ΚΑΚΩΣΙΣ ΙΝ ΘΥΚΥΔΙΔΕΣ ΙΙ, 43 AND ELSEWHERE

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The interpretation of Thucydides II 43, 4-6 and, in particular, of the phrase ἦ μετὰ τοῦ μαλακσθήναι κάκωσις has often been the subject of dispute and seems to have puzzled editors as much as those who have to use their commentaries. At least one editor, Steup, found it necessary to resort to emendation1) in an attempt to provide a logical connexion between the last two sentences in the passage. This emendation, together with the necessity for it, Gomme rejected, also expressing his disapproval both of Steup's rendering of κάκωσις as 'the shame which follows cowardice' and of Marchant's as 'cowardice' tout court; he himself supported Haacke in taking it as an amplification of ἦ ἐναντία μεταβολή in the previous sentence (=condicionis in deterius mutatio) and offered the following paraphrase: 'if, through (or together with) μαλακία, instead of being free and proud citizens of a great city, we were to become subject to another or citizens of a humbled and impoverished Athens' 2).

In other words, the rough sense of the whole passage would be, according to Gomme: 'With the example of the dead men before you you should identify happiness with freedom, freedom with courage, and need have no anxiety for war's perils. For successful men are more justified than unsuccessful in disregarding their own survival, because survival may bring with it the risk of a deterioration in their own condition in the event of failure; any man of spirit would prefer sudden death, faced with courage and in the hope of benefit to his country, to that deterioration in his position which is attendant upon cowardice'. An antithesis between the condition and prospects of the successful and those of the unsuccessful is thus

1) <ἀλλ> ἄλγεινοτέρα γὰρ ..... 

Mnemosyne, XV
established in the second sentence and carried over to the third with the addition of the phrase 'to a man of spirit', which links up with the exhortation in the first sentence not to worry too much about the perils of war but to equate happiness, freedom, and courage and thus profit by the enviable example offered by the dead men who are the subject of the eulogy.

This interpretation leaves one with the suspicion that, though he does not himself attempt to translate the word κάκωσις, Gomme has been forced to strain its meaning in order to preserve, or establish, the logic of the passage, and that at a point in the speech where Thucydides' argument is of the loosest and his practical wisdom clearly at fault—unless we are prepared to accept the paradox that it is those with least to lose who take the greatest pains not to lose it and vice versa 1). On Gomme's interpretation κάκωσις must be akin to 'deterioration of one's position', i.e. the opposite condition to that normally associated with happiness, freedom, and courage, and is presumably covered in his own paraphrase by the words 'subject to another (sc. city) or citizens of a humbled and impoverished Athens': it is a material deterioration accompanying the moral deterioration of cowardice.

Other editors and translators are in general, if not always exact, agreement with this rendering of κάκωσις: while Steup renders 'Erniedrigung . . . Herabsetzung in den Augen der Welt' and Croiset 'amoindrissement (matériel et moral)', both of which approximate to Gomme's interpretation, Arnold translates 'distress and suffering', Stahl 'miseric', citing Hesychius' gloss of ταπείνωσις, δείσωσις, which would seem to bring us back again to 'humiliation'. It would be tedious to rehearse all the translations offered, but one at least is worth quoting, that of F. Haas, 'vexatio', a verbal noun which he must have intended in the passive sense of 'hardship, distress' (cf. Arnold, Stahl), but which might also have borne an active

1) Cf. the scholiast's comment on οι κακοπραγούντες: το νόημα παράδοξον και ἐναντίον τῇ κοινῇ συνήθειᾳ; he goes on to quote Theognis, 175 f. For a recent attempt to explain this sentence, which involves radical changes in the text, see R. Merkelbach, Kritische Beiträge 15 in Studien zur Textgeschichte und Textkritik (Festschrift Jachmann), 175 f.; I am indebted to Professor Verdenius for this reference.