
Classicists, speaking highly of perennial values in ancient literature, too often seem to forget that great literature never transcends the vicissitudes of time, but contains the very elements by which we are enabled to envisage some moulding factors of our own time-bound consciousness. The meaning of a κτήμα ἐς ἴσι in this sense is abundantly illustrated in this study, where Barry Goldwater, Harold Wilson, Vietnam, de Gaulle appear on the stage; it is written by an author who is a good philologist and historian, and who is at the same time deeply convinced of the utility and the lessons to be learnt from history.

The dangerous temptation to read our problems and our approach to political issues into Thucydides has been carefully evaded. „It is we, that do not want Thucydides to be neutral and power to be neutral“; all the fuss about Thucydides' own attitude towards Athenian imperialism and power is only a result of putting the wrong questions. For, as the author repeats again and again, „to seek power, is, in the eyes of Th., a neutral phenomenon; power is simply without moral content. With regard to power at least, Thuc. is not a judge but a reporter. There is no moral connotation implied in the trias of δέος, τιμή, and ὀφελία which oblige the Athenians to cling to their empire. The condemnation of Ian Smith by Mr. Harold Wilson, as a man merely bend on clinging to power, „to Thucydides and his contemporaries would have meant nothing“. Such healthy correctives against an over-moralistic approach do much to clear the ground for a better understanding of the great historian. The δύναμις of the Athenian people led to ἀρχή, and to πλασμόνια, a leitmotiv in the pages of Thucydides. Neither victory, nor the phraseology of power are wrong in itself, only its misuse (of victory in Melos, of phraseology in the Corcyrean στάσις). The loss of σοφροσύνη after Pericles' death led to a decline in means and methods; here Thucydides seems to become more of a judge. There is much truth in this, but we may put some question-marks which have been left out. Without the aristocratic virtues of Periclean leadership the people gave free rein to unbridled passions and infatuation which corrupted their power. The author implies that Thucydides did not like the virtues of the δημοκρατία, which produced the Athenian power he „liked and enjoyed“ (39). Is Thucydides so explicit as this? Even VIII 97 is a questionable base to build upon in reconstructing his political sympathies. I have the feeling that, like many interpreters of the historian, Woodhead is

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reading more into II 65 than is justified. One of the most vexing questions in Thucydidean research is whether the very development of the war, with its particular ἀνάγκαι, did not, in a way, belie the idea that the man who κατείχε τὸ πλήθος ἐλευθέρως could have forestalled the fatal development of the war. We may recollect the invaluable pages in the book of von Fritz devoted to this problem. One may also ask whether the development for the worse (leading to the abyss of Melos, Skione and the Sicilian adventure) was a real decline from Periclean standards or the démasqué of what was, from the beginning, implied in Athenian power. Andrewes was rightly, I think, reluctant about the first alternative (commentary on V 113, p. 184): “The concrete implications of II, 13, 2 are not reassuring”. I cannot help asking with Andrewes by what right the Athenians imposed their will on others, even for good. But such questions might be discussed ad nauseam.

I refrain from discussing the interesting chapters on ‘Power and the Individual’ (mainly about the ever intriguing personality of Alcibiades), ‘Power and the Military Machine’ (where Sparta’s conduct of the war is fundamentally criticised; they won the war, thanks to Persia, Athens and Syracuse), and ‘The Great Power’ (Persia, “a monolith with cracks known and exploited, but still great enough to be awe-inspiring”). To me, the most interesting chapter of the book is the final one on ‘Power and Public Opinion’. Here the author displays a very refined understanding of the interplay between the realism of power-politics and the moral codes influencing it. Political life, revolving around the requirements of expediency and advantage, needs the moral considerations that cloak the political designs in respectable nomenclature. By recklessly unmasking specious pretexts, Thucydides points out the driving forces of political life, but, by that very fact, seems to curtail some of its most important aspects. That the humanitarian feeling of the Athenian populace led to the decision not to murder the whole population of Mytilene, is only hinted at; it does hardly play any role in the famous debate between Cleon and Diodotus. W. thinks that in Thucydides moral words were kept distinct from τὸ ἔμμφάτων; only for popular consumption the distinction was blurred. He rightly acknowledges the fact that, by discarding this blurring, Th. may fail to give an accurate portrayal of the situation. “If a man’s life is essentially founded upon innocent falsehood, it is not correctly delineated or explained by an analysis of the truth” (p. 159). But he rightly states that not even the Melian dialogue, where all ἄλλα χωρὶς are absent, proves that Thucydides discounted the basic validity of δικαιώματα, and suggests (p.17) that the historian, in the vehicle of the Funeral Speech, accepted them.