γῆρας ἄνευ ἀλλήλων μηδὲν δύνασθαι, which is probably true. This appeal to cooperation and moderation is a powerful response to Nicias' criticism of the youth. If Nicias alienated the young men to win over the old men, Alcibiades has likely won over many of both through this appeal. In short, without engaging with the real problems of the expedition, Alcibiades manages to be more persuasive than Nicias. Alcibiades' encouraging tone and call for unity among the Athenians play a large role in this persuasion.

The final speech of the debate belongs to Nicias. The inclusion of a second speech by the first speaker in a debate is unique in the *Histories*, but Nicias does not use it effectively. Realizing that he needs to try a new path to change the assembly's minds, he tries to appeal to them in terms of the cost and difficulty of the expedition, but this fails miserably for him. He begins in 6.20

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<sup>23</sup> There are 26 such references to the heroic generation who fought the Persians in the text as πατέρες (1.71, 1.85, 1.122, 1.137, 1.144, 2.11, 2.36 [twice], 2.62, 2.71 [twice], 2.73, 2.74, 3.57, 3.68 [twice], 3.59, 3.67 [twice], 4.92, 4.95, 6.17, 6.18, 8.18, and 8.52). This is a common and seemingly powerful strategy. The exception which proves the rule is the Plataean speech in book 3, discussed above in chapter 2.

disingenuously saying, *ξυνενέγκοι μὲν ταῦτα ὡς βουλόμεθα*, and continues in this vein. He informs the Athenians of the advantages the Syracusans have in the rest of 6.20, and lists the things he would need for the invasion to succeed in 6.21. In 6.21 Nicias remarks of the Sicilian cities *εἰ ξυστῶσιν αἱ πόλεις φοβηθεῖσαι*, as though it were not certain that the arrival of an Athenian army and fleet would terrify the Sicilians. His words carry through the theme of fear for the future in the debate, with Nicias afraid of the fearful reaction of the cities in Sicily. Nicias then summarizes his arguments in 6.22. His attempt at what we might call reverse psychology includes ending this part of his speech with *ἀπολαμβάνομεθα... μάλιστα δὲ χρήματα αὐτόθεν ὡς πλεῖστα ἔχειν* (6.22). In 6.23 he returns to his pessimism from the first speech:

*ἦν γὰρ αὐτοὶ ἔλθωμεν ἐνθένδε μὴ ἀντίπαλον μόνον παρασκευασάμενοι, πλὴν γε πρὸς τὸ μάχιμον αὐτῶν, τὸ ὀπλιτικόν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὑπερβάλλοντες τοῖς πᾶσι, μόλις οὕτως οἷοί τε ἐσόμεθα τῶν μὲν κρατεῖν, τὰ δὲ καὶ διασῶσαι* (6.23).

After laying out this long list of difficulties Nicias admits his fear for the expedition, *ὅπερ ἐγὼ φοβούμενος* (6.23.3). This is one of the most explicit statements of fear in the debates. He concludes his speech in 6.23 by offering the command to anyone who is more willing to take the risk of the expedition. The postscript explains his motivations: *ὁ μὲν Νικίας τοσαῦτα εἶπε νομίζων τοὺς Ἀθηναίους τῷ πλήθει τῶν πραγμάτων ἢ ἀποτρέψειν ἢ, εἰ ἀναγκάζοιτο στρατεῦσθαι, μάλιστα ἂν οὕτως ἀσφαλῶς ἐκπλεῦσαι*. Unfortunately for Nicias (and Athens), he succeeds at the latter rather than the former. Even with the

second mover advantage that he gains by speaking after Alcibiades, Nikias is unable to prevent the Athenians from rushing headlong into disaster. Since Nikias' factual statements should give the assembly pause, it is his rhetoric which fails him in this debate. Divisiveness in the first speech and disingenuous arguments in the second undermine the common sense that Nikias has.

### The Debate at Syracuse

With the debate at Athens summed up, we must consider the debate at Syracuse before we weigh the merits of the speakers between the two debates, and before we can explain why Thucydides sets up two parallel debates. The debate at Syracuse has two speeches, as usual in the *Histories*. It opens with the speech of Hermokrates. Athenagoras speaks next after him. The debate in Syracuse is also an isolated exchange nesting between a preamble and a postscript. It begins with an abrupt shift of scene in 6.32.3, when the narrative moves from the Athenian fleet at Corcyra to Syracuse in the middle of a chapter. The only transition is a lonely δέ, which is striking given how great a change this is from the previous sentence.<sup>24</sup> The sense this creates is that the debate happens to be inserted into the narrative here, but could have been placed anywhere in the text before the Athenians get to Italy. The Syracusans are skeptical about the danger, but an

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<sup>24</sup> While another writer might have written καί μὴν, or something else emphatic, this is normal for Thucydides. Every book after book 1 begins with δέ as the only transitional particle present, so this is an acceptable transition even for a large shift in the narrative. At the turning of the seasons, which is the main way Thucydides signals a large transition in the text, a simple καὶ is used as a transition. καὶ ὁ χειμῶν ἐτελεύτα, καὶ ἕκτον καὶ δέκατον ἔτος ἐτελεύτα τῷ πολέμῳ τῷδε ὃν Θουκυδίδης ξυνέγραψε (6.4).

assembly has convened to discuss whether or not precautions should be taken.

The speeches, one for action and one against, follow in the same fashion as in the debate at Athens.

Hermokrates, who is familiar to the reader from book 4, gives the first speech. Hermokrates' speech as a whole is quite effective in part because of his tone, which is encouraging and praises the city, and also because he offers a detailed path to victory for the Syracusans. The mood of his speech is akin to Alcibiades', even if some of the content is similar to Nikias'.

In section 6.33 he sets up his credibility, explains the facts of the invasion, and says that he is sure Syracuse will prevail over the Athenian invaders. He begins by acknowledging the doubts of the assembly:

ἄπιστα μὲν ἴσως, ὥσπερ καὶ ἄλλοι τινές, δόξω ὑμῖν περὶ τοῦ ἐπίπλου τῆς ἀληθείας λέγειν, καὶ γινώσκω ὅτι οἱ τὰ μὴ πιστὰ δοκοῦντα εἶναι ἢ λέγοντες ἢ ἀπαγγέλλοντες οὐ μόνον οὐ πείθουσιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἄφρονες δοκοῦσιν εἶναι.

This is a bold beginning to his speech, because he acknowledges the greatest weakness of his position immediately, rather than avoiding the issue. ἄπιστα recalls the disbelief of the Athenians who saw the invasion fleet assembling in 6.31.1. οἱ δὲ ξένοι καὶ ὁ ἄλλος ὄχλος κατὰ θεὰν ἤκεν ὡς ἐπ' ἀξιώχρεων καὶ ἄπιστον διάνοιαν. This is one of the more explicit parallels between Athens and Syracuse: in neither city can the people believe that the expedition force is real. He confronts the people's doubts head on by reminding

them of his own good character: ὅμως δὲ οὐ καταφοβηθεὶς ἐπισχίσω κινδυνεύουσης τῆς πόλεως, πείθων γε ἑμαυτὸν σαφέστερόν τι ἑτέρου εἰδῶς λέγειν. ἐπισχίσω is a striking word choice. Elsewhere in the *Histories* it refers to physical detainment and delay (1.90, 7.74). The word does occur 33 times in the histories, but nowhere else in book 6. καταφοβηθεὶς, moreover, carries forward the theme of fear from earlier speeches into Hermokrates' speech. Like Nikias before him, Hermokrates rests his case on the idea that the city will defer to a man of good character. He convinces the assembly of that character by asserting his lack of fear in the face of adversity, as Nikias did (6.9.2).

After explaining that a large invasion force is approaching Sicily, he goes on to explain that the πρόφασις of the Athenians is not truly to liberate the Egestaeans and restore the Leontini. Hermokrates is the only speaker in either debate to say συμμαχία, which seems strange since the allies are the nominal reason for the invasion. Rather, Hermokrates says τὸ δὲ ἀληθὲς Σικελίας ἐπιθυμία, μάλιστα δὲ τῆς ἡμετέρας πόλεως, ἡγούμενοι, εἰ ταύτην σχοῖεν, ῥαδίως καὶ τᾶλλα ἔξειν. He implores the assembly to take action in 6.33.3 and not to put the city at risk by remaining skeptical. He moves to a more hopeful note, though, οὐ γὰρ δὴ μὴ τύχῳσιν γε ὧν προσδέχονται φοβοῦμαι. φοβοῦμαι is the same word Nikias used for his own fear in 6.13, and this turns Nikias' fear on its head. Just as Nikias was afraid of the certain failure of the expedition, Hermokrates has no fear that such a bad idea could ever succeed. And then Hermokrates tells the assembly that when they succeed κάλλιστον δὴ ἔργον ἡμῖν ξυμβήσεται. The idea of very great deeds calls to mind the kind of heroism not really seen since the Persian

invasion, and must invite the assembly to imagine similar glories. In other words, this may even be good for Syracuse in the long term. Moreover, he reminds them that large scale invasions are seldom successful. He points explicitly to the irony of the Athenians launching such a foolish expedition, ὅπερ καὶ Ἀθηναῖοι αὐτοὶ οὗτοι, τοῦ Μήδου παρὰ λόγον πολλὰ σφαλέντος (6.33.6). This is some of the most explicit judgement of the folly of the Sicilian expedition in the text. The Athenians are a living example of how ill advised large scale foreign expeditions are. This speech, therefore, unlike the speech of Nikias, has hopeful and triumphant tone.

In the next section, 6.34, Hermokrates begins by setting out what must be done to repel the Athenians. In the sense that it is an explanation of how to carry out a large enterprise at great expense it is similar the second speech of Nikias. But because the Syracusans have no choice in the matter, and because Hermokrates optimistically believes many avenues for help are open to them, the tone is the opposite of Nikias' gloomy defeatism. The first verbs at the start of 6.34, παρασκευαζώμεθα... βεβαιωσώμεθα, capture the mood of the passage overall, which is positive and encouraging. After explaining the precautions which they must take, he shifts to what must be done at home. The mood is hopeful here as well: ὁ δὲ μάλιστα ἐγὼ τε νομίζω ἐπίκαιρον ὑμεῖς τε διὰ τὸ ξύνηθες ἤσυχον ἤκιστ' ἂν ὀξέως πείθοισθε, ὅμως εἰρήσεται. He identifies a strategy that will stop the invasions as a whole, launching a fleet to prevent the Athenians from crossing the sea, either due to fear or because the Sicilian ships could pick off the Athenians during the long voyage. The mention of the

Carthaginians in 6.34.2, ἀλλ' αἰεὶ διὰ φόβου εἰσὶ μὴ ποτε Ἀθηναῖοι αὐτοῖς ἐπὶ τὴν πόλιν ἔλθωσιν, invites the readers to compare the seemingly fearless Syracusans who do not wish to take precautions and the more prudent Carthaginians (whose fears are legitimate, given the Athenian capacity to cause trouble abroad).

Amusingly in 6.34.7 Hermokrates confirms something Alcibiades said:

ἀγγελλοίμεθα δ' ἂν εὖ οἶδ' ὅτι ἐπὶ τὸ πλεόν, in order to inspire greater fear (μᾶλλον πεφόβηνται).<sup>25</sup> Without knowing it, Hermokrates is matching both the concerns of Nicias and the rhetoric of Alcibiades here. He closes his speech by imploring his countrymen to be brave, to take advantage of their fear and harness it for good (τὸ δ' ἤδη τὰς μετὰ φόβου παρασκευὰς ἀσφαλεστάτας νομίσαντας), and not to ignore the risks to come.

Next Athenagoras addresses the assembly. Thucydides introduces him as πιθανώτατος, coloring our perception of him before he even begins to speak. He has not appeared before in the *Histories*, unlike the other 3 debaters, so this is the only knowledge of him we have before he begins to speak. Athenagoras begins his speech with a straightforward attack on the character of Hermokrates and any who agree with him: ἢ δειλός ἐστιν ἢ τῇ πόλει οὐκ εὖνους. Θαυμάζω, he says, at the claims Hermokrates has made, and says that Hermokrates has ulterior motives for his claims. This carries forward the idea of fear as the primary motivator of the debaters, since presumably the accusation of δειλός is responsive to Hermokrates' references to fear, while reminding the reader of Nicias' hesitation as well.

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<sup>25</sup> One almost wonders if this is not a comment by Thucydides about the exaggerated troop numbers seen in other writers' descriptions of armies.

Athenagoras goes on to call Hermokrates and his allies cowardly traitors, saying οἱ γὰρ δεδιότες ἰδίᾳ τι βούλονται τὴν πόλιν ἐς ἔκπληξιν καθιστάναι. δεδιότες keeps the larger theme of fear in the reader's mind. So Athenagoras' speech begins with a barrage of personal attacks against Hermokrates, in an attempt to discredit his opponent's character, on which Hermokrates' argument rests. What follows is another piece of ironic commentary on the invasion in 6.36.4: οὐ γὰρ αὐτοὺς εἰκὸς Πελοποννησίους τε ὑπολιπόντας καὶ τὸν ἐκεῖ πόλεμον μήπω βεβαίως καταλελυμένους ἐπ' ἄλλον πόλεμον οὐκ ἐλάσσω ἐκόντας ἐλθεῖν. This is another of the most explicit pieces of condemnation for the Sicilian expedition in the text. The folly of what the Athenians are doing is so great that Athenagoras cannot believe they would actually do something so foolish. Whether or not all of Athenagoras' speech is based on a real speech or written purely by Thucydides, certainly that part is commentary on the folly of the Athenians.

He continues in 6.37 by listing out many reasons why the Athenians could not win if they did come, finishing by saying τοσοῦτω τὴν ἡμετέραν παρασκευὴν κρείσσω νομίζω. In short, he thinks that the Syracusans will win no matter what. Conceding the possibility that Hermokrates may be right, and agreeing with him about what will happen if the Athenians are coming, seems like a questionable decision rhetorically. If Athenagoras had limited himself to explaining why the invasion was not coming, then he would more likely have persuaded the assembly. Instead, he has reinforced one of Hermokrates' arguments for him without explaining why it actually benefits his arguments more than his opponent's arguments. Athenagoras hardly seems πιθανώτατος here.

The next section of his speech, at 6.38, is more persuasive. He warns of the threat of an oligarchic plot against the democracy. He explains that the constant threat of tyranny is the cause of Syracuse' troubled history, which he sums up *στάσεις δὲ πολλὰς καὶ ἀγῶνας οὐ πρὸς τοὺς πολεμίους πλέονας ἢ πρὸς αὐτὴν ἀναιρεῖται, τυραννίδας δὲ ἔστιν ὅτε καὶ δυναστείας ἀδίκους*. *στάσις* in particular is a frightening word in Thucydides' writing, calling to mind the disastrous state of affairs at Corcyra in book 3. Thucydides' commentary on the nature of *στάσις* in 3.82 and 83 leaves the reader with no doubt about the dangers of such a state of affairs. For an Athenian reader at the end of the war, the oligarchic coup and the discord between the fleet and the city (which is one of the major subjects of book 8) would also come to mind here. This warning from Athenagoras is therefore quite emotionally charged. Athenagoras then presents himself as a savior, opening his offer to save the city *ὧν ἐγὼ πειράσομαι, ἣν γε ὑμεῖς ἐθέλητε ἔπεσθαι*. It is as though the people can choose to be saved by Athenagoras or face certain doom at the hands of Hermokrates and his shadowy oligarchic partisans. Note that Hermokrates also set himself up as a savior for the city due to the information that he brought, but with weaker language than Athenagoras uses here. Hermokrates privileges his information, more than ability to save the city personally, as Athenagoras does.

The next section of Athenagoras' speech is a defence of democracy, and this is where *πιθανώτατος* begins to make more sense. It begins at 6.38.5 and continues through the end of his speech. He challenges young men who desire power beyond what they deserve in 6.39.5, which seems like a condemnation of

Alcibiades when read so soon after the debate at Athens. *καὶ δῆτα, ὃ πολλάκις ἐσκεψάμην, τί καὶ βούλεσθε, ὧ νεώτεροι; πότερον ἄρχειν ἤδη; ἀλλ' οὐκ ἔννομον.* He asserts that young men are not suitable for these offices, *ὁ δὲ νόμος ἐκ τοῦ μὴ δύνασθαι ὑμᾶς μᾶλλον ἢ δυναμένους ἐτέθη ἀτιμάζειν.* Given that Athens has been led into disaster by an ambitious young man with poor judgement, this seems like a fair characterization, and also another instance of the irony the second debate creates in light of the first. It also recalls the anti-youth rhetoric that Nikias used in his first speech. Whether or not Athenagoras gave such a speech, this critique seems to have been chosen because of the commentary it offers on events in Athens. He goes on to assert that the strength of the democratic city lies in its ability to let each class of people contribute their own talents to the commonwealth.

*ἐγὼ δὲ φημι πρῶτα μὲν δῆμον ζύμπαν ὠνομάσθαι, ὀλιγαρχίαν δὲ μέρος, ἔπειτα φύλακας μὲν ἀρίστους εἶναι χρημάτων τοὺς πλουσίους, βουλευῆσαι δ' ἂν βέλτιστα τοὺς ξυνετούς, κρῖναι δ' ἂν ἀκούσαντας ἄριστα τοὺς πολλούς, καὶ ταῦτα ὁμοίως καὶ κατὰ μέρη καὶ ζύμπαντα ἐν δημοκρατία ἰσομοιρεῖν (6.39.1).*

This is one of the most ringing defenses of democracy in the text, and it explains what is best about democracy in the abstract, without limiting it to discussion of Syracuse or Athens alone. While Perikles was a strong defender of the democracy in the funeral oration, this is the first explicit explanation of why the democratic constitution is superior to all others. It also foreshadows what Thucydides has to say in 8.97.2 about the rule of the 5,000.

ἐγίγνοντο δὲ καὶ ἄλλαι ὕστερον πυκναὶ ἐκκλησίαι, ἀφ' ὧν καὶ νομοθέτας  
καὶ τᾶλλα ἐψηφίσαντο ἐς τὴν πολιτείαν. καὶ οὐχ ἥκιστα δὴ τὸν πρῶτον  
χρόνον ἐπὶ γε ἐμοῦ Ἀθηναῖοι φαίνονται εὖ πολιτεύσαντες.

As with the constitution described by Athenagoras, the government by the 5,000  
also combines aspects of democracy and oligarchy to make the city less  
vulnerable to the impulses either of the very powerful or of the easily swayed  
assembly.

Athenagoras would have inspired listeners of many different classes,  
especially *hoi polloi*, so this part of his speech explains in part why Thucydides  
characterizes Athenagoras as *πιθανώτατος*. After this section comes a critique of  
oligarchy, which exposes its weakness as a constitution for a city.

ὀλιγαρχία δὲ τῶν μὲν κινδύνων τοῖς πολλοῖς μεταδίδωσι, τῶν δ' ὠφελίμων  
οὐ πλεονεκτεῖ μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ξύμπαντ' ἀφελομένη ἔχει: ἃ ὑμῶν οἱ τε  
δυνάμενοι καὶ οἱ νέοι προθυμοῦνται, ἀδύνατα ἐν μεγάλῃ πόλει κατασχεῖν

He explains how the concentration of power denies the city access to one of its  
greatest resources, the striving of young men towards greatness. This must also  
have appealed to the democratic faction of the city, while perhaps encouraging  
moderates to think critically about the strengths and weaknesses of the  
constitutions proposed by the two different parties. Where Alcibiades criticized  
the democracy without praising oligarchy, Athenagoras makes the comparison  
quite clear, although with different conclusions.

His speech closes by warning the Syracusans that they must look to their best interests as patriots, reminds them that they will win if he is wrong (and that they have good generals), and that they must defend themselves from the oligarchic faction. Strangely, later in book 6 Hermokrates has to reorganize the command structure in order to defeat the Athenians, so the point Athenagoras makes about generals is probably untrue (6.73). Regardless, the effectiveness of this summary portion of Athenagoras' speech is again hindered by the way he tells the people that they will win if the Athenians do come. This is the case either way, no matter what he says, but because he says it Athenagoras reminds them that Hermokrates' course of action would serve them well.

After his speech a general stands, says that the debate has devolved into insults, and tells the assembly that the city will prepare for the invasion. Hermokrates wins the debate without any vote of the assembly, perhaps because the general is alienated by Athenagoras' tone and his attacks on the character of his enemies. Indeed, the general's use of *παρασκευαζώμεθα* explicitly recalls Hermokrates in 6.34.1.<sup>26</sup> The rest of the postscript is the speech of the Syracusan general, who explains what course of action the city will take. The speech is in indirect discourse, so it is less vivid than those of the debates and does not command the same emotional power that they do. The willingness of the Syracusan general to intervene and set the city on the right path is a sharp departure from the situation in Athens, where the people were goaded to disaster

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<sup>26</sup> He could well have said *στελλώμεθα* or *ἐξαρτώμεθα* instead, so this seems like explicit echoing.

without intervention from those who knew better, save the ineffective Nikias. The intervention shows us that in Syracuse deeds are more important than words, as opposed to the Athenian assembly, where Alcibiades' words count for more than Nikias' deeds (or his own, for that matter). Afterwards, the main narrative resumes with οἱ δ' Ἀθηναῖοι ἤδη. This is a less abrupt shift than δέ alone, but still reinforces the idea that the Syracusan debate really is isolated from the rest of the text, like Syracuse itself is isolated from the events in Greece.

### The Relationship Between the Debates

A major question arises after reading the Syracusan debate about the effect of Thucydides' choice to put such a spirited defence of democracy in the mouth of Athenagoras, rather than the more prudent Hermokrates, or an Athenian character. This is especially important since the general's decision in the postscript seems to make the debate irrelevant to the decision making process of the Syracusans (Andrews 2009, 1). The commentary on democracy must be one of the primary purposes of the entire debate, since the practical discussion is divorced from the outcomes. Are readers to think that Athenagoras' defence of democracy is as wrongheaded as his comments about the invasion? Andrews thinks that the defence of democracy is meant to illustrate how self serving Athenagoras is (4). But even if that is true, the arguments presented in the speech are meritorious on their own, and they do make Athenagoras seem πιθανώτατος. Not since Perikles in book 2 has there been such a thorough defense of democracy. Moreover, the argument about the strength of democracy deriving from its ability to use the skills of many different classes is a strong one, even when placed in the mouth of

someone as wrongheaded as Athenagoras. One likely reason for the argument to be placed here is that by setting the context in Syracuse, rather than Athens, Thucydides can speak about democracy more broadly without the unique problems facing Athens during the war. In other words, Athenagoras is a voice for democracy in its pure form, rather than Athenian democracy in particular. No Athenian can be separated from the war as a whole, or the folly of the invasion of Syracuse, but this otherwise unknown character in Syracuse can. He seems to exist only to provide these remarks on the democratic constitution and then fade away once more. In his mouth commentary about democracy is not commentary about Athens necessarily, although there is an element of that as well when he describes Alcibiades.

With that in mind, one major similarity between the two debates is their role as commentary on the Sicilian expedition. In both cases Thucydides has characters make prescient, proleptic comments about the outcome of the invasion. For the reader, who knows what is about to happen in book 7, the effect is dramatic irony comparable to that of a tragedy. The double debate allows four perspectives on the folly of attacking a powerful enemy at great distance. Neither Nikias nor Athenagoras can believe that the Athenians would be so foolish. Hermokrates recognizes that it is a great opportunity for Sicily, just as the Athenians wrongly thought it would be for their city.

An important difference between the two debates lies in their outcomes. Whereas the debate in Athens leads to a vote by the assembly and a foolish decision, the debate in Syracuse does not prompt a vote and does not directly

determine the ensuing course of action. Out of the four speakers, Hermokrates emerges as the overall victor, since he bests Athenagoras, does not ruin his city like Alcibiades, and succeeds, unlike Nikias. Bloedlow remarks, “By contrast, Hermocrates emerges as intelligent, consistent and authoritative, with a policy that recommends itself as highly sensible” (Bloedlow, 157). Indeed, Hermokrates does emerge from the debate scene as a formidable opponent for Nikias, which foreshadows his role in the defeat of the Athenian invasion in book 7 and his leadership of the expedition to Greece in book 8.

The common purpose for the debates can be seen from this foreshadowing, to establish the characters of the leaders on each side. While Nikias, Alcibiades, and Hermokrates are all familiar to the reader by this point (Athenagoras never appears before or after the debate), their role in the expedition is clarified by the debates. Nikias is ineffective and a poor speaker in the debate, which presages his performance as a general in Sicily. Up to this point Nikias had been one of the best Athenian generals and one of the most prudent Athenian leaders since Perikles’ death. But in Sicily he falls ill and fails to take decisive action to save the army when he could. Alcibiades wins over the people to his side for his own personal gain, and in doing so reveals his true character before he goes over to the Spartans. Hermokrates, who has already appeared as an opponent of the Athenians in book 4, is reestablished for the reader as a competent statesman and worthy adversary.

One feature of the speeches which has been ignored by many past commentators is the relationship between the merit of the speeches in terms of

rhetorical quality and the quality of their content. Whereas elsewhere in the *Histories* the two seem to be related, in the paired debates in book 6 they are not.<sup>27</sup> Alcibiades, for instance, avoids the largest concerns his opponent has while convincing the people to invade Sicily with empty promises and assertions. If ever the weaker argument were made the stronger, it was in that debate. In Athens there is a disconnect between good council and good rhetoric, but in Sicily the better speaker makes the better arguments and wins the debate. One explanation for this difference is that Thucydides thinks that the better speaker ought to win, but is unable to do so in Athens because of the problems in the democracy described in this debate. On the other hand, it may be that Thucydides divorced quality of argument from quality of speech to emphasize Nikias' poor abilities before the expedition to Sicily. Nikias had, after all, served competently earlier in the war and negotiated the peace, so his newfound incompetence needs to be forshadowed. But it could also be that in real debates which happened Nikias was regarded as speaking poorly and Alcibiades as speaking well. It stretches the limits of probability that Thucydides had this kind of information about the debate in Syracuse, but it could certainly be the case in Athens.

With all this about book 6 in mind, one must remember that the *Histories* is full of debates. The Mytilenaeon Debate and the Plataean Debate, both in book 3, are other examples of important decisions made during the war because of

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<sup>27</sup> Arnold-Debnar remarks that the Thebans are ineffective speakers, and that this reflects their poor arguments in 3.61-67 (Arnold-Debnar 1996). Another example is that Perikles' speeches are well constructed and contain good arguments in books 1 and 2.

debates. Many of the arguments made here about book 6 would apply to these, and other debates as well. The unique feature of these two debates in book 6 is that they are paired, but otherwise they function in the same way as other debates in the *Histories*. The arguments presented, the commentary offered, and the irony that the debates in book 6 build are all features to be found elsewhere as well. Whether or not the speeches he gives are based on actual speeches, they do reflect the agenda Thucydides set in 1.22. After all, Thucydides need not make up speeches from thin air, although he may have had to do so in Syracuse in order to provide the sort of distant mirror for Athens that he needed to make particular comments on the invasion and on democracy. But he has used the speeches that happened in Athens to great effect here in support of his narrative.<sup>28</sup> The choices in style and content which he ascribes to the characters reflect on the narrative of books 6 and 7 as a whole, and also on the larger issues of the text, such as democracy and the futile nature of the war.

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<sup>28</sup> Garrity thinks that Thucydides would not introduce speeches which did not really happen (Garrity 1998, 377). I am skeptical, since it seems implausible that Thucydides had access to good information about the proceedings of the Syracusan assembly. Moreover, the parallels between the two debates lend to the idea that the one in Syracuse was created in response to the one in Athens, which is more likely to have happened and which Thucydides would perfectly well have known about.

### III. Vividness and Characterization

This chapter will demonstrate Thucydides' use of the variation between speech and narrative to create more vivid characters in his *Histories* and ultimately to create a more vivid story as a whole. By vivid I mean both emotionally engaging and aesthetically satisfying. In order to demonstrate the point, I will examine the character of Nicias in depth, not only his speeches but also the narrative of his (mis)adventures and the authorial judgements offered about him. I will examine Nicias' role in the text, as a general and a statesman, and then examine the contradictions in his character.

Nicias has a joint role in this text, as a statesman and a general. In the vacuum left by the death of Perikles, he is initially one of the most successful leaders of the Athenian polis, leading several successful military actions and negotiating a truce with the Spartans. But Nicias' story in the text can be neatly divided between the time before and after the peace that bore his name. Before the peace he was one of the most successful Athenian commanders and statesmen, and after it he falls upon disaster. As a statesman he is unable to prevent the Sicilian expedition, and as a general he is unable (i) to achieve its impossible goals and (ii) to save the army and the fleet from the Syracusans. His story is closely tied to the peace which bears his name, which concludes the plot of the

first half of the *Histories*, and the Sicilian expedition, which dominates the second half.<sup>29</sup>

But the great question about Nikias is why Thucydides chooses to eulogize him at the conclusion of book 7.

καὶ ὁ μὲν τοιαύτη ἢ ὅτι ἐγγύτατα τούτων αἰτία ἐτεθνήκει, ἥκιστα δὲ ἄξιος ὦν τῶν γε ἐπ' ἐμοῦ Ἑλλήνων ἐς τοῦτο δυστυχίας ἀφικέσθαι διὰ τὴν πᾶσαν ἐς ἀρετὴν νενομισμένην ἐπιτήδευσιν (7.86.5).

This is one of the (relatively) rare breaches of the impersonal nature of the *Histories*. ἐπ' ἐμοῦ is a fundamentally personal statement, because it relies on Thucydides' familiarity with Nikias and the other commanders. Moreover, this is one of the most positive assessments of a character in the text. Nikias is not only undeserving of his ignominious fate, but the least deserving of a such a fate among the post-Periklean leaders of Athens.

The obvious parallel for this authorial assessment is Perikles himself in book 2. While this eulogy is shorter than the one for Perikles in 2.65, it suits Nikias' role in the text. Whereas Perikles was the driving force of Athens in the first part of the war, Nikias was always one of many generals and statesmen trying to guide the city. It seems curious, however, that Thucydides would draw a parallel between Nikias and Perikles at all. While Perikles led the city to success after success and died before any tragedy befell it (or rather, in the first tragedy to

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<sup>29</sup> This is using Thucydides' division of the text into halves, based on the second preface at 5.25-26, and following the division made by Gomme *et al.* in the *Historical Commentary to Thucydides* (vol. iv, 5).

befall it), Nikias failed to prevent the greatest tragedy of all. What seems to unite them is not their record as generals, but their ἀρετή. This ἀρετή cannot be military, since Nikias ultimately undoes his good reputation before the peace with his failures in Sicily. It must be a reflection of Nikias' character alone. After all, despite the cowardice some writers have seen in him due to his reaction to the eclipse or his letter requesting to come home, Nikias never fails to act on behalf of the city's best interests.<sup>30</sup>

Antiphon, another man personally admired by Thucydides, is described as ἀνὴρ Ἀθηναίων τῶν καθ' ἑαυτὸν ἀρετῆ τε οὐδενὸς ὕστερος (8.68).<sup>31</sup> We can see, therefore, that when Thucydides intervenes in the narrative, that there is (i) no reason to assume he is not genuine, as some have suggested about Nikias (Gomme, vol iv, 461-462) and (ii) that it is for good reason, given its rarity in the text. Regarding (i), while it is true that Thucydides praises Nikias after a great defeat, Nikias also had tremendous success in his life, and while his word and deed sometimes were at odds with one another (such as his second speech to the Athenian assembly), in general he sought to do what was best for the city in both

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<sup>30</sup> The best example of this cowardice would be from Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*. He pairs Nikias with Crassus, which seems entirely unfair to the former and too generous to the latter. While Nikias had fabulous wealth (Xen. *Ways and Means* 4.14), he never put his own ambitions before the city on such a disastrous scale as Crassus did in Parthia. Nor is Xenophon alone in his fabulous wealth among his peers; we would do well to remember that Thucydides' life in exile was financed by his mines in the north.

<sup>31</sup> καὶ αὐτός τε, ἐπειδὴ τὰ τῶν τετρακοσίων ἐν ὑστέρω μεταπεσόντα ὑπὸ τοῦ δήμου ἐκακοῦτο, ἄριστα φαίνεται τῶν μέχρι ἐμοῦ ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν τούτων αἰτιαθεῖς, ὡς ζυγκατέστησε, θανάτου δίκην ἀπολογησάμενος (8.68.2). Antiphon is the best orator of his day, according to Thucydides, putting him in the company of Perikles, among others.

word and deed.<sup>32</sup> As for (ii), we saw that Thucydides praised Perikles to make a point about the difference in quality of leadership under Perikles and after his death. We also see that he praised Antiphon to explain an otherwise unknown character to the readers, and to emphasize the excellence of a man who also did what was best for the city (or so we may assume Thucydides thought, given his praise for the oligarchic government of the 5000 in book 8). Nikias rests somewhere between these two. He lacks the excellence of Perikles, but he is also more familiar than Antiphon to the reader. Moreover, Thucydides must have seen that posterity would be cruel to the man who led a failed expedition, no matter how strongly he protested the expedition in the first place.<sup>33</sup> The eulogy at 7.86.5 seems like an attempt to explain to the reader that despite the events of the fabula, Nikias was a good man. In the same way, the speeches support this interpretation of the eulogy. With this in mind, let us look at Nikias in the first and second halves of the text to see how this sympathetic image of Nikias is constructed before the eulogy, with respect to word and deed.

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<sup>32</sup> I agree with Hornblower here that Dover is too harsh on poor Nikias (Gomme *et al.* vol iv, 461 and Hornblower 1991, vol. iii, 742). Hornblower says that Dover's judgement is too modern, and that a Greek audience would be more sympathetic to Nikias' concern for his good name. But I would go further and say that throughout the *Histories* Nikias balances his concern for his good name with the good of the city, as I will explain when I examine his motivations surrounding the peace that bore his name below.

<sup>33</sup> While the initial reaction to Nikias in Athens was quite negative, he was thoroughly rehabilitated by the 4<sup>th</sup> century (Gomme *et al.* vol iv, 463-464). Why Plutarch holds him in such a poor light, I cannot say. Perhaps he read more sources than we have available to us.

## Nikias in the First Half of the Text

Nikias's story before the peace is told entirely through the narrative without speeches. During this portion of the text, Nikias emerges as one of the primary Athenian leaders in the post-Periklean power vacuum. In book 3 he leads expeditions to Minoa (3.51) and Melos (3.91), but he is not a major focus of the narrative. In book 4 we see him come into his own as a major figure in the story. At 4.27 Kleon criticizes the Athenian leaders at Pylos and, when the assembly chooses him as an investigator (κατάσκοπος), attempts to pass the blame onto the generals.

καὶ ἐξ Νικίαν τὸν Νικηράτου στρατηγὸν ὄντα ἀπεσήμαιεν, ἐχθρὸς ὢν καὶ ἐπιτιμῶν, ῥάδιον εἶναι παρασκευῆ, εἰ ἄνδρες εἶεν οἱ στρατηγοί, πλεύσαντας λαβεῖν τοὺς ἐν τῇ νήσῳ, καὶ αὐτός γ' ἄν, εἰ ἦρχε, ποιῆσαι τοῦτο (4.27.5).

Thucydides chooses to introduce Nikias as a new character again, using the patronymic, although the reader had already met him in book 3. He also tells us, in this focalized passage (Kleon has been focalized by γνοῦς in 4.27.4) that Kleon hates Nikias. This tells us that Nikias must have been an important political figure for some time, since he has been elected general and has become hated by Kleon. This also sets up Nikias for his first major political achievement in the *Histories*. He urges Kleon (ἐκέλευεν) to take a force to Pylos at 4.28.1 in his place, because he is aware (ὀρῶν) that the Athenians are unhappy with Kleon for not sailing already. Kleon realizes he has underestimated Nikias at 4.28.2, δεδωῶς ἤδη καὶ οὐκ ἂν οἰόμενός οἱ αὐτὸν τολμῆσαι ὑποχωρῆσαι. Nikias goes on to trap

Kleon in an impossible position by resigning the command before the assembly at 4.28.3. This leaves Kleon with no choice but to take the command at Pylos, which removes one of Nikias' powerful enemies from Athens and allows him to remain in the city rather than taking on the (presumably undesirable) command at Pylos. The episode portrays Nikias as an adept politician who understands how to operate within the assembly.<sup>34</sup>

Note, however, that Thucydides chooses not to include the speeches that Kleon and Nikias must have given. Instead, Thucydides chooses to give limited remarks in indirect discourse and to relay the sense of what was said. The focus here is more on Kleon and Nikias' thoughts than their words. This means that we have less information about how Nikias interacts with the assembly than we do for the debate at book 6. Thucydides has told us that Nikias is a competent statesman without really showing us. The proof is in the aftermath of the encounter, which sends Kleon to Pylos and leaves Nikias at Athens for a time, but the details are not present in the narrative here.

After Pylos Nikias leads an expedition to Kythera (4.53) and then a major force to Corinth at 4.42. The large force under Nikias' command on the Corinthian expedition at 4.42.1 reveals how much trust the Athenian assembly has in him already by this point in the *Histories*. The overall impression we take away

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<sup>34</sup> Dover calls this an early instance of Nikias' "obsessive anxiety to preserve his own reputation as a general" (Gomme *et al.* vol iv, 461). But a more charitable reading is that Nikias is willing to turn the tables on Kleon when given the opportunity, which, while self interested to be sure, does not indicate some great moral failing. It seems like admirable political skill, especially given who his adversary is in this case.

from Nikias' defeat of the Corinthians (4.44) is that he is a competent general who can be trusted with large scale military operations. No insight is given into the mind of Nikias in this passage, however; both the battle narrative and the framing before and after it are told purely from the primary narrator's perspective.

Nikias is then absent from the narrative until he reappears at 4.129 as one of the two commanders of an Athenian force attacking Mende. Nikias distinguishes himself for his bravery, being personally wounded at 4.129.4 (τραυματιζόμενος) in a daring flanking maneuver. He remains an effective commander on the expedition, ultimately taking the city in 4.130.6. Thucydides tells us that after the sack of the city, καὶ μόλις οἱ στρατηγοὶ κατέσχον ὥστε μὴ καὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους διαφθείρεσθαι. In other words, Nikias (and Nikostratus) are able to restrain their troops, albeit with difficulty – which does not indicate incompetence. Nikias shows his competence again when he demands proof from Perdikkas (previously an ally of Brasidas) that he is loyal to the Athenians now (4.132.2). This brief passage about the fighting at Mende shows us more of Nikias' competence and bravery in the field, and again demonstrates his ability as a statesman in negotiating with a possible ally. In all of book 4 we can see Nikias emerge as a competent leading figure among the Athenians.

It is in book 5 that Nikias will reach the peak of his success though. At 5.16 we learn the background for the peace that will come to bear Nikias' name.

τότε δὴ ἑκατέρω τῇ πόλει σπεύδοντες τὰ μάλιστα τὴν ἡγεμονίαν

Πλειστοάναξ τε ὁ Πausανίου βασιλεὺς Λακεδαιμονίων καὶ Νικίας ὁ

Νικηράτου, πλεῖστα τῶν τότε εὖ φερόμενος ἐν στρατηγίαις, πολλῶ δὴ  
μᾶλλον προουθυμοῦντο (5.16.1)

This tells us that Nicias has become the foremost man in Athens, in parallel with one of the Spartan kings, the first time anyone has achieved this since Perikles' death. He is also the most successful of the living generals. His reputation has developed considerably from 4.27, perhaps because of the successes he achieved later in book 4. The death of Kleon also removed his greatest rival in the assembly, leaving him with more opportunities to exert influence there.

In 5.16.1 we learn Nicias' motivations for seeking the peace, some of which are more noble than others. He desires to preserve his own reputation while it is good, and to pass on a good reputation (τῷ μέλλοντι χρόνῳ καταλιπεῖν ὄνομα ὡς οὐδὲν σφήλας τὴν πόλιν διεγένετο), but he is also concerned for the wellbeing of the city (καὶ ἔς τε τὸ αὐτίκα πόνων πεπαῦσθαι καὶ αὐτὸς καὶ τοὺς πολίτας παῦσαι). Few passages in the *Histories* evoke more pity for a character, or a more striking dramatic irony. For, of course, everything that Nicias hopes for here will be turned on its head at Syracuse. This passage has damaged Nicias' reputation among later readers of the *Histories*, because it presents him in a somewhat selfish light.<sup>35</sup> But that aside, we can see from this description of Nicias before the truce that he is an influential man and has climbed to the highest rungs of the

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<sup>35</sup> The negative opinion that no less a scholar than Kenneth Dover (see above) takes of Nicias is an example of this. In antiquity, Plutarch's decision to pair Nicias with Crassus is an example of the poor reputation he left behind, at least to some.

leadership of the city. Indeed, the first war ends because of this truce in Thucydides' view (5.24)

In the first half of the *Histories*, Nikias is portrayed as a competent general and statesman. The eulogy that Thucydides gives him in book 7 (more on this below) makes perfect sense from the perspective of the first half of the text. He conducts himself admirably and for the benefit of the city. Nowhere are his words reported directly, perhaps because the narrative reveals the image Thucydides wants for Nikias without the need for intervention in the form of speeches. Much of the *Histories* is about the tension between word and deed, but with Nikias in the first half of the text we see an alignment of authorial intention (the portrayal of a sympathetic Nikias) and deed, which seems to make the inclusion of "word" in the form of speeches unnecessary in this portion of the text.

#### Nikias in the Second Half of the Text

In the second half of the *Histories* Nikias' story is told through a mix of speeches and narrative descriptions. Nikias has five speeches (and a letter) in books 6 and 7, more than any other character has in the text. Unlike most other characters he addresses both the assembly and the army (reflecting his dual role as statesman and general in the text). This gives him the rare honor of participating in paired speeches (the debate at Athens) and isolated ones (his general's speeches in books 6 and 7). During this portion of the *Histories* Nikias becomes one of the most important characters in the story, due to his leadership in the Sicilian expedition. With that in mind, let us trace his progress through the second half of the *Histories*.

At 5.46 Nikias persuades the assembly to send him as one of a group of emissaries to meet with the Spartans about the peace. He fails to persuade the Spartans to swear off their alliance with the Boeotians, which was the main difficulty with the peace at that point. Still, he extracts a renewal of the oaths. Thucydides focalizes Nikias and then provides proleptic context to explain this action.

ἐφοβεῖτο γὰρ μὴ πάντα ἀτελεῖ ἔχων ἀπέλθῃ καὶ διαβληθῆ, ὅπερ καὶ ἐγένετο, αἴτιος δοκῶν εἶναι τῶν πρὸς Λακεδαιμονίους σπονδῶν.

We learn Nikias was afraid to return empty handed from the talks because of the risk of disgrace, and then also that the disgrace really did come about. Nikias was held to blame for the truce in the time after this. He is reduced from his high position in the state at 5.16 because of the failure of the truce to bring a lasting peace. This marks a turning point in the text for Nikias. Up to this point his influence was increasing, his military commands and political endeavors were all successful, and he was on the path to becoming a true first citizen in the Periklean mould. But the failure of the truce and the backlash against him mark the beginning of a long decline in his fortunes.

Nikias next appears at the beginning of book 6 in a debate against Alcibiades. He attempts to convince the Athenians not to invade Sicily. Nikias gives two speeches in this debate (the only character to do so in the *Histories*). They are discussed in depth above in chapter 2, but suffice to say that in the first he genuinely attempts to persuade the Athenians, with good reason, not to invade Sicily, and in the second he tries to deceive them by asking for such a large

invasion force that they will never agree to supply it. Unfortunately for Nikias, the Athenians are all too happy to dispatch an enormous force to Sicily. Whereas in book 4 Nikias was able to manipulate the assembly and deftly outmaneuver his political enemy Kleon, in this debate Alcibiades is able to do the same to him. Nikias only makes the situation worse with his second speech, which is as disingenuous as Kleon's remarks were at 4.27. In both cases, Nikias and Kleon asked for something they did not want, and the assembly were all too happy to oblige.

Moving on from the debate, Nikias departs with the fleet for Sicily. It is beyond the scope of this paper to examine the entire Sicilian expedition in detail, but a few salient points emerge. At 6.47-49 Nikias, Alcibiades, and Lamachus give their proposed plans for the Sicilian expeditions. Nikias is the only general who proposes a cautious plan. He advises that they sail straight to Selinus and achieve their stated goals and then return to Athens, καὶ τῇ πόλει δαπανῶντας τὰ οἰκεῖα μὴ κινδυνεύειν (6.47).<sup>36</sup> The plan lacks the ambition of Alcibiades' or Lamachus' plans, both of whom want to engage the Syracusans directly. Nikias comes across as prudent, but perhaps lacking ambition, or worse, as a coward. Lamachus throws his support behind Alcibiades, and the expedition follows his course of action rather than Nikias' plan. This is the second time, after the debate,

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<sup>36</sup> Dover thinks Nikias was dodging the intent of the expedition with his proposal (Gomme iv, 461) and says that most readers have found Lamachus plan the most agreeable (*ibid.* 315-316). Both may be true, but Nikias' plan is still prudent given that the expedition was a poor idea to begin with.

at which Nicias fails to persuade others to heed him and not Alcibiades, putting the fleet and the army on the path to destruction.

We can skip ahead now to the battle at the Anapus river, which is the first major engagement between the Athenians and the Syracusans (6.63-71). Nicias is the Athenian commander in the battle, and he addresses his troops at 6.68. The speech is unremarkable but competent. Nicias degrades the Sicilians they will fight against and reminds the Athenians of the stakes should they be defeated. He then attacks the Syracusan force and routs them, although, as Thucydides tells us, it is partially due to luck. The Syracusans are bold, if not skilled (6.69.1), but a storm causes them to lose morale and allows the Athenians to defeat them easily (6.70). Nicias comes across fairly well from this whole episode as a general. His speech reveals that he fully understands the enemy and his own men (he assesses the abilities of the Sicilians and the risks the Athenians run accurately) and he exploits the enemy's weaknesses to win the battle with few losses.

At 6.101 Nicias' fellow general Lamachus is killed by the Syracusans, leaving him as the sole commander of the expedition. He continues the strategy of building walls and trying to prevent Syracusan counter-walls from succeeding. Nicias prevents a Syracusan victory at 6.102.2, having remained at camp when most of the army was away due to his illness (*ἀσθένεια*). This is the first mention of the illness that will affect him for the rest of his life, if it is the kidney disease. This section reveals that Nicias' competence as a commander is hindered by his health (he should not have been in the camp), although fortune makes it an advantage in this one circumstance. At 6.104 Nicias hears of the approach of

Gylippus but ignores him, which will harm the Athenians later, because Gylippus is a more competent commander than the others on the Syracusan side. Nicias' poor judgement in this matter helps to set the stage for the Syracusan victory in book 7.

Moving into book 7, Gylippus is able to lead the Syracusans to block the Athenian wall building effort at 7.6. Nicias is now left without a clear path to victory over the Syracusans. At 7.8 Nicias is focalized (ὁ δὲ Νικίας αἰσθόμενος τοῦτο) and Thucydides tells us that Nicias realizes how dire the situation is and wants to send word to the assembly. He sends a letter to Athens, which is presented in the text in the same way as a direct speech by Nicias. Consider how the letter is introduced:

ὁ δὲ γραμματεὺς ὁ τῆς πόλεως παρελθὼν ἀνέγνω τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις  
δηλοῦσαν τοιάδε (7.10).

The nameless grammateus is a stand in for Nicias, and the letter effectively becomes an assembly speech. The letter explains in great detail why the situation in Sicily is untenable, from the difficulties with Gylippus' counter wall to the risk of losing the supplies provided by the Italian allies, to the threat of fresh troops arriving from the Peloponnese. In 7.15.1 Nicias says that the assembly must send another army to relieve the one at Syracuse and send a new general to relieve him, as his illness has gotten worse (ὡς ἀδύνατός εἰμι διὰ νόσον νεφρῆτιν παραμένειν). He continues, ἀξιῶ δ' ὑμῶν ξυγγνώμης τυγχάνειν: καὶ γὰρ ὄτ' ἐρρώμην πολλὰ ἐν ἡγεμονίαις ὑμᾶς εὖ ἐποίησα. Nicias' strategy is to plead that his current inability should excuse him from the command of a doomed army and to point out that the

assembly owes him for his past good service. But unfortunately for Nikias, the Athenian assembly is not known for its gratitude. His letter will not lead to his recall, but rather to another fleet being deployed with Demosthenes. For a second time Nikias has persuaded the assembly to do something he does not want them to do by asking them to do it. He did not want a massive reinforcement for the invasion, but he asked for and received it. He does not want a relief force with a new general, he wants to leave, but he asks for and receives one. Nikias has fallen into the same trap with his letter that he did in the debate. His competence as a statesman in books 4 and 5 is forgotten now that he has blundered so greatly twice.

Let us move ahead in the text to 7.50 now. Demosthenes and Nikias are planning to depart from Syracuse due to plague and an impossible military situation when a lunar eclipse happens (ἡ σελήνη ἐκλείπει, 7.50.4). This leads the Athenians to remain, since:

καὶ οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι οἳ τε πλείους ἐπισχεῖν ἐκέλευον τοὺς στρατηγοὺς  
ἐνθύμιον ποιούμενοι, καὶ ὁ Νικίας (ἦν γάρ τι καὶ ἄγαν θειασμῷ τε καὶ τῷ  
τοιούτῳ προσκείμενος) οὐδ' ἂν διαβουλεύσασθαι ἔτι ἔφη πρὶν, ὡς οἱ  
μάντις ἐξηγοῦντο, τρεῖς ἐννέα ἡμέρας μεῖναι, ὅπως ἂν πρότερον κινηθεῖη.

Thucydides mitigates Nikias' responsibility somewhat by telling us that the Athenian people wish to remain due to the eclipse, but he does make an authorial aside about Nikias' foolishness (ἦν... προσκείμενος). Nikias' θειασμός ultimately leaves the Athenians trapped, as they give up a good opportunity to escape from Syracuse. It is a lapse in judgement for a general to be caught up in superstition

at the expense of the good of the state and the fleet. It seems an almost Spartan decision to delay action due to a sign from the gods.<sup>37</sup> The Spartans are much more likely than the Athenians to make a decision because of a festival or divine sign, and here Nikias falls into the same trap. Nikias' overly cautious behavior sets him up for failure during the rest of book 7.

Soon after the eclipse, at 7.61, Nikias gives a speech to the army to try to improve morale ahead of a major sea battle to determine the fate of the army and the fleet. He reminds all of the nations in the fleet why they are there to fight and warns the Athenians of what they stand to lose. The speech is well constructed and reflects favorably on Nikias. The fleet prepares for battle with improved morale. He goes on to call on the leaders of the fleet directly and remind them of their heritage and their duty to their country. Nikias does the best he can here with an impossible situation; calling on the leaders of the fleet is an example of his leadership, the same leadership which led him to this command in the first place.

After the fleet is defeated in their attempt to break out of the Syracusan harbor, Nikias attempts to restore their morale once more at 7.77. At 7.76 when he focalizes Nikias, Thucydides notes that he does this ἐπι πλεῖστον, as much as possible, which is a sympathetic portrayal of Nikias' ability to rally the troops at this point, when defeat is all but certain. The speech is certainly inspiring. One

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<sup>37</sup> Debnar refers to Spartan dorianism as defined by their “deeply conservative values” (2001, 5). This superstition shows Nikias' conservativeness relative to his peers. Most educated Athenians of this time would not have feared the eclipse as such, and another (like Demosthenes) might have moved the troops despite it (Gomme *et al.* vol. iv, 428-429).

line at the end leaps out to the reader in particular, ἄνδρες γὰρ πόλις, καὶ οὐ τείχη οὐδὲ νῆες ἀνδρῶν κεναί. In these circumstances it is hard to imagine that Nikias could make a better speech. He reminds the men that there is still hope of survival and that they are still a powerful army to contend with, and then tries to inspire them with his rhetoric. Thucydides tells us in 7.78 that καὶ ὁ Δημοσθένης οὐδὲν ἥσσον τοῖς καθ' ἑαυτὸν τοιαῦτά τε καὶ παραπλήσια λέγων. We see here that Thucydides has carefully selected one speech of many to relay to the reader. By choosing to make Nikias the main character of this narrative, he seems to be attempting to push the reader towards a certain idea of Nikias. Without the speeches, we would not know Nikias as a man. We would see the failure and defeat, but not that he did everything he could in an impossible circumstance. This is not to say that Thucydides' Nikias is perfect, but he is sympathetic.

At 7.86 Nikias and Demosthenes are killed by the Syracusans. Thucydides tells us that Nikias felt somewhat assured of his safety during the surrender, since he had secured the release of the Spartan prisoners from Pylos. It seems unlikely, even impossible that Thucydides would know this, but it is a last reminder that Nikias, despite his admirable conduct, is also thinking of himself in this awful time for the city. Recall that he made the truce not only to benefit the city, but also his own reputation. This is a similar line of thought for him. 7.86 ends with the eulogy for Nikias.

The second half of the *Histories* portrays Nikias as a failure, for the most part. He manages to make the situation in Sicily worse than it would have been on two occasions, asking for more men for the initial invasion and then for a relief

force at the start of book 7. To a large extent, the devastation brought on the city is because Nicias raised the stakes of the expedition. As a general he is defeated again and again throughout book 7, for want of strategy and not tactical skill.<sup>38</sup> The speeches mitigate the narrative to some extent. The debate speeches reveal that Nicias was (i) sound enough in his judgement to see the futility of the expedition but (ii) not able to manipulate the assembly in the way Kleon or Alcibiades could. His general's speeches at 6.68, 7.61, and 7.77 come across much better. They reveal his understanding of the situation in Sicily as it deteriorates and succeed at motivating the army. The letter to the assembly at 7.10 is a mixed bag. It demonstrates his good judgment as a commander and depth of understanding, but it also reveals his poor judgement of the assembly. Nicias assumes they will listen to reason, which flies in the face of his experience in the debate. The eulogy seems strange in the context of the second half of the text, then.<sup>39</sup> The speeches provide some framework for Thucydides' praise of Nicias, which would otherwise be wholly out of place at the end of book 7, but the praise has still jarred past readers.

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<sup>38</sup> For instance, while Nicias' plan for the whole expedition at the council of generals was not especially strategically impressive, he is able to organize a rapid retreat after the defeat at the Great Harbor of Syracuse, which is not a small feat, and he defeats the Sicilians in battle several times.

<sup>39</sup> Dover remarks on this passage, "No one who has read this history up to the present point is likely to have formed a very favorable view of Nicias" (Gomme *et al.* vol iv, 461).

## Conclusions and Synthesis

The question which remains is, do the speeches and deeds of Nikias before and after the peace create a cohesive whole? The characterization of Nikias in the text synthesizes failure and nobility. The contradictions within his characterization make him more vivid. It is difficult for the reader to empathize with Perikles, who is resolutely unchanging, impossibly eloquent, and supernaturally prescient. Nikias, on the other hand, is a basically good man who is forced beyond his level of ability, and who struggles to balance self interest and the common good. He is brave at some times and not at others. He experiences both great successes (like the truce) and setbacks (like the debate against Alcibiades). If the Histories are a sort of warning for future generations, then Nikias embodies this warning. He shows the limits of good intentions and competence in the face of an unpredictable world. The thesis, if you will, is the ἀρετή from the eulogy, the moral fiber which Nikias generally exhibits, the defeat of Kleon in the assembly, or the successful military action at Corinth. The antithesis is the concern for his own name, the superstition, the ill-conceived letter, the debate with Alcibiades, or the dithering at Syracuse. The speeches smooth over the tension between the thesis and antithesis here. They show Nikias at his best and his worst and reveal a state of mind that may explain his actions in the text. They are a tool for Thucydides to explain to the reader what is missing from the history by inserting events into the fabula.

But Thucydides must have felt that even the speeches were not enough to ensure that the reader took away the proper idea of Nikias from his text, because

he included the eulogy at the end of book 7. Thucydides tells us what to think about Nikias more than almost any other character, through the use of speeches (which allow Thucydides to put the appropriate words in Nikias' mouth) and eulogy (which is a pure authorial assertion of Nikias' goodness). It seems that Thucydides felt some fondness for Nikias, and that he wanted readers to realize that despite the failure of the peace, and despite the disaster at Syracuse, Nikias was a good man. Nikias' thread in the story represents a masterwork of authorial manipulation of the historical narrative. It reveals how plastic the fabula of the *Histories* is, open to the insertion of new events (speeches) when it suits authorial purposes. This is not to say that Thucydides conjures up a more sympathetic Nikias from thin air, but rather that Thucydides does much more authorial work to create a particular character for Nikias than other people in the text. The goal of his presentation is made clear by the eulogy, and as we have seen, the speeches and narrative descriptions serve as a foundation for that eulogy. The effect is a character more vivid than the narrative events in the fabula could produce without the supplementary speeches.

## Conclusion

Thucydides' speeches have fascinated readers since the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, and it is beyond the scope of any study to narrow down their purpose or authorial intent to a single conclusion. If it were possible, then I expect it would have been done long ago. Nevertheless, in this thesis I have shown that the speeches allow Thucydides to (i) comment on the narrative and (ii) create an emotional response in his readers. The former claim has been demonstrated by the proleptic nature of many of the speeches, examined in all three chapters, and by the tension between word and deed (speech and response in the narrative) explained in the second chapter. The latter has been explained in the third chapter, by examining how Thucydides tries to create a view of Nicias more sympathetic than one inspired solely by the narrative, and the first, which explains why Thucydides uses such complex and varied focalization techniques in the text.

I am hardly the first person to apply narratological techniques to Thucydides' *Histories*, and this thesis is in the debt of Rood, de Jong, and others who pioneered the way. But the attention paid to focalization in particular as a narratological technique is a novel contribution of this study. Rood certainly touches on the topic, but the analysis of the Plataean debate in book 3 in particular stands as a new contribution here. Moreover, I hope that this analysis shows Thucydides' willingness to use focalization, which ought clarify the text, as a tool to obscure meaning and the intent of speakers.

To tie off a loose end, a word about dramatic irony is in order. Throughout this thesis I have referred to dramatic irony as a literary device used by Thucydides

to increase the reader's emotional investment in the text. Proleptic passages, such as the last speech of Perikles or the statement of Nicias' intentions for the peace that bore his name, reveal this device most clearly, but it is pervasive throughout the text. I have pointed it out where it occurred in the close readings above. But what does it mean for a historical text to adopt the strategies of drama? We know that Thucydides' literary environment is conditioned by drama. I am inclined to say that he likely knew Euripides and Sophokles personally, but even if he did not, he certainly was familiar with their body of work and grew up during the "golden age" of tragedy in Athens.<sup>40</sup> We should not then be surprised to find that tragedy influences his *Histories* on a deep level. While the characterization of Thucydides as a "tragic" historian does not seem especially useful to me, it seems hard to contest Visvardi's thesis that debates and speeches in Thucydides perform a similar role in the collective psychology of Athens within the text that tragedy performs in the city outside of the text (2015, 34-37). The *Histories* may not be a performative text, but it is both a history of a performative culture and a product of that performative culture.<sup>41</sup> It should not surprise us to find the trappings of the tragic chorus in the funeral oration when both the "real" funeral oration and the Thucydidean funeral oration are products of a culture deeply influenced by

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<sup>40</sup> Thucydides is a generation younger than Euripides and Sophocles and two younger than Aeschylus. He saw many of our most beloved tragedies performed at the Athenian festivals.

<sup>41</sup> Hornblower notes that certain sections of the *Histories* seem like they are written in "recitation units." He suggests the stasis at Corcyra episode in book 3 and the great sea battle at Syracuse in book 7 as possible sections which Thucydides may have performed at symposia or elsewhere (1992, vol. iii, 31).

tragedies. But what is more, the tragedians would have heard real funeral orations, so perhaps there is a cross pollination of ideas between the two.

I will close with a reminder that Thucydides' intentions for the speeches are multivalent. If they represent authorial intervention (be it for commentary or emotional purposes) then that does not mean that they do not reflect historical events. The speeches are events inserted into the fabula of the *Histories* and often isolated from the rest of the narrative (such as the debates in book 6), but this does not mean that they are not also intended to reflect historical events. Throughout this thesis I have pointed out that some speeches (like the Athenian speech to the Spartans) seem implausible, while others (like the funeral oration) seem as historical as the battles. The arguments of this thesis are agnostic about the composition or historicity of the text.

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