INTRODUCTION

On August 11, 1777, John Adams, then a delegate to the Second Continental Congress in session in Philadelphia, wrote a letter to his ten-year-old son, John Quincy. In light of the ongoing War of Independence and with a mind to other wars and "Councils and Negotiations" that the future might hold for the boy, Adams urged him "to turn your Thoughts early to such Studies, as will afford you the most solid Instruction and Improvement for the Part which may be allotted you to act on the Stage of Life." He gave one recommendation in particular: "There is no History, perhaps, better adapted to this usefull Purpose than that of Thucidides." For Adams, Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* contained within it insight of every possible "usefull" sort: "You will find it

full of Instruction to the Orator, the Statesman, the General, as well as to the Historian and the Philosopher."[1]

For centuries, Thucydides has been made to wear each of those very hats. Politicians and military personnel, historians, political scientists, and classicists have all laid claim, often in radically different ways, to his work and wisdom. Today, the *History* enjoys a status—in university curricula, among political theorists, and in military and policy communities—as a foundational source for theorizations of democracy, international relations, war, and human and state behavior. Thucydides himself might not be disappointed to know this, for toward the beginning of his *History* he announces that he has composed his work with future ages in mind:

> Perhaps the lack of fantastical material here will seem charmless to my audiences.

> Nevertheless, I will be content if anyone who desires to gain a clear understanding of past events, and of future events that will one day resemble the past more or less closely—human nature being what it is—finds my work useful. This work was composed to be a possession for all time and not as a showpiece to be heard for a fleeting moment. (1.22)

Of course, not everyone agrees with what Thucydides implies about the universalism of "human nature," a common translation for his substantive adjective *anthrōpinon* (which covers the range of human things—thoughts, behaviors, affairs, and so on; some translators prefer "human condition"). Nevertheless, ever since Thomas Hobbes published his 1629 translation of the *History*, the first English translation prepared from the Greek, Thucydides has continued

to cast a long shadow over Western political thought. Today, he is even more a staple of the political science than the history classroom, his *History* as often the subject of dissertations in international relations as in Classics.

Modern readings of Thucydides often shine the spotlight on the speeches that he attributes to his work's "characters." Those passages are especially rich in abstract reflections on war, human behavior, and what today we call political theory. It is also undoubtedly "in the speeches that much of the most explicit analysis of the nature of Athenian imperialism appears."[2] These speeches are, however, difficult to find collected together outside of translations of Thucydides' long, dense, and difficult *History* in its entirety. This volume seeks to make the speeches more accessible by presenting them together, in a new translation that is faithful to the Greek but which also aims to be fresh and approachable.

Here readers will find all of the speeches delivered before the Athenian Assembly ("On Justifying a War: Pericles' First War Speech"; "On Holding the Course: Pericles' Last Speech"; "On Realpolitik: The Mytilenean Debate"; and "On Launching a Foreign Invasion: The Sicilian Debate"), as well as the two best-known passages of the *History* as a whole: Pericles' funeral oration ("On Dying for Your Country: Pericles' Funeral Oration") and the Melian Dialogue ("On Ruthlessness: The Melian Dialogue").

The remainder of this introduction provides an orientation to the speeches, their author, his work, and his times; the last section will briefly discuss Thucydides' "Athenian thesis" and exceptional status in American political thought. This background is, however, simply intended to facilitate—and not to direct—analysis, appreciation, and critique of the speeches and the ideas that they develop.

The Rise of the Athenian Empire

Each of the speeches in this volume contains remarks upon the origins, validity, and character of the Athenian Empire, the very thing that the Athenians gambled when they voted to enter into war with Sparta. Any potted history of the rise of that empire would, however, be misleading, for the ancient sources—Herodotus, Thucydides, Aristotle, and other authors (including tragic and comic playwrights), along with inscriptions, buildings, artworks, and other material evidence—tell a rich but incomplete and sometimes contradictory story. Most of the surviving ancient evidence originates with Athens and Athenians, and already in classical antiquity some people were aggravated by the triumphalist "Athenian history of Athens."[3] Despite the impossibility of tracing a straightforward or objective picture, it will be useful to

approach the speeches with a general outline of Athens' rise to power in mind. The narrative that follows is based largely on Thucydides' own account in the first book of his *History*, in part because it is a primary source of our evidence, but also because its particular contours are programmatic for the rest of Thucydides' work. (References are to passages from the *History* unless otherwise indicated.)

Stirrings of Athens' expansionist ambitions can be detected just after the reforms of Cleisthenes in ca. 508, which established the basic structures and institutions of Athenian democracy. After a military victory on the nearby island of Euboea in 506, the Athenians sent settlers there to establish the city's first cleruchy—a kind of colony whose settlers owned the land but retained their Athenian citizenship—in the town of Chalcis. At the time, Athens was still politically insignificant;

in his *Histories* (late 5th century BCE), Herodotus recounts that when, in the first years of the fifth century, Athenian forces came to aid the coastal Ionian cities rebelling from Persian rule (the Athenians ethnically identified as Ionians), the Persian king Darius had to ask just who they were (Hdt. 5.150). Regardless of its historicity, the anecdote suggests that Athens' subsequent rise was perceived as rapid.

True Athenian hegemony in the Aegean region seems to have originated in the immediate aftermath of the two failed Persian invasions of Greece; the first dispatched by King Darius, the second led by his son Xerxes. Decisive Greek victories in the summer of 479 at the battles of Plataea (in the Greek mainland region of Boeotia) and Mycale (on the west coast of Asia Minor, opposite the island of Samos) effectively ended the second Persian invasion of

Greece, secured the liberation of the Greek Ionian cities, and turned the tide of war in the Greek coalition's favor. That coalition, the Hellenic Alliance, had been forged at a summit in Corinth three years earlier, just before Xerxes launched his attack on Greece.

Following the victory at Mycale, the Spartans returned home while the Athenians and other alliance members continued to engage the Persians. In Athens, work also began on rebuilding the city, which Xerxes and his forces had destroyed shortly after their victory in the 480 Battle of Thermopylae. Despite the Spartans' protestations, the Athenians rapidly reconstructed and expanded their city walls and finished fortifying the port of Piraeus. Thucydides ascribes these initiatives to the general Themistocles, the architect of the Greek victory at Salamis, who "helped to begin

establishing the empire" by encouraging his compatriots to continue investing in their newfound naval supremacy (1.93).

In 478, the Spartans sent the general Pausanias, who had led the Greeks to victory at Plataea, to command the still-united Greek forces in attacks on Cyprus and Byzantium, a city on the site of modern-day Istanbul. Pausanias came under suspicion of Persian sympathies and, according to Thucydides, lost favor with the Ionian Greeks "because he was violent." Just when the allies had asked Athens to assume leadership, Pausanias was recalled to Sparta to be investigated "for acting more like a tyrant than a general." The Spartans dispatched another commander to replace him, but when he arrived he found that the Athenians had already taken charge. Thucydides explains that, at that point, the Spartans were content simply to return home, as they desired "to be done with the

war against Persia and thought that the Athenians were perfectly fit to take charge and were at that moment on good terms with them" (1.95).

According to Thucydides, the Athenians were thus "invested with hegemony by the free will of the allies." This was the birth of what is now commonly known as the Delian League, a modern term for what was initially a confederation led by Athens. In administering the alliance, the Athenians instituted the office of the ten "Treasurers of Hellas," who were to collect tribute from the allies to fund the league's charter purpose of "avenging what they had suffered by laying waste to the lands of the King" of Persia (1.96). These monies were, at first, kept on the island of Delos, an Ionian sanctuary dedicated to the god Apollo, where the league's meetings were held. Certain island powers (Chios, Lesbos, and Samos) contributed ships in lieu of monetary tribute.

Within a decade or so, the alliance counted some two hundred members; that number would eventually increase by half. Under the leadership of Cimon, an Athenian general and statesman, the league became increasingly aggressive in pursuing its founding aim of attacking the Persians. Supported by their allies, the Athenians gained full command of the Aegean Sea. Yet as Athenian power consolidated, resentment brewed among other members of the league. The allies might have entered of their own free will into a coalition with Athens but leaving was now another matter. When the islands of Naxos and Thasos attempted to break free in the 460s, Athens violently suppressed the revolts—and set a precedent for the approach that it would take toward its "allies" over the following decades (1.98–101).

Athenian expansionism provoked the resentment of Sparta, and Thucydides records that a

Spartan plan to invade Attica was foiled only by a major earthquake in 464 (1.101). That earthquake in turn sparked a revolt of Sparta's serf population, the Helots, and when Sparta snubbed Athenian offers of assistance in putting down the revolt, tensions began to come to a head. By 460, Athens and its allies had entered into war with Sparta and the Peloponnesian League, an alliance that dated to the previous century. During the campaigns of this, the First Peloponnesian War (460–446), the Athenians continued to maneuver against Persia in distant theaters, particularly Egypt, where they had been asked to aid the Egyptians in a revolt from the Persian Empire. The Persians, however, managed to quell that revolt and destroy most of the Athenian fleet.

Hostilities between Athens and Sparta continued despite a five years' truce sworn in 451. Finally, in 446, Athens agreed to cede a number

of territories back to Sparta, and the two sides agreed to the Thirty Years' Peace. Athens continued, however, to come into conflict with its own allies, and in 440 a faction from the island of Samos attempted a revolt from the Athenian alliance. Byzantium followed suit. The Samian rebellion was crushed after the Athenians conducted a siege of nine months and both Samos and Byzantium returned as subject states to what by now was the Athenian Empire, in Greek the *arkhē*.

In ca. 454 the Athenians transferred the Delian League's treasury from Delos to Athens, and from then on one-sixtieth of each state's tribute payment was dedicated to the goddess Athena. Those amounts were inscribed and publicly displayed on steles, large stone tablets that are known as the "Athenian Tribute Lists," of which significant fragments have been found. Tribute came to be collected annually in the

days before the City Dionysia, Athens' largest festival and the occasion that saw the premiere of most surviving ancient Greek plays. The allies were also compelled to send offerings of the "first fruits" of their harvests to the Athenian festival of the Great Panathenaea, the city's celebration of its patron goddess.

In the *History*, both Pericles and Cleon refer explicitly (in "On Holding the Course: Pericles' Last Speech" and "On Realpolitik: The Mytilenean Debate") to the Athenian empire as a "tyranny," a conceit that was also sometimes fancifully dramatized on the Athenian comic stage (in, for example, Aristophanes' play *Knights* and Eupolis' lost comedy *Demes*). Athens attempted to maintain control over its subject states in a number of ways. It eventually demanded that all major trials be held in Athens itself, where in 461 the court system had been revolutionized and expanded by the Reforms of

Ephialtes. At some point between the 440s and 420s (scholarly opinion is divided), the city also passed the Coinage Decree, which outlawed the use throughout the empire of any silver coinage but the Athenian tetradrachm (the decree's efficacy is, however, a matter of doubt). Cleruchies continued to be established on conquered territory well into the era of the Peloponnesian War.

The empire also served as a conduit of Athenian culture. The Athenians regularly imposed democratic regimes on their allied states, which, also under varying degrees of compulsion, adopted certain Athenian religious and cultural practices. One testament to Athens' "soft power" in this period was the rapid spread across the wider Mediterranean, even beyond the imperial territories, of enthusiasm for the Athenian theater. The sheer size and complexity of the empire—and of Athenian approaches to

managing it—made for an enormous bureaucracy, much of which was administered by highly skilled "public" slaves.[4]

The figure that dominated the middle decades of the fifth century in Athens was Pericles, an aristocrat, politician, and immensely successful general. Thucydides' esteem for Pericles' talents as a politician is on display in his "Obituary" for him in Book 2 of the *History* (see the introduction to "On Holding the Course: Pericles' Last Speech"), where he observes that, under Pericles' leadership, the city became "a democracy in name, but a rule by the first man in reality" (2.65). There Thucydides also attributes Athens' ultimate loss in the war to the mistakes of Pericles' successors, who devoted their efforts not to the city's best interests but to their own populistic jostling. Texts from subsequent decades, especially Socratic dialogues by Plato, are more overtly critical in

their appraisals of Pericles, but unanimous in acknowledging his skills as a public speaker.

Pericles is credited with launching the city's massive building program of the 440s and 430s, about which Thucydides is notoriously silent. It often has been assumed that Delian League monies were appropriated for the program, though that view has lately been questioned; regardless of the actual funding source, these lavish structures—the Parthenon among them—served to proclaim Athens' status as an imperial city.[5] Sparta, on the other hand, remained an unwalled assemblage of villages throughout the fifth century. Early in his *History*, Thucydides reflects that, if Sparta were to disappear, later generations would forget just how mighty it had been. "But if this were to happen to Athens," he continues, "the sheer sight of [the ruins] would leave the impression that the city's power had been twice what it actually is" (1.10).

Yet what Sparta lacked in its cityscape was outweighed by the stability and soundness of its institutional foundations; by Thucydides' time, it had been operating under the same constitution for more than four centuries (1.18). In the *History*, Spartan moderation, adherence to tradition, and contentment with quiet peace are made to stand in sharp relief against Thucydides' portrait of Athenian rashness, innovation, and restlessness.

The Peloponnesian War

Thucydides submits that the "truest" but least publicly acknowledged cause for the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War in 431 was "that Athens had become mighty, which provoked fear in Sparta" (1.23). He therefore identifies Spartan worry over Athens' consolidated power as the "ultimate" cause of the war, but he also discusses a number of "proximate" causes.

The first was a conflict that flared up in 435. That year, a democratic revolution provoked the aristocrats of Epidamnus (west of modern day Tirana, Albania) to seek help from their "mother city," the island of Corcyra. When that request fell on deaf ears, the Epidamnians turned to Corinth, Corcyra's own mother city. The Corinthians, the Peloponnesian League allies of Sparta, claimed that they had obligations toward the Epidamnians and resented Corcyra's evident contempt. When Corinth dispatched a force to Epidamnus, the Corcyraeans petitioned for help from Athens, which agreed to join them in a defensive alliance. The culmination of the "Corcyraean Affair" (1.24–55) was a naval battle between Corinth and Corcyra. The Corinthians won an initial victory but backed down after thirty Athenian ships came to Corcyra's defense.

Not long afterward, the Athenians began a siege of Potidaea, a town on the Pallene peninsula (the first "leg" of Chalcidice) in northeastern Greece. Potidaea was a subject ally of Athens but retained ties with Corinth, which was also its own mother city. At the urgings of the Peloponnesian League, Potidaea revolted from the Delian League in 433/2; Athens responded by besieging the city. Relations between Athens and the Peloponnesian League thus continued to break down and, at the Corinthians' insistence, the next year Sparta voted to make a formal declaration that Athens had broken the treaty (1.87). The Spartans then threatened Athens with war if it failed to comply with a series of demands: that it end the siege of Potidaea, allow the island of Aegina its independence, and lift economic sanctions that it had decreed against Megara, a Peloponnesian

ally to Athens' northwest. When the Athenians refused to comply with any of these demands, Spartan emissaries issued a final ultimatum: "The Spartans want peace to continue, if you are willing to allow the Greeks their autonomy" (1.139). At the Athenian Assembly convened to discuss the city's next move, Pericles encouraged his compatriots to stand their ground (see "On Justifying a War: Pericles' First War Speech"), and the Athenians voted to go to war. Each side, then, cast the other as aggressor.

The conflict remembered as the Peloponnesian War broke out halfway into the Thirty Years' Peace that had been negotiated in 446. It unfolded in at least three discrete phases, yet Thucydides himself casts his *History* as the history of a single war and, with reference to that war as a whole, claims at the start of his work that he began to write "in the belief that it would be a massive one and more noteworthy

than those that had come before." He also notes that, before the war was over, all Greece had been forced to take sides.

The phases of the war are typically designated as follows:

1. *The Archidamian War*, named for Archidamus II, king and general of Sparta, and known to Thucydides as the Ten Years' War (431–421). This phase ended with an inconclusive Athenian victory and the unsteady "Peace of Nicias";
2. *The Sicilian Expedition* (415–413), which resulted in catastrophe for Athens;
3. *The Decelean War*, so-called for the Peloponnesians' hostile fortification of Decelea in the region of Attica (where Athens was located), and known to Thucydides as the Ionian War (413–404). This phase ended with Athens' definitive surrender.

Thucydides lived to see the end of the war (see below, "Thucydides and His *History*"), but his narrative breaks off in 411 (subsequent ancient historians of the war tended to begin their accounts where he left off). He does, however, express his opinion that the beginning of the end of the war was Athens' misguided invasion of Sicily, the so-called Sicilian Expedition (see "On Launching a Foreign Invasion: The Sicilian Debate"). Spartan reinforcements sent to aid the Sicilian forces turned the tide of that war in the "Greek west" and secured the Athenians' defeat. Of some 5,000 troops deployed from Athens, "few . . . ever saw their homecoming day" (7.87).

Despite the magnitude of the blow that Athens suffered in Sicily, neither Athens nor Sparta waited long to begin preparations for renewed war against each other. In 412, Sparta forged an alliance with Persia, which turned the tide in

the Peloponnesians' favor. Athens' allies now saw the city's substantially weakened position as an opportunity to revolt from Athenian rule. The final major battle of the war was fought at the Hellespont in late summer of 405. Under the leadership of their general, Lysander, the Spartans destroyed the Athenian naval fleet at the Battle of Aegospotami. In a famous passage of his *Hellenica*, the Athenian historian Xenophon, Thucydides' younger contemporary, describes the dread that the news of Aegospotami provoked when it arrived in Athens. The Athenians, he recounts, spent that night mourning the dead, but also "lamenting much more for themselves, worried that they would suffer the very things which they had wrought upon the Melians . . . and upon the Histiaeans and the Scionaeans and the Tornaeans and Aeginetans and so many other Greeks" (Xen. *Hell.* 2.2.3).

With no allies left but Samos, the starving Athenians finally surrendered to Lysander in the spring of 404. Sparta's allies were eager to see Athens suffer the very fate that its people had so feared in the immediate aftermath of Aegospotami. Yet Xenophon describes how it was, unexpectedly, the Spartans who refused to destroy the city on the grounds that they could not "enslave a Greek city that had done so much good when Greece had been caught in the greatest dangers," a reference to the Persian Wars. The terms that they dictated in the end required that Athens tear down its walls, give up all but twelve ships, allow exiled citizens to return, share friends and enemies with Sparta, and "follow the Spartans on land and sea, wherever they should lead" (Xen. *Hell.* 2.2.20). When the Athenian ambassadors communicated these terms to the Athenian Assembly, the people voted to accept. The Peloponnesians allegedly

tore down the walls of Athens joyously and to the accompaniment of flutes, "in the belief that the day marked the beginning of freedom for Greece" (Xen. *Hell.* 2.20.23).

Thucydides and His *History*

We know little about Thucydides' own life. He begins his *History* by identifying himself as an Athenian; its first words are "Thucydides the Athenian composed the War of the Peloponnesians and Athenians . . ." (1.1). He claims that he was alive for all of that war, and implies that, from its start, he was old enough to understand its events (5.26). He tells us that he was serving as elected general in 424, which means that he was likely born in the early 450s. Thucydides thus came of age in the brief but momentous era that saw the Athenian Empire at its height.[6]

When Thucydides narrates his own role in the war, he refers to himself in the third person

as the son of Olorus (4.104; Olorus was an aristocratic name associated with Thrace, the region to the northeast of Greece). In Book 2, he mentions that he survived the plague that devastated Athens during the first years of the war (2.48). In Book 4, he narrates how, in 424, he led the Athenian forces in an attempt to preserve the Athenians' hold on Amphipolis, their valuable base in Thrace. He was entrusted with the mission, he explains, because of his stake in the local gold mines and the influence that this granted him in the region. He arrived too late, however, to prevent Athens from losing Amphipolis to the Spartans under the command of the extraordinary general Brasidas.

For that failure, the Athenians cast Thucydides into exile, where he would remain for twenty years. That long exile was precisely what allowed him the peace and quiet needed to work on his *History* and to conduct inter-

views with parties on both sides of the conflict (5.26). The *History* shows full knowledge of the outcome of the war, which ended in 404; Thucydides is therefore assumed to have died in about 400. This is the extent of the biographical information that can be inferred from his work; additional details are furnished by later ancient biographers but should be treated with caution.[7]

Thucydides organized his *History* by campaign season—consecutive winters and summers of the war—and the text's arrangement in eight books is not his own. The work's degree of completion is still a matter of debate; some scholars have seen the lack of speeches in Book 5 (the Melian Dialogue is not, strictly speaking, a speech) and Book 8 as the result of the work's unfinished state.[8] In his extensive critical essay *On Thucydides*, the ancient critic Dionysius of Halicarnassus (1st c. BCE) noted that Cratippus,

Thucydides' younger contemporary and supposed editor, had commended the lack of "assembly speeches" toward the end of the *History* because he found their earlier prevalence "hindering" and even "annoying" (§16).

Modern readers of the *History* rarely voice that complaint, though they have often wondered to what extent the speeches are Thucydides' own compositions. Toward the beginning of his work, Thucydides provides this account of his methodology:

> As to the speeches that individuals gave both when war was approaching and when it was already underway, it has been difficult to remember precisely what was said, regardless of whether I heard the speeches myself or had them communicated to me by others. That is why I have recorded what I thought that each speaker

> ought to have said in light of the demands of the specific moment, though I have kept as close as possible to the complete spirit of what was actually said. (1.22)

Despite Thucydides' avowed commitment to keeping "as close as possible to the complete spirit of what was actually said," Pericles' first war speech ("On Justifying a War: Pericles' First War Speech"), his funeral oration ("On Dying for Your Country: Pericles' Funeral Oration"), and the Melian Dialogue ("On Ruthlessness: The Melian Dialogue") have all proven particularly vulnerable to charges of "inauthenticity." Whether these passages represent "what was actually said" by the speakers (we will never truly know), they remain challenging and illuminating for students of Thucydides, the Peloponnesian War, classical Athens, and political philosophy more generally.

The "Athenian Thesis"

The speeches included in this volume constitute a small fraction of the total number in the *History*, which by one count tally at 141 (a total that includes speeches in indirect, as well as direct, discourse).[9] This book also contains only "Athenian" speeches. That is not because the Athenians constitute the only side of the story worthy of attention, but because together their speeches open a window onto one particular community's influential and fascinating, but also extraordinarily tendentious and slanted, vision of the world and of itself.[10]

The Athenian speeches, along with the Melian Dialogue, are so often read, studied, and cited today in large part for their presentation of what has come to be known as the "Athenian thesis." That thesis has two parts: first, it is the *very nature* of people and states (and even gods)

to seek constantly to expand and exercise their power; second, they should not be blamed for doing so, seeing as it is simply human nature. A corollary to this thesis is that the abstract concept of moral justice has no real bearing in the realm of interstate relations.

The first articulation of such a thesis appears in a speech made by Athenians in Sparta, to Spartans and other members of the Peloponnesian League, on the eve of the war (that speech is not included here, but many of its points are repeated in speeches that are). In Sparta, the Athenians argue that they simply acted in accordance with "human nature" (literally the "human way") when they "accepted the empire that was handed to" them:

> We have done nothing extraordinary, nor beyond the realm of human nature, if we accepted an empire that was handed to us

> and refuse to give it up, hostage as we are to the three greatest motives of all: honor, fear, and self-interest. Nor indeed are we the first to behave like this, for it is a well-established rule that the weak are oppressed by the strong. (1.76.2)

This line of argumentation sets an early and unsettling tone for Thucydides' representation of the position of "the Athenians" and will be most explicitly reprised in the Melian Dialogue (On Ruthlessness: The Melian Dialogue), where they similarly argue, "Those in positions of power do what their power permits, while the weak have no choice but to accept it" (5.86). It is simply the nature of the world that both gods and humans "always seek to rule wherever they can" (5.105).

Due principally to the positions expressed in the Athenian speeches, in the aftermath of World War II Thucydides was adopted as a

forefather of the international relations paradigm now known as Classical Realism. That paradigm regards nation-states as rational actors engaged in constant struggles for power and security; it also assumes there is such a constant as "human nature" that can be used to explain state behavior. The "Athenian thesis," however, was not named as such until later, when University of Chicago philosopher Leo Strauss coined the phrase in his 1964 book *The City and the Man*. There Strauss read Thucydides' *History* as a work of political philosophy and pronounced that "Thucydides sympathizes and makes us sympathize with political greatness as displayed in fighting for freedom and in the founding, ruling, and expanding of empires."[11]

Strauss's readings of certain ancient Greek texts (including also Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Politics*) were to become profoundly

influential, and today Straussian interpretations of Thucydides are often cited as foundations of American Neoconservative foreign policy. Neoconservatism was born of dissatisfaction with the Democratic Party's "weak" foreign policy stance during the Vietnam War and the Cold War Era more generally: the first Neoconservatives supported socially liberal policy at home but still favored the containment of communism. By the mid-1990s (during the Clinton administration) leading "Neocon" thinkers were arguing that the United States' post–Cold War international role should be one of "benevolent global hegemony."[12]

To many of these "second-wave Neocons" Thucydides' *History* seemed to confirm the wisdom of the United States' aggressive promotion of democracy and other national interests abroad, including by means of military might (the Athenians, too, imposed democracy

on their allies; see "The Rise of the Athenian Empire" above). In a 2003 essay, Irving Kristol, the "Godfather of Neoconservatism," even called Thucydides' *History* "the favorite Neoconservative text on foreign affairs," a status that he attributed to the work of both Leo Strauss and Donald Kagan, a historian of classical Greece and conservative public intellectual at Yale.[13] Kristol's essay appeared just months after the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq; in the early years of the millennium Thucydides' *History* was regularly invoked in justifications of the American invasions of and wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.[14]

Strauss himself, however, had read Thucydides as condemning the immoderation of classical Athens. He argued that Thucydides saw that regime as "defective" and also "did his best to prevent Pericles' Funeral Speech from being mistaken for his own praise of Athens."[15] Many

have since read Thucydides as performing an implicit critique of the Athenians' Realism, hawkishness, and imperialism, a critique that seems to materialize largely through what Edith Foster has called "contrasting narrative illustrations."[16] Pericles' funeral oration ("On Dying for Your Country: Pericles' Funeral Oration"), for example, celebrates an idealization of Athens, but after that speech Thucydides immediately turns to a gruesome account of the havoc wreaked there by the plague—a picture of the city at its lowest. He also places the display of Athenian ruthlessness in the Melian Dialogue not long before his two-book account of the catastrophe of the Sicilian Expedition (see "On Launching a Foreign Invasion: The Sicilian Debate"), during which the Athenians suffered, in a manner of speaking, the consequences of their own thesis. Such contrasts are evident, however, only if one takes into account the en-

tirety of Thucydides' *History*; speeches, after all, account for only about 25 percent of the text as a whole.[17]

Despite the currency that Thucydides' name has acquired in American political discourse, biased political lenses serve to obscure rather than illuminate the text by magnifying particular aspects and conveniently obscuring others. In their own right, Thucydides' Athenian speeches offer a complex picture of classical Athenian debates about empire, war, and the city's place in the world. They also present a deeply troubling set of views on the nature of human behavior, imperial power, interstate relations, the reconciliation of might and right, and the relationship between thought, word, and action. But while Thucydides' speakers may perform explicit analysis along these lines, the wisdom of their reflections—both in their specific historical context and more absolutely—

will always remain a matter of debate. Nor should these speeches be read as evidence of what Thucydides himself believed: one must always bear in mind that, when Thucydides' characters speak, "they are doing so with something to say, something to hide, something to achieve at a particular time and place."[18] This challenging combination of revelation and concealment is itself one of the reasons these speeches are rewarding reading today, when many of the points and problems they raise remain as urgent as ever. Nevertheless, the reader who turns to these speeches in search of practical ancient wisdom is strongly encouraged to do so with the ultimate fate of Thucydides' Athens in mind.

HOW TO THINK ABOUT WAR