

From Democracy in Name to Democracy in Practice?
Contextualizing the Transition to Oligarchy of 411 BCE
in Athens

by

David Jackson Barnett
Class of 2018

A thesis submitted to the
faculty of Wesleyan University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Bachelor of Arts
with Departmental Honors in Classics

Acknowledgements

To quote Allison Janney's 2018 Academy Award acceptance speech for Best Supporting Actress for her role in *I, Tonya*: I did it all by myself.

Of course, for me, as well as for Janney — who followed up this statement with “Nothing further from the truth!” and a laundry list of thank-yous — that's a big lie. But maybe it will make my otherwise very boring and dry acknowledgements a little more interesting.

To the Classics department: thank you for your constant support, your infectious love of Homer and ablative absolutes, and your ability to make the ancient feel relevant.

To my thesis advisor, in particular, Professor Eirene Visvardi: you have taught me how to write well and how to read Greek, how to love Classics and how to use TLG, and how to view the world through the lens of 5th century Athens. I am so indebted to you, and I promise not to forget my Greek after I graduate.

To my mom, dad, and brother: thank you for everything, from building a little pocket of the world in Alabama that I've come to appreciate more than I ever thought I would and for encouraging a reckless pursuit of all things knowledge.

To my fellow residents of 107 Cross, Eric, Dasha, and Rebecca: I've loved living (and procrastinating) with y'all. I hope we'll continue to tag each other on Facebook meme posts forevermore.

To Professor Lauren Caldwell: thank you for being my first Latin professor and for your mentorship. You sparked my love for Classics and I'm eternally grateful for that.

And now, a big long list of people I'm grateful for and people I love:

Celeste, love of my life, my first work-spouse and my eternal long-distance life-partner; Joanna and Safa, my irreplaceable Wesleyan crew from below the Mason-Dixon line; Margot, for Aristophanes, gossip, and your camaraderie from Greek 101 to the present; Caroline, Katie, and Hannah, for the straight month of friendship-affirming library solidarity in the month before theses were due; Torii and Marcos, for a restful and reenergizing spring break before the last month of this project began and for sweet friendship (and Torii, as well, for your southern solidarity); Lily, for unwavering support and tea-spilling; my friends on Twitter, for not unfollowing me when I literally only post about my thesis; Doug Jones and everyone who voted for him, for making me proud of and hopeful for Alabama; WesWings, for the Jackson Pail and for your love.

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Part I: Before 411	8
1: Pericles	11
2: The Sicilian Debate	42
3: Hope	50
Part II: The oligarchy of 411	57
1: The Athenians after the Sicilian Disaster	65
2: Alcibiades and the Athenians in Samos	71
3: Peisander in Athens	84
4: Hope(lessness)	106
Conclusion	118
Bibliography	120

Introduction

Around thirty years before Plato would write the *Republic*, in which he famously asserts that democracy distributes equality indiscriminately between the equal and unequal (*dēmokratia* [...] *isotêta tina homoiôs isois te kai anisois dianemousa*, *Rep.* 8.558c), the democracy in Athens votes to abolish their own government and to institute an oligarchy of Four Hundred men in its place. The setting of this vote is the end of the second decade of the 27-year-long Peloponnesian War, a war between Athens and Sparta and their respective allies. In 412/1 BCE, the Athenians find themselves bereft of soldiers, ships, money, reeling from their recent military disaster in Sicily.

The oligarchy comes to power in 411, instituted by a democratic vote in the Athenian Assembly after oligarchic conspirators commit acts of domestic terrorism. Much has been written about the violence of the oligarchic conspirators and its political effects. There is evidence, however, that the Athenian *dēmos* endorses a proposal to institute an oligarchy before any violence had yet occurred. This initial endorsement of oligarchy has been much overlooked in the study of the Athenian constitutional shift of 411 BCE despite its role in catalyzing that shift.

This thesis attempts to contextualize the Athenians' endorsement of abandoning their democracy in favor of an oligarchy by seeing it in a broader context of decision-making. Through a study of earlier democratic decisions during the Peloponnesian War, I aim to examine how a democratic society makes use of democratic processes to transition to a non-democratic government. I will begin in

Part I with an analysis of the *dêmos*'s decisions during the Peloponnesian War under Pericles's leadership, whom Thucydides praises as the "first man of this time in Athens, most capable in both speech and action" (*anêr kat' ekeinon ton chronon prôtos Athênaiôn, legein te kai prassein dynatôtatos*, 1.139.4). I will also examine Pericles's funeral oration, which eulogizes the democratic city. Then, I will address the Sicilian Debate between Alcibiades and Nicias, which results in the *dêmos*'s decision to sail to Sicily with a massive force that will ultimately be defeated.

In Part II, I will provide an analysis of the political, economic, military, and emotional landscape of the Athenians after the disaster in Sicily. In this context, a proposal by Alcibiades prompts a group of men to suggest to the Athenian *dêmos* that they abolish their democracy and institute an oligarchy. Thucydides's text explicitly states that the *dêmos* resists the idea of oligarchy only briefly before they decide to endorse it. My analysis will focus on this transitional point, which I suggest is telling of the *dêmos*'s behavior at a time of great crisis: the *dêmos*'s initial endorsement of oligarchy brings out aspects of democratic decision-making that suggest weaknesses in the Athenians' democratic system, and possibly in democratic systems more broadly.

Throughout my analysis of the transition in 411, I will focus on how democratic political processes during the Peloponnesian War are affected by ideology, changing circumstances, and collective emotion. I will conclude both Part I and Part II with a discussion of hope and hopelessness, suggesting that both affect and occasionally seriously limit the processes that allow for effective decision-making. I

ultimately argue for the importance of a well-founded hope for guaranteed survival and safety in constituents of a democracy; I suggest that, without such hope, a *dêmos* is susceptible to making potentially self-destructive decisions.

Thucydides's *History of the Peloponnesian War* (from here onward, the *History*) will serve as my main ancient source. In books 1 and 2, Thucydides provides information about the democratic decisions made under Pericles's guidance during the war; in book 6, he includes the debate between Nicias and Alcibiades about whether to go on the Sicilian Expedition; and in book 8, he details the aftermath of the Sicilian Expedition and the subsequent transition from democracy to oligarchy in Athens. I will occasionally supplement my analysis with information from Plutarch's *Lives* and the pseudo-Aristotelian *Athenian Constitution*.

My translations of Thucydides's *History* are adapted from Robert B. Strassler in the *Landmark Thucydides* (1996) and from C. F. Smith in the Loeb Classical Library (1919-1923). Quotations of the Greek come from the Oxford Classical Text (OCT) (1942). All Greek is transliterated.

The title of this thesis, *From Democracy in Name to Democracy in Practice?*, is a play on Thucydides's comment that Athens under Pericles's leadership was only "nominally" a democracy; he suggests that the Athenians really enjoyed the privileges of leadership by the "first man" (2.65.9), and their political atmosphere shifted rather dramatically after his death, when democracy became less the "name" of the government in Athens and more the rule of a *dêmos* without a "first man" as a leader. This thesis attempts to contextualize what initially appeared to me to be a very

confusing decision by the post-Periclean Athenian *dêmos* to abolish their democracy. It has been a rewarding project which has provided me with much insight both about the necessities of a well-functioning democracy as well as about the reasons a democracy may function poorly. While I do not make comparisons between the Athens of the Peloponnesian War and the modern United States, it is in this context that I have been researching, writing, and asking questions. While studying the constitutional shift of 411 has been a fascinating project on its own, it has provided me with a way of viewing many contemporary events that has been personally enriching and will continue to be important throughout my life as a citizen of a democracy.

Part I: Before 411

“Pericles indeed, by his rank, ability, and known integrity, was enabled to exercise an independent control over the multitude — in short, to lead them instead of being led by them; for as he never sought power by improper means, he was never compelled to flatter them, but, on the contrary, enjoyed so high an estimation that he could afford to anger them by contradiction. Whenever he saw them unseasonably and insolently elated, he would with a word reduce them to alarm; on the other hand, if they fell victims to a panic, he could at once restore them to confidence. In short, what was nominally a democracy was becoming in his hands government by the first citizen.”¹

Thucydides’s *History* presents the events of the Peloponnesian War and the ways it affected the Athenians. Book 8 of the *History* (the *History*’s final book) addresses the events that unfolded in Athens after the failed Sicilian Expedition and narrates the history of the brief oligarchic rule of the Four Hundred in 411 BCE, culminating with the subsequent restoration of democracy. As discussed in the introduction, my objective is to offer an analysis of the transition from democracy to oligarchy in 411 BCE. The introduction of book 8 clarifies the context that must be considered before studying this transition: the Athenians have been “utterly destroyed” at Sicily, and the news of this defeat has finally arrived at Athens (8.1.1). The beginning of book 8 gives us a glimpse at democracy in turmoil. Part of the Athenians’ response to the news of the failure at Sicily is their anger at the orators (*tôn rhêtôrôn*) who promoted the expedition and the diviners who had led them to hope (*epêlpisan*) that they would succeed in Sicily.

The failure in Sicily is the first event mentioned in book 8 and leads to the transition to oligarchy. In order to understand both Alcibiades as a leader (*rhêtôr*) and

¹ *Thu.* 2.65.8-9.

the response of the Athenians to the disaster in Sicily, we must first look back at the Sicilian Debate (6.8-25), which provides the speeches that Alcibiades and Nicias give at the Assembly concerning the specifics of the Sicilian Expedition. The need to study this debate in order to understand book 8 is clear, as Thucydides mentions it specifically in 8.1. Furthermore, earlier in the *History*, Thucydides cites the Sicilian Expedition as evidence for a decline in the quality of Athenian leadership after Pericles's death.

Thucydides's text emphasizes the importance of Pericles as an Athenian politician; after his death only a few years into the Peloponnesian War, the lack of a comparable leader is evident, at least from Thucydides's perspective. A feature of Thucydides's text that is worth considering is that Pericles's Assembly speeches are the only ones that are spoken alone in the whole of Thucydides's text (i.e., unlike the Sicilian Debate, in which Alcibiades and Nicias debate each other). This suggests that Thucydides believes Pericles to be unrivaled, signifying his position both among other leaders and among the *dêmos*. For this reason, studying Pericles and reconstructing his ideology and strategy in leading the *dêmos* is of paramount importance if we wish to develop an understanding of both the leaders and the *dêmos* later in the war. In Part I, I turn my attention first to the figure of Pericles and his three speeches preserved in Thucydides: his speech urging the Athenians to go to war (1.140-144); his funeral oration after the first year of the war (2.35-46); and his last speech, urging Athens not to give up after the plague has hit (2.60-64). The funeral oration gives a description of the Athenian nature; the other two speeches, on the

other hand, are examples of how Pericles urges the people to make decisions. Both will inform our understanding of Alcibiades and Nicias in book 6, to whom we will turn our attention after Pericles.

W. Robert Connor reminds us that the book 8 does not have a single character that stands out above the others: “We might expect that one or two of [the characters] might serve as a center of focus around which the events of the book might be arranged and given form. But no figure in the eighth book takes on the role that Brasidas performed in the fourth book or Nicias and Demosthenes in the seventh.”² Although it is impossible to follow the thread of a single character throughout the narrative of book 8, as different characters like Alcibiades, Peisander, and Agis take the lead at different times, it is possible to follow the thread of the presence of hope (*elpis*) throughout the book. Hope, occurring for the first time in book 8 in its first chapter (*epêlpisan*), is present in the Athenian citizens in many instances during which the *dêmos* is contemplating or making a decision: to borrow Connor’s language from above, the presence of hope can act as a (center of) focus around which the events of the book 8 are arranged and given form. The function of hope and hopelessness will be a primary focus throughout my thesis; in Part I, I will contemplate the presence of hope in the earlier passages from Thucydides, in order to see how it functions and changes in the earlier Thucydidean narrative and what structure it has developed among the Athenian citizens and leaders by the time

² Connor (1984) 214-215.

Thucydides reaches book 8, both through Pericles's speeches and through the Sicilian Debate.

1: Pericles

Pericles was an Athenian *stratêgos* at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War. Pericles's political history, however, began long before the outbreak of the war and ended rather quickly after the war began: he died from the plague in 429/8 BCE, living for only two of the 27 years of the war.³ Although Pericles had a political career before the onset of the war, we know few details about it.⁴ Loren Samons describes the importance of Pericles as a figure in 5th century Athenian democracy, and he suggests that much of the reception of Pericles causes his "mythologization" in the same way that Americans mythologize George Washington (e.g., that Washington could not tell a lie).⁵ Pericles was nevertheless an important Athenian politician by any measure: Anthony J. Podlecki argues that, based on the evidence left to us, it is "reasonable to suppose that Pericles' was an important voice in public affairs through the 440s and that, without question, he was the main agent in forming Athenian policy from the war with Samos until his death in 429."⁶

In Plutarch's *Life of Pericles*, one of our main extant sources, we learn of his political roots: his mother, Agariste, was the granddaughter of Cleisthenes, who

³ Samons (2004) 62.

⁴ *ibid*, 59.

⁵ *ibid*, 51.

⁶ Podlecki (1998) 133.

expelled the Peisistratid tyrants from Athens in 511 BCE (*Pericles* 3.1). Through his mother, Pericles belonged to the Alcmaeonid clan, which was one of the wealthiest families in Athens.⁷ Pericles did not want to be involved in politics: Plutarch attributes this to Pericles's fear that he would be ostracized⁸ because of his wealth and his friendship with influential people (7.1). Nevertheless, Pericles ultimately became a politician: "[T]hen at last Pericles decided to devote himself to the people, espousing the cause of the poor and the many instead of the few and the rich, contrary to his own nature, which was anything but popular" (7.2). Pericles developed appeal among the "multitude" (7.3), stopped spending time with his former aristocratic friends and his family (7.4), and allied himself with the masses of Athenian citizens instead of the elites.

Pericles's career makes it clear that he bridged the gap between the multitude and the elite: he had the favor of the multitude due to his devotion to them, and he had the favor of the elite due to his birth and wealth. His political activity shows another similar ability to build bridges: he connected the *dêmos* to the course of action that most correctly aligned with their needs. Plutarch details the evolution (15.2) of Pericles's political persona, writing:

There were times when [the *dêmos* was] sorely vexed with him, and then he tightened the reins and forced them into the

⁷ Azoulay (2014) 16-7.

⁸ *cf.* Azoulay (2014) 148-9. Ostracism was a "mode of control over members of the city's elite [...]. This was instituted following Cleisthenes' reforms; it consisted of exiling for a period of time any figure considered to wield too much influence. This limited the risks of a return to tyranny. The decision did not need to be justified [...]. In 485 BC, Pericles' father, Xanthippos, was ostracized, but he was recalled at the time of the Persian Wars. [You mean "at the time of Xerxes/ invasion, in 480"] According to Plutarch, it was because Pericles feared that he, in his turn, might be ostracized that he sided with the *dêmos*."

way of their advantage with a master's hand, for all the world like a wise physician, who treats a complicated disease of long standing occasionally with harmless indulgences to please his patient, and occasionally, too, with caustics and bitter drugs which work salvation. (15.2-3)

Plutarch presents Pericles as a political figure who advises the *dêmos* with an expert knowledge of the Athenian political system. Plutarch offers an analogy about Pericles's character: he leads the *dêmos* as a physician treats a patient. In the *History*, for example, we see Pericles "prescribing the bitter drug" of curbing the desire for expansion (1.140-144) despite Athens's tendency toward expansionism.⁹ Pericles is difficult to contextualize as an Athenian leader: considering the fact that Thucydides does not situate Pericles's speeches in the context of debate (as he does all other speakers in his *History*), we are given to understand that there was something quite unusual about Pericles's particular brand of leadership. Freedom of speech, or *parrhêsia*, was an integral part of Athenian democracy: any citizen could speak up in the Assembly for the purpose of debate.¹⁰ In Josiah Ober's opinion, Thucydides believes that the *dêmos* on its own cannot consistently or accurately "determine whether their collective interest [...] and the speaker's particular interests are congruent or where and how those interests diverge," because "they have no reliable method of testing for either quality."¹¹ Ober notes that, constitutionally, this is accurate, but "it leaves out the vital role played in Assembly debates by the skilled

⁹ *cf.* Ober (2006) 141-2.

¹⁰ Wohl (2002) 38.

¹¹ Ober (1998) 78.

citizen speaker, the *rhêtôr*.¹² Pericles, according to Plutarch, is a model *rhêtôr* with an expert understanding of the needs of his polis. His leadership appears to have mitigated many of the pitfalls of *parrhêsia*: the Athenians could rely on Pericles's advice and policy suggestions without fearing that his particular interests were incongruent with the interests of the *dêmos* as a whole.

Ober suggests that Thucydides's text can be considered an early example of (or the invention of) political science,¹³ which "sketched out a somewhat abstract theory of power, politics, international relations, human psychology, and collective action. The chronological narrative fleshed out the theory, by demonstrating how it worked in practice."¹⁴ The purpose of the *History* was didactic, and Pericles was a paradigm to be emulated.¹⁵ A deep understanding of Thucydides's text would allow the reader to become a "Thucydidean technical expert in political science," because the reader would come to understand the complex system in which he would take part. Ober argues that the "ultimate purpose of the text" is "to produce leaders with Periclean abilities."¹⁶ From Thucydides's perspective in the *History*, we see Pericles functioning as a leader whose presence is necessary, albeit not constitutionally specified or guaranteed. Because the *dêmos* made decisions based on oratory in the assembly, however, and because orators could advise the *dêmos* with untestable facts (e.g., in the Sicilian Debate, "Nicias tries to refute Alcibiades' facts with his own

¹² *ibid*, 79.

¹³ Ober (2006).

¹⁴ *ibid*, 157.

¹⁵ *ibid*, 155.

¹⁶ Ober (2006) 157.

better facts”¹⁷), an incorruptible leader like Pericles, who “never put his own personal interests above or in opposition to the interests of the community as a whole,”¹⁸ elevated the functioning of Athenian democracy. And after Pericles’s death, as Thucydides makes clear in 2.65, no one adequately replaced him. To develop an understanding of Thucydides’s text as a whole, then — book 8 included — it is clear that Pericles demands our consideration.

The shift after Pericles’s death is significant, and it is one of the most important reasons to study him. If we consider Thucydides’s text to be didactic, with the goal of educating the next Pericles-like leaders, as Ober believes we should, we must acknowledge that Pericles is alive only in the first 2 books of the *History* and that many leaders follow after his death. The development of a Pericles-like leader was not a constitutional function or guarantee of Athenian democracy. Ober reminds us that there were no elected representatives and no elite governing class in Athens.¹⁹ While Pericles held the office of *stratêgos* (general), this was not a governing office *per se*: the *stratêgia* was an annual office which commanded the Athenian military²⁰ and was subject to regular accountability procedures. At the beginning of the Peloponnesian War, virtually all Athenian political figures had at some point held the office of *stratêgia*. Roberts argues that the office was not in itself responsible for the creation of leaders with the qualities that Pericles had. Later, fewer emerging political

¹⁷ Ober (1998) 116

¹⁸ Ober (2006) 150-151.

¹⁹ Ober (1989) 7. The representatives of the people were chosen by lot.

²⁰ Roberts (1982) 352.

figures had held the office of *stratêgos* before becoming politicians; likewise, Roberts argues that the decline in the number of political figures who were formerly *stratêgoi* was not in itself responsible for the decline in Periclean quality leaders.²¹ The tension in Roberts's argument points to a conundrum in studying post-Periclean Athens: it is difficult to understand exactly what shifted in the Athenian political sphere.

Nonetheless, it is essential to understand the shift that Thucydides portrays after Pericles's death with respect to the leaders who follow Pericles — how Athens goes from “government by the first citizen” (2.65.9)²² to the “successors” who governed differently (2.65.10) and “the host of blunders [they produced], and amongst them the Sicilian expedition” (2.65.11). Thucydides does not treat the transition to oligarchy in book 8 in a vacuum: rather, he theorizes about a decline in leadership after Pericles's death which results in a multitude of disasters spanning nearly two decades before the rise of oligarchy in 411. I will return to Thucydides's assessment of Pericles in more detail.

While many scholars believe that studying Pericles through Thucydides is problematic and likely contributes to further mythologization of his character, Samons offers a useful note: “[Pericles's Thucydidean] orations as a whole have rarely been examined carefully as documents of Pericles' thought [...]. But at worst they represent what Thucydides thought people would believe Pericles had said or

²¹ Roberts (1982).

²² This claim is problematic, because, of course, Pericles's agenda required the *boulê* and the *ekklêsia* in order to take effect. Thucydides's text suggests that Pericles was the figurative “first citizen” of the government rather than the literal. See Farrar (1988) 164ff for a discussion of Pericles as the *gnômê* of the Athenian people.

might have said, and they are therefore, even on the minimalist view, the reflection of an acute contemporary observer's opinion about Pericles' ideas."²³ In this section, I will look closely at the three speeches of Pericles preserved in the *History*, connecting elements of Periclean thought and strategy as well as his funeral oration's authoritative presentation of Athenian nature, before turning to the Sicilian debate in the next section, attempting to pinpoint how and where the Periclean model of the ideal politician fails after his death.

1.1: Pericles's first speech, 1.140-144: the beginning of the Peloponnesian War

Pericles's first speech, delivered in the winter of 432/1 BCE, provides us with a glimpse into the structure of his strategy as a military leader in the Peloponnesian War. In this speech, we can see the way Pericles advocates for his position, using what I will call an evidence-based approach to develop his argument. Pericles focuses on the Athenians' qualifications that make them superior to the Peloponnesians, basing his position on the successful history of the Athenian navy.

Thucydides introduces Pericles as the "first man of his time at Athens, ablest (*dynatôtatos*) alike in counsel and action" (1.139.4), immediately signifying Pericles's high status as a politician in Athens. His first speech to the Athenians in Thucydides's account occurs in the winter of 432/1 BCE. Samons describes it as arguably being Pericles's greatest political success, due to its monumental

²³ Samons (2004) 62.

effectiveness.²⁴ While many of the specific causes of the Peloponnesian War remain unclear, Pericles's involvement in the war's beginning appears to be significant. Samons argues that Pericles's influence at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War had risen to the point at which he could assure Sparta's submission to Athens.²⁵ Pericles delivers his first speech after the Athenians have received a set of demands from the Peloponnesians because they had breached the Thirty Years' Peace (446/5) between Athens and the "Peloponnesian League" (i.e., Sparta and their allies). The agreement required that the Athenians not form treaties with the Peloponnesians' allies, and vice versa. Athens, however, formed a defensive alliance with Corcyra, a Corinthian colony (Corinth was a member of the Peloponnesian League), when Corcyra and Corinth fell into a war with each other.²⁶

In the speech, Pericles advises the Athenians not to concede to the Peloponnesians' demands, an action which will in turn bring about the inevitable Peloponnesian War. Pericles notes that "as circumstances change, resolutions change" (1.140.1), implying that the war will likely cause significant stress in Athens before it is over. Pericles holds that the Athenians should commit to not conceding and to

²⁴ *ibid*, 61.

²⁵ *ibid*, 124. Concerning the statement that Pericles "felt able to pursue an implicit goal of *his* foreign policy," we can turn to Ober (2006: 151), who argues that, as we can see through Pericles, "there was no contradiction between seeking *his individual good* and the *good of his community* [my emphasis]. Pericles' nature was entirely human, but his tendency to seek his own interests was framed by his political-moral insight that even (or maybe especially) under the conditions of modernity, the individual's best interests could only be secured in the context of a powerful and flourishing community." We can and, as Ober would argue, probably *should* consider Pericles's personal goals to be congruent with the best course of action for the goodwill of the polis.

²⁶ *ibid*, 124-5. Note that Corcyra's alliance with Athens was not *technically* a violation of the Thirty Years' Peace because Corcyra was a colony of Corinth. See Hornblower (1991) 66ff for a more detailed analysis of the implications of the alliance between Athens and Corcyra.

retaining such a resolve, presenting the options as either “submit[ting] before you are harmed” or “go[ing] to war [...] without caring whether the ostensible cause be great or small, resolved against making concessions or consenting to a precarious tenure of our possessions” (1.141.1). Pericles states his preference for the second option, arguing that concession would result in slavery (1.141.1). Later Pericles will claim in his speech after the outbreak of the plague in Athens that he did not believe Athens would retain its stable circumstances throughout the war (2.60.1). This first section of Pericles’s first speech, as Rusten notes, emphasizes the importance of holding onto the common resolve even if or when circumstances become more difficult (1.140.1).²⁷

After stating his objective — that the Athenians offer no concession to the Peloponnesians and go to war — Pericles adopts an evidence-based approach in his advice to the Athenians: “As to the war and the resources of either party, a detailed comparison will not show you the inferiority of Athens” (1.141.2). His “detailed comparison” includes references to the Peloponnesians’ relative inexperience in naval affairs (1.141.3-4), their lack of monetary resources (1.141.5, 1.142.1), and the frequent gridlock that arises in their oligarchic government (1.141.6). After describing the weaknesses of the Peloponnesians, Pericles states that “Athens is free from the defects I have criticized in them” (1.143.1). Nevertheless, he admits that the Spartans may well lay waste to some Attic land (1.142-3), saying that Athens “must vigilantly guard the sea and the city” (1.143.5).

²⁷ Rusten (1989) 197.

Only after detailing the circumstances that cause him to expect a victory does he acknowledge hope: “I have many other reasons to hope for a favorable outcome (*polla de kai alla echô es elpida tou periesesthai*), if you can consent not to combine schemes of fresh conquest with the conduct of the war, and will abstain from willfully involving yourself in other dangers; indeed I am more afraid of our own blunders than of the enemy’s devices” (1.144.1). This is the first mention of hope (*elpis*) in Pericles’s speech, and it tells us about the ideal structure of hope for Pericles. For one, Pericles structures his hope around evidence; secondly, his hope is conditional. The evidence consists of the detailed comparison of Peloponnesian and Athenian forces that he had previously illustrated. Here, we can see how Pericles uses hope in his political strategy: hope is secondary (i.e., *polla kai alla*), and it should follow evidence and deliberation, which are of primary importance in decision-making. It is significant both that Pericles invokes hope only after providing specific evidence and that he structures his hope around the condition that the Athenians not involve themselves in expansion or other dangers until the war concludes. We will return to other structures of hope in Thucydides later on, which will further clarify how Pericles’s stands out.

Ultimately, the Athenians follow Pericles’s advice and begin what will become a 27-year-long war with the Spartans. Pericles remains an important figure in the next few years of the war. As we will see next, his funeral oration provides valuable insight into the Athenians’ nature and behavior that is especially telling in our observations of decision-making processes.

1.2: Pericles's funeral oration, 2.34-47.2

The *History* presents us with a funeral oration (*epitaphios logos*) in the second book, delivered by Pericles in the summer of 431. The funeral oration is the second of the three speeches we have from Pericles, and it is important that this speech was part of a very different genre than the speeches delivered in the Assembly. Pericles's other speeches in the assembly concluded with a call to action in the form of a democratic vote. The funeral oration, on the other hand, honored the lives of those who had died in the war, and there was no specific action to be advocated for, but rather a call to preserve the vigor with which Athens had entered the war. Pericles's funeral oration is helpful in developing an understanding of Athenian citizenship and decision-making processes. The insights that it provides will be useful throughout the rest of this project.

Thucydides clarifies the necessary qualities the orator is expected to possess: “[W]hen the remains have been laid away in the earth, a man chosen by the state, who is regarded as best endowed with wisdom and is foremost in public esteem, delivers over them an appropriate eulogy” (2.34.6). Pericles hymns the city (*tên polin hymnêsa*, 2.42.2) in his speech. As Rusten points out, “One of Thucydides’ main concerns in Book I [...] was to paint [a ...] vivid portrait of the national character of Athens, and that task is completed by the Funeral Oration.”²⁸ Loraux argues that the funeral oration is not just for the men who have died but that it also “presents an

²⁸ Rusten (1989) 19.

ordered eulogy of the political system.”²⁹ In order to understand the importance of the funeral oration, it is helpful to address how the oration is authoritative. Nicole Loraux, Bernd Steinbock, and Victoria Wohl each provide analyses that inform my own interpretation, regarding the elements of the oration that offer insights into democratic decision-making processes.

Pericles’s funeral oration creates the paradigm of “hymning the city”: his is the first recorded oration that we possess. The structure of the oration begins with an idealized description of the city, with an evocation of its ancestral foundation: “For this land of ours, in which the same people have never ceased to dwell in an unbroken line of successive generations, they by their valour transmitted to our times a free state” (2.36.1). By beginning his speech with the Athenians’ ancestors, Pericles invokes the permanence and antiquity of the Athenian people and therefore situates the oration’s roots in the quasi-mythic past. But Pericles does not emphasize the autochthony³⁰ of the Athenians with the same intensity that later orators do. He rather focuses on the self-sufficiency of the Athenian individuals. Nicole Loraux argues that, by this focus on the Athenians’ self-sufficiency, Pericles’s funeral oration “aims to define an Athenian essence; but instead of basing the uniqueness of Athens on its mythical autochthony, it founds the superiority of Athenian man in the very [...]

²⁹ Loraux (2006) 220.

³⁰ “Autochthony” means “born from the earth.” See Ober (1993b) 485: “the Athenians believed themselves to be a collective nobility. All Athenians could trace their ancestry back to the earliest ‘earth-born’ inhabitants of Attica, and so all Athenians were ‘autochthonous’ and shared a connection to the soil of their homeland. In Athenian ideology, autochthony ensured a firm loyalty to the good of the polis and to the political regime that sustained it.”

hegemonic nature of the historical city.”³¹ By evoking the Athenians’ roots, he projects the funeral oration backward. The oration does have a historical background, but even without discussing the Athenian origin myth of autochthony as we find in other extant *epitaphioi logoi*, the oration’s historical roots are rather on par with the mythical *because* of the evocation of eternity: we Athenians have never ceased to dwell here, as far back as time immemorial. The discussion of the ancestral becomes a discussion of the contemporary, creating a cultural mythology of civic ideology. Loraux argues that Pericles’s funeral oration “arrive[s] at a praise of the Athenian *nature*.”³² The nature of Athens, in Pericles’s speech, includes its self-sufficiency: “each individual [could] prove himself self-sufficient (*autarkes*)” (2.41.1), and the city is “sufficient (*autarkestatên*) for itself both in peace and in war” (2.36.3).

Bernd Steinbock, moreover, provides a compelling argument for the function of the funeral oration. Steinbock writes about social memory — “the shared remembrances of group experience” — which he states is “a powerful force in every community, since it creates collective identity by giving individuals a shared image of their past, providing them with an explanation of the present and a vision of the future.”³³ Steinbock considers the funeral oration to be a carrier of social memory and that “the praise of past and recent Athenian achievements was not an end in itself but fulfilled a didactic function: the *aretê* displayed by the fallen and their ancestors was

³¹ Loraux (2006) 215-6.

³² *ibid*, 221.

³³ Steinbock (2012) 7.

normative, and all Athenians were encouraged to emulate their example.”³⁴ Steinbock illustrates that social memory and shared historical experience interacted with each other, with the collective ideology “determin[ing] which ‘events’ of Athens’ mythical past were commemorated” in the orations.³⁵ Thus, the oration, according to Steinbock, carries social memory and is a significant source of the Athenians’ knowledge of their shared history.³⁶

Last, Victoria Wohl argues that the oration is paradigmatic. She suggests that the oration “engenders what it names” by “urging the living citizens to emulate the dead.”³⁷ The oration thus “creates Athenian democracy: calling it by name, it defines it, denominates it, makes it real.”³⁸ One problem with studying 5th century Athenian democracy, as Ober notes, is that we have no theory of democracy that survives from ancient Athens.³⁹ Pericles’s funeral oration, though, can be read as a blueprint for the best version of Athenian democracy. The funeral oration can be read as a quasi-democratic theory that, as Wohl states, paradigmatically “crystallizes as an idea” of democracy.⁴⁰

Together, Loraux, Steinbock, and Wohl each suggest that the funeral oration has authority both in recounting and in shaping the ideology of the polis. Ultimately, Pericles’s oration speaks into existence what he speaks about, and the oration’s

³⁴ *ibid*, 51.

³⁵ *ibid*, 55.

³⁶ *ibid*, 57.

³⁷ Wohl (2002) 40.

³⁸ *ibid*.

³⁹ Ober (1993a) 81.

⁴⁰ Wohl (2002) 40.

didactic elements encourage the *dêmos* to respond to the oration's paradigmatic language and contribute to preserving the oration's ideal.

Pericles's funeral oration moves from an authoritative reflection on Athens's origin to a praise of the contemporary city. After imbuing his oration with didactic authority, Pericles moves forward: "But I shall first set forth by what sort of training we have come to our present position, and with what political institutions and as the result of what manner our empire became great, and afterwards proceed to the praise of these men" (2.36.4). Pericles attests that the Athenians situate their lives within a public/private dichotomy. People are free to live how they please in their private life: "[W]e do not feel resentment at our neighbor if he does as he likes" (2.37.2). In public life, on the other hand, Athenians "are restrained from lawlessness chiefly through reverent fear, for [they] render obedience to those in authority and to the laws" (2.37.3). Civic participation is of paramount importance to Athenian citizenship:

And you will find united in the same persons an interest at once in private and in public affairs, and in others of us who give attention chiefly to business, you will find no lack of insight into political matters. For we alone regard the man who takes no part in public affairs, not as one who minds his own business, but as good for nothing; and we Athenians decide public questions for ourselves or at least endeavor to arrive at a sound understanding of them, in the belief that it is not debate that is a hindrance to action, but rather not to be instructed by debate before the time comes for action. (2.40.2)

Participation in decision-making in Athens is not only a privilege of citizenship but also a duty. Being educated on relevant issues and concerns, or at least being

prepared to be educated on relevant issues and concerns, is required of citizens who do not wish to be regarded as “good for nothing.” Informed participation in political decisions is therefore a necessity for rule by the many. Pericles affirms in 2.37.1 that Athens is a city whose government is called a democracy (*dēmokratia keklētai*), with its administration “in the hands of the many” (*es pleionas*) and “not the few” (*mê es oligous*). Perhaps Pericles does not only believe that *Athenians* “regard the man who takes no part in public affairs [...] as good for nothing,” but that democracy itself has no use, or does not function appropriately, when there are citizens who do not participate.

Pericles reiterates the self-sufficiency of the Athenians after discussing the expected ways of conducting oneself privately and publicly: “In a word, then, I say that our city as a whole is the school of Hellas, and that, as it seems to me, each individual amongst us could in his own person, with the utmost grace and versatility, prove himself self-sufficient (*autarkes*) in the most varied forms of activity” (2.41.1). Athenian citizens live varied lives but all can effectively bring their self-sufficiency together as members of the decision-making body, the cornerstone of *dēmokratia*. In this section, Pericles asserts that his speech is as authoritative as mythology. “We shall need no Homer to sing our praise nor any other poet whose verses may perhaps delight for the moment but whose presentation of the facts will be discredited by the truth” (2.41.4). The reputation of Athens, Pericles assures his audience, will survive forever with authority that rivals that of canonical myth, claiming that the “self-evident power of the city, a ‘fact’ rather than the product of words, will establish the

truth of Athens' greatness."⁴¹ No Homer, no *logographos*, is necessary, because the *erga* of Athens are sufficiently evidential.

While the genre of funeral oration is very different from the other two of Pericles's Assembly speeches, we can nevertheless isolate a few aspects of Athenian nature and culture as they relate to decision-making *about* specific actions. Pericles says, "For in truth we have this point also of superiority over other men, to be most daring in action and yet at the same time most given to reflection (*eklogizesthai*) upon the ventures we mean to undertake; with other men, on the contrary, boldness means ignorance and reflection brings hesitation" (2.40.3). The reflection recalls the *dêmos*'s decision under Pericles to go to war in book 1: that decision was based on a thorough consideration of Athenian military resources compared to Sparta's. Pericles juxtaposes this Athenian tendency to be reflective with "other men," probably referring to Spartans. Pericles's speech thus raises the question of whether it is possible for a democratic government which lacks reflection (*logismos*, *eklogizesthai*, 2.40.3) to function well. Ober presents a dichotomy between *erga* and *logoi* that is evident in Thucydides's text as well as in Pericles's speeches. Thucydides privileges *erga* in historical reporting, and Pericles privileges *erga* in decision-making. But as Thucydides mentions, it is necessary to confront the fact that much of his understanding of *erga* has come from careful consideration of the *erga* reported to

⁴¹ Ober (1998) 84-5.

him in various *logoi*.⁴² Likewise, in decision-making, orators present evidence and arguments as facts, but these facts must be examined and considered by the audience in order to determine their accuracy and take account of their biases: to borrow Ober's words, the assembly had to make decisions based on "social facts" when they needed "brute facts."⁴³ In a participatory democracy, where decision-making is based on the problematic reporting of *erga* through *logoi*, Pericles's assessment that the Athenians exercise *logismos* and *eklogizesthai* suggests that the *dêmos* should be capable of making decisions even without incorruptible leaders such as himself.

We also learn about the history of Athenian military decisions: "And in fact our united forces no enemy has ever yet met, not only because we are constantly attending to the needs of our navy, but also because on land we send our troops on many enterprises" (2.39.3). Including this detail about the history of Athenian military decisions within a speech that discusses the nature of decision-making itself highlights an Athenian ideal: that their habit of reflection has not, and habitually does not, lead to a decision to use the whole of Athens's military forces in one military pursuit. Thucydides later, in his assessment of Pericles (2.65), mentions the Sicilian

⁴² *ibid*, 59-60. Thucydides "reminds the reader that his own knowledge of the *erga* was, necessarily, largely a product of listening to things said by others about what had actually happened in the war, and that these *logoi* were recounted by multiple witnesses, each of whom imposed his own ideological perspective on his narrative, and whose memory was imperfect. Thucydides' account of *erga* is thus based on biased *logoi*."

⁴³ *ibid*, 9. Thucydides "identified in [the relationship between democratic leadership, public rhetoric, and mass audiences of decision-making citizens] what he regarded as a key epistemological problem: the Athenians made important decisions on the basis of speeches they heard, and they created 'social facts' whenever they voted in their citizen Assembly. Yet the all-important distinction between these politically enacted 'social facts' and the unalterable 'brute facts' of nature tended to become blurred in the context of the awesome power wielded by the successful democratic state."

Expedition, which makes use of a huge portion of the Athenian military, contrary to the ideal Pericles states.

Pericles then praises and recommends consistently thoughtful and systematic political decision-making. In his first speech in book 1 (and in his speech after the plague in book 2, to which I will turn next), Pericles encourages decision-making based in *logismos*. In the funeral oration, he hymns the ability of all citizens, both individually and collectively, to make decisions with *logismos*, as an integral aspect of (idealized) Athenian nature and democratic culture and perhaps the goal of democracy itself.

1.3: Pericles's last speech, 2.60-64; the plague

After recounting Pericles's funeral oration during the winter of the first year of the war (431/0), Thucydides's narrative moves immediately into the summer of the second year (430), at which time the Spartans have invaded Attic land and a plague has appeared in Athens. In the writing that follows, between the end of the funeral oration (2.46) and Pericles's next speech (2.60), Thucydides details the severity of the plague and the domestic strife that occurs because of it. The ideal of the publicly-minded citizen which Pericles presented so passionately in the funeral oration devolves into lawlessness and selfish self-preservation when the plague spreads. Both the description of the plague and Pericles's subsequent speech are significant for understanding democratic decision-making in Athens, during a crisis in particular.

Pericles's speech during the plague will provide useful context as we study the decision to institute an oligarchy after the disaster in Sicily.

In describing the plague, Thucydides provides several details that help illustrate how the plague confounds reason. First, he notes that physicians are not useful, because what helps to heal one sufferer does nothing for another. He also writes that many "futile" religious practices, such as supplication, cease during the plague (2.47.4). There is "no ostensible cause" of the plague, and the plague attacks "people in good health" (2.49.2). The plague causes the body to burn violently, such that the sufferers desire to throw themselves into cold water (an action which Thucydides identifies with the pleasurable, or *hêdistia*). He states that this "indeed was done by some of the neglected sick, who plunged into the rain tanks in their agonies of unquenchable thirst" (2.49.5).

Once he describes the plague as it affected the individual, he further discusses how it impacts the city and social life within it. In line with his earlier comment about the uselessness of physicians, Thucydides writes that "[s]ome died in neglect, others in the midst of every attention" (2.51.2). This affects the interpersonal relationships of the community: "On the one hand, if they were afraid to visit each other, they perished from neglect; [...] on the other, if they ventured to do so, death was the consequence [i.e., from catching the plague while attending to a sick friend, 2.51.4]" (2.51.5). The plague rewards selfishness and self-preservation on the individual level: the most compassionate Athenians are those who had already suffered from the plague, because the plague does not fatally affect the same person

twice (2.51.6); others who had not been affected are not compassionate toward their family member or friend who is suffering, prioritizing self-preservation and fearing the possibility of infection should they attend to their sick (2.51.4-5).

The plague also causes a shift in the conduct of social, cultural, and religious practices. For example, funerary traditions become difficult to uphold. “All of the burial rites before in use were entirely upset, and they buried the bodies as best they could. Many from want of the proper appliances through so many of their friends having died already, had recourse to the most shameless modes of burial” (2.52.4). Aside from the breakdown of religious and burial norms, the plague also impacts the community’s respect for and adherence to the laws. “Lawless extravagance” (2.53.1), a general disregard for legal institutions, becomes rampant: “Men now did just what they pleased, coolly venturing on what they had formerly done only in a corner [...]. So they resolved to spend quickly and enjoy themselves, regarding their lives and riches as alike things of a day” (2.53.1-2). Consequences for illegal actions become unlikely, Athenians think: “[N]o one expected to live to be brought to trial for his offenses, but each felt that a far severer sentence had been already passed upon them and hung ever over their heads, and before this fell it was only reasonable to enjoy life a little” (2.53.4). The plague disrupts the customary legal observances and social bonds of Athenian society, replacing the traditional “fear of gods or law of man” (2.53.2) with a fear of death. Eirene Visvardi calls this new ideology “collective *anomia*” or collective lawlessness: a common social disposition that, “by its very

nature, undermines social cohesion.”⁴⁴ Pericles’s earlier ideal presented in the funeral oration of the citizen who is “good for nothing” (2.40.2) if he is not publicly-minded is called into question. During the plague, the behavior of the citizens undermines their very ability to coexist *as* citizens.

Thucydides ends his discussion of the plague with a note that the plague only appears to attack Athens and Athenian territories, and not the Peloponnesus (2.54.5). He then moves to a discussion of military strategy: the Peloponnesians had advanced to the region of the Athenian silver mines (2.55.1), and the Athenians want to march against them. Still *stratêgos*, Pericles “held the same opinion as in the former invasion” and would not let the Athenians march (2.55.2). Relying instead on Athenian naval power, he insists on sailing for the Peloponnesus (2.56.1) on a mission which would be unsuccessful in its intended purpose (to take the Peloponnesian city of Epidaurus, 2.56.4) but was successful in laying to waste several Peloponnesian coastal cities (2.56.5). During this time, the plague continues to ravage Athens and the Athenian army (2.57.1), which fails to capture the city of Potidaea and lost over one thousand of the four thousand hoplites on the expedition (2.58.1-3).

This is the context of Pericles’s next speech. Thucydides introduces this speech by focusing first on the audience. The Athenians, he writes, had experienced a great change in their spirit due to the calamity at hand: “Their land had now been twice laid waste; and war and pestilence at once pressed heavy upon them” (2.59.1). The Athenians were upset with Pericles, who as *stratêgos* was the “author of the war.”

⁴⁴ Visvardi (2015) 56.

They also deemed him to be the “cause of all their misfortunes” (2.59.2). Eli Sagan, writing about anti-democratic sentiment after the Sicilian Expedition in the last decade of the war, observes that, internationally speaking, “the loss of a major war always threatens the legitimacy of the reigning government.”⁴⁵ While the Athenians at this point had not yet lost a major war, they nevertheless find their numbers dwindling as a result of the plague, leaving them unable (in their minds) to respond to the external threat of the Peloponnesians. In this case, it is Pericles — the author of the war, the cause of misfortunes — whose authority is threatened.⁴⁶ “[The Athenians’] despair was now complete and all vented itself upon Pericles” (2.59.2). Pericles rises to the task at hand, intending to restore public confidence and calm the angry Athenians (2.59.3).

Pericles’s speech, therefore, addresses a fractured society. Ultimately, he proposes that the Athenians persevere in regards to the external and inter-state threats of the Peloponnesian War (2.64.6). In order to convince the Athenians not to submit to the Spartans — as is the national desire (2.59.3) — Pericles attempts to turn the Athenian *dēmos* into to a socially cohesive and law abiding state again. His speech addresses several other concerns of the Athenians before arriving at his concluding proposal of preservation in the war: a defense of his authority when the public

⁴⁵ Sagan (1991) 136.

⁴⁶ It is necessary to subtly reword Sagan’s argument so that it applies well to Pericles during the plague. Pericles’s legitimacy is not threatened *per se*, because the office of *stratēgos* is not threatened or thought to be illegitimate: it is an elected office. Ultimately, it appears that Pericles is defending his own authority to be and to remain *stratēgos*, rather than his legitimacy as a politician. This does not work completely: the Athenians will go on to vote him out of office briefly. See Azoulay (2014) 38ff for a discussion of Pericles’s authority during and after the plague.

sentiment is raging against him; the need to repair social cohesion by prioritizing the public over private grievances; and, finally, the best path forward in the war based on the Athenians' existing resources.

Pericles's speech begins with a defense of his authority and a criticism of the Athenian sentiment against him: "I have called an assembly for the purpose [...] of protesting against your being unreasonably irritated with me, or cowed by your sufferings" (2.60.1). He states that he is "second to no man" regarding his knowledge of public policy (2.60.5), asserting his authority to be a leader of the *dêmos*. He later states that, if the assembly thought his advice was good when making the decision to go to war (*cf.* 1.140-144), they should not now charge him with wrongdoing (2.60.7). Pericles's authority is at stake as a result of the calamity of the plague, and he does not expect the public to judge his advice and act upon it unless they are convinced that he is as worth listening to now as he was worth listening to earlier, when he advised that Athens go to war against the Peloponnesians. Interestingly, Pericles's defense of himself as an authoritative leader reappears as a thread throughout the speech (2.61.2, 2.64.1), emphasizing Sagan's comment's applicability here: clearly, Pericles feels that his standing as a political figure is threatened due to the events of the plague. The authority of the advice that he gives in this speech depends on the Athenians' acceptance of him as an authoritative figure. This is his rhetorical strategy: we will see later, in 2.65, how the Athenians respond to it.

Next, Pericles addresses the lack of social cohesion and the need to repair it by prioritizing the public over the private. The funeral oration attests to the ability of

the Athenians to be publicly minded. During the plague, on the other hand, the private is linked to pleasure and self-preservation, ultimately connecting the private to the good (if the good and the pleasurable are connected) more than the public.⁴⁷ Pericles says, very shortly into the speech: “I am of the opinion that national greatness is more to the advantage of private citizens than any individual well-being coupled with public humiliation. A man may be personally ever so well off, and yet if his country be ruined he must be ruined with it; whereas a flourishing commonwealth always affords chances of salvation to unfortunate individuals” (2.60.2-3). Pericles calls into question the prioritization of self-preservation over and at the expense of the social cohesion of the polis: when a citizen’s polis is ruined, even if the individual is “ever so well off,” he will be ruined with his city. This section of the speech introduces (although not explicitly) the need to take a risk. While it remains possible that prioritizing the commonwealth will result in calamity for the individual, the alternative is much worse: a destroyed commonwealth can in no way support private individuals in and through their misfortune. By committing to preserve or prioritize the commonwealth, individual citizens take a risk that, to Pericles, is not only worth taking but necessary to take. He says: “[I]t is surely the duty of everyone to be forward in [the state’s] defense, and not like you to be so confounded with your domestic afflictions as to give up all thoughts of the common safety (*tou koinou tês sôtêrias*), and to blame me for having counselled war and yourselves for having voted it” (2.60.4).

⁴⁷ cf. Visvardi (2015) 54ff.

After this, Pericles shifts his focus to the war. The Athenians must not prioritize their domestic safety — the afflictions affecting the individuals — over the safety of the commonwealth: as we learn from the next part of Pericles’s speech, the safety of the commonwealth requires the Athenians’ (re)commitment to persevere in the Peloponnesian War. Pericles here asserts that the Athenians have two options: “submission with a loss of independence” versus “danger,” or perseverance in the war, “with the hope of preserving that independence.” The preservation of independence is not guaranteed, but it is better nevertheless to take the risk (2.61.1). Perseverance, Pericles notes, provides a reward that is “remote and obscure” (2.61.2), suggesting that he understands the inability of the Athenians to visualize its advantage. He appeals to the nature of the Athenians (that he so emphasized in the funeral oration) in his advice: “Born, however, as you are, citizens of a great state, and brought up, as you have been, with habits equal to your birth, you should be ready to face the greatest disasters and still to keep unimpaired the luster of your name. [...] Cease then to grieve for your private afflictions, and address yourselves instead to the safety of the commonwealth (*tou koinou tês sôtêrias*)” (2.61.4). Here, Pericles begins to define *sôtêria tou koinou*: *sôtêria*, translated by Crawley as “safety,” is here the preservation of independence; and the opposite of *sôtêria* is submission with a loss of independence. Preservation of the democracy includes independence for each member of the *dêmos*, whereas submission to the Peloponnesians results in the loss of independence. Pericles asserts that *sôtêria*

requires the Athenians (re)committing to show the same resolve now as when they entered the war.

After explaining the need to persist in the war, Pericles turns his attention to the question of *how* to best go about winning the war. Instead of “shrink[ing] before the exertions which the war makes necessary, and fear[ing] that after all they may not have a happy result” (2.62.1), Pericles advises that the Athenians consider where the “greatness of [their] dominion” (2.62.1) lies and focus their offensive war efforts there. The Athenians are “completely supreme” over the Peloponnesians in their navy, “not merely as far as [they] use it at present, but also to what further extent [they] may think fit” (2.62.2). Focusing efforts on the navy may result in loss of land and real estate, but Pericles states that these losses are recoverable: “You should know too that liberty (*eleutherian*) preserved by your efforts will easily recover for us what we have lost, while, the knee once bowed, even what you have will pass from you” (2.62.3). After his discussion of the Athenians’ naval ability, Pericles talks about the spirit of the public, more specifically, how the public can gather its courage: “And where the chances are the same, knowledge fortifies courage by the contempt which is its consequence, its trust being placed, not in hope (*elpidi*), which is the prop of the desperate (*hês en tôi aporôi hê ischys*), but in a judgement (*gnômêi*) grounded upon existing resources (*apo tôn hyparchontôn*), whose anticipations are more to be depended upon” (2.62.5). Pericles interjects a clear-eyed belief that hope is insufficient as a basis for action and that the action at hand (perseverance in the war)

can justifiably be carried out based in a knowledge of *ta hyparchonta*, the existing resources of Athens's powerful navy.

Once Pericles has established what he considers to be the best plan of action for perseverance in the war, he again discusses the reasons why perseverance is necessary. On the one hand, the Athenians owe their country their services, because they share the common pride that comes from the empire and therefore must devote themselves as well to burdens that arise from the continuation of its prominence (2.63.1). On the other hand, it is not an option to recede: the Athenians hold a tyranny; "to take it perhaps was wrong, but to let it go is unsafe (*apheinai de epikindynon*)" (2.63.2). Here, again, Pericles invokes the idea of *sôtêria*: safety comes from being subject to no one; danger, on the other hand, arises with a loss of independence. Safety is not merely survival: to survive without independence is equatable to living in a state of danger (*epikindynon*).

In his speech's final sentences, Pericles echoes its beginning: he reminds the Athenians that they should not be angry with him, because he voted for war just as they did, and that the plague is the only point that his earlier advice did not calculate (2.64.1). He moves from his earlier discussion of the superiority of Athens's navy to a possibility of Athens's superiority in general if they carry on, through the present calamity, until they win the war: "Remember, too, that if your country has the greatest name in all the world, it is because she never bent before disaster" (2.64.3). He ends his speech with a call to action: "[D]o not send heralds to Sparta, and do not betray any sign of being oppressed by your present sufferings, since they whose minds are

least sensitive to calamity, and whose hands are most quick to meet it, are the greatest men and the greatest communities” (2.64.6). Pericles, in his final Thucydidean speech to the Assembly, has attempted to reset the public mind of the Athenians, addressing the public sentiment against his own legitimacy as a leader, emphasizing the need for social cohesion in the face of the domestic and international threats at hand, and voicing support for a clear path forward that relies on the existing resources of Athens’s superior navy.

1.4: Thucydides’s assessment of Pericles

At 2.65 of the *History*, Thucydides offers an assessment of Pericles as a political figure. After his last speech, Pericles is expelled from his position as *stratêgos* (2.65.4). On the public level, however, the Athenians follow Pericles’s advice and cease negotiations between the Spartans, but they retaliate against Pericles by fining him.⁴⁸ The Athenians reelect him as *stratêgos*, but he dies from the plague shortly after (2.65.4). Thucydides then offers a reflection on Pericles’s life and the effect he had on Athens’s democracy as a politician.

Here Thucydides writes retrospectively, acknowledging his awareness of the outcome of the war: the assessment reflects on how Pericles’s death and the Athenians’ neglect to follow his advice, beyond his instruction to cease negotiation

⁴⁸ Nichols (2015) 41.

with the Spartans,⁴⁹ both play into Athens's ultimate loss in the Peloponnesian War. This section suggests that Thucydides is both a historian and a member of the collective Athenian citizen body, for whom the loss of the Peloponnesian War is significant: Thucydides has an opinion about the ending of the Peloponnesian War, and he gives it to us very explicitly in 2.65 and as an undertone, at the very least, throughout the entirety of the *History*.

Thucydides first discusses Pericles's life and leadership. He writes that Pericles "pursued a moderate and conservative policy" in his leadership and that "when the war broke out" he "rightly gauged the power of his country" (2.65.5). Each of these elements echoes the evidence-based approach to decision-making which I have argued Pericles advocated and used during his leadership. He next enters into a reflection on Pericles's life based on his own experience and understanding of the war as a completed whole. Thucydides writes, "[T]he correctness of his foresight concerning the war became better known after his death" (2.65.6). Here, Thucydides says, Athens went wrong: they did not do as Pericles advised, which was "to wait quietly, to pay attention to their marine, to attempt no new conquests, and to expose the city to no hazards during the war" (2.65.7). Thucydides discusses the change in the behavior of politicians after Pericles's death: the Athenians "allow[ed] private ambitions and private interests, in matters apparently quite foreign to the war, to lead them into projects unjust both to themselves and to their allies — projects whose success would only conduce to the honor and advantage of private persons, and

⁴⁹ *ibid*, 42.

whose failure entailed certain disaster on the country in the war” (2.65.7). Following this statement, Thucydides provides some specific examples, naming the calamitous Sicilian Expedition as a primary instance of failure of leadership.

Thucydides draws a stark contrast between Pericles and his successors. Rusten notes, “It is difficult to generalize about such a diverse group of politicians as Cleon, Hyperbolus, Nicias, Alcibiades, Phrynichus, Peisander, and Theramenes [...]; but it became a commonplace in antiquity to suggest that none of them remotely matched Pericles [...], and [Thucydides] expands this idea into a general explanation of Athens’ defeat.”⁵⁰ In his estimation of Pericles’s superiority over later politicians, Thucydides famously attributes a quality to Pericles that Plutarch will later repeat: Pericles had the ability “to lead [the multitude] instead of being led by them; for as he never sought power by improper means, [he] was never compelled to flatter them, but, on the contrary, enjoyed so high an estimation that he could afford to anger them by contradiction” (2.65.8). Thucydides suggests that the Athenian democracy was, “in short, [...] nominally a democracy,” because it was “government by the first citizen” under Pericles’s leadership (2.65.9-10). After Pericles’s death, democracy in name would become democracy in practice.

Thucydides’s portrayal of the paradigmatic politician ends abruptly with Pericles’s death: he raises the question of whether the ultimate failure of the Peloponnesian War was due to the decline in the quality of political figures after Pericles. While Pericles’s death is significant in Thucydides’s understanding of the

⁵⁰ Rusten (1989) 209.

events of the war, Rusten reminds us that Thucydides in this lengthy chapter does not intend to present a detailed analysis of Athenian failures but rather provides a “eulogy of one leader’s contribution.”⁵¹ Though Thucydides clearly shows a preference toward Pericles in 2.65, “he does not go so far as to say that, if Pericles had survived, Athens would definitely have won [the war].”⁵² Thus, Thucydides leaves the readers of his *History* with a large task: to come up with their own understanding of the shift after Pericles’s death and its effect on the rest of the war.

2: The Sicilian Debate

The Sicilian Debate follows many years of stability and peace during the Peloponnesian War, in which the Athenians decide whether to go on an imperialist and expansionist expedition to Sicily. Thucydides writes about the two major figures who are involved in the Athenians’ decision to go to Sicily: Alcibiades, a bombastic young man, and Nicias, an older and much more conservative politician. In 415 BCE, Athens’s allies in Sicily are dealing with threats from the Spartan colony of Syracuse and are seeking help from the Athenians. Thucydides’s narrative focuses on the point after which the Athenians have already decided to help the Sicilians: Nicias believes the decision to go to Sicily is unwise, and he wishes to hold a second vote.⁵³ Thucydides prefaces the Sicilian Expedition by discussing the “archaeology” of Sicily

⁵¹ Rusten (1989) 212.

⁵² *ibid*, 213.

⁵³ Saxonhouse (2006) 163ff.

(6.2-5). As David Smith notes, the information about Sicily was “false knowledge,” which would cause “confusion and upheaval” in the Sicilian Debate.⁵⁴

The Sicilian Debate is an example of a democratic process of decision-making that showcases how leaders manipulate and inflect facts through their personal goals. Earlier, I referred to Wohl’s comment that democracy in Athens was built on oratory and the principle of *parrhêsia*, and I argued that that worked well under Pericles’s leadership. The Sicilian Expedition, on the other hand, displays the difficulty of successful debate without a Periclean leader: “The Funeral Oration ideal, which elides the difficulty of moving from political speech in a democracy to effective action, here reaches its telos: speech becomes more than just a spur to action; with the enactment of the decree authorizing the great expedition, speech is isomorphic with action.”⁵⁵ Abandoning their process of reasoning or *eklogizesthai*, the *dêmos* acts just as Alcibiades tells them to. The debate, which leads to the failed campaign in Sicily, begins the path to the transition from democracy to oligarchy in 411.

According to Nicias, the war in Sicily does not pertain to the Athenians (6.9.1), and helping Sicily is an “ambition not easily accomplished” (6.9.3). Nicias cites the precarious peace treaty with Sparta (421 BCE, now ironically known as The Peace of Nicias), and he expresses his fear that the Athenian military, weakened with part of its force in Sicily, would be vulnerable to the Spartans if the peace should fail (6.10.1-3). Nicias suggests that the Athenians ought to direct their attention to their

⁵⁴ Smith (2004) 46.

⁵⁵ Ober (1989) 116.

own problems instead of helping the Sicilians: “A man ought [...] not to think of running risks with a country placed so critically, or of grasping at another empire before we have secured the one we have already” (6.10.5). This statement recalls Pericles’s early advice (1.144) to avoid expansionism. Unfortunately, Nicias’s hesitations, while justifiable and well-reasoned, lose much of their authority when he indirectly criticizes Alcibiades, one of the potential leaders of the expedition, for his age.⁵⁶ Nicias is one of few who speak out against the expedition (6.15.1), but he is unable to persuade the people against going, which Thucydides suggests would likely have been the best course of action. Ober offers a comparison between Nicias and Pericles here: “According to Thucydides Pericles had been able to restrain the Athenians from ultimately imperial adventures, but it is not at all clear that Nicias will be up to the Periclean standard in terms of moral authority or rhetorical finesse.”⁵⁷ In the process of speaking out, Nicias creates an enemy in Alcibiades, who Thucydides says “wished to thwart Nicias both as his political opponent and also because of the attack he had made upon him in his speech” (6.15.2). In his own speech, Alcibiades challenges Nicias’s claim against his young age and economic flamboyance, saying: “The things for which I am abused bring fame to my ancestors and to myself, and also profit to my country” (6.16.1). Alcibiades further assures the

⁵⁶ 6.12.2: “And if there be any man here, overjoyed at being chosen to command, who urges you to make the expedition, merely for ends of his own — especially if he is still too young to command — who seeks to be admired for his stud of horses, but on account of heavy expenses hopes for some profit from his appointment, do not allow such a one to maintain his private splendor at his country’s risk, but remember that such persons injure the public fortune while they squander their own, and that this is a matter of importance, and not for a young man to decide or hastily to take in hand.”

⁵⁷ Ober (1998) 107.

Athenians of his superiority, and that it is not wrong to “refuse to be upon an equality with the rest” (6.16.4). He moves on, stating that the empire should constantly desire to expand, and therefore that forging its way into Sicily is a necessary and good objective; he also reminds the Athenians that they are bound to their allies in Sicily (6.18). He concludes his speech by encouraging the Athenians not to let Nicias’s distrust of young people dissuade them from voting in favor of the expedition.

Nicias realizes that he is losing, and he attempts again to dissuade the Athenians from the expedition by suggesting that they will not succeed unless they mobilize their entire military along with hoplites of their allies (6.20-22). “The Athenians,” Thucydides writes,

far from having their enthusiasm for the voyage destroyed by the burdensomeness of the preparations, became more eager for it than ever; and just the contrary took place of what Nicias had thought, as it was held that he had given good advice, and that the expedition would be the safest in the world. Everyone fell in love with the enterprise (*kai erôs enepese tois pasin homoiôs ekpleusai*). The older men thought that they would either subdue the places against which they were to sail, or at all events, with so large a force, meet with no disaster; those in the prime of life felt an ongoing for foreign sights and spectacles, and had no doubt that they should come safe home again (*euelpides ontēs sôthêsesthai*); while the idea of the common people and the soldiery was to earn wages at the moment, and make conquests that would supply a never-ending fund of pay for the future. With this enthusiasm of the majority, the few that did not like it feared to appear unpatriotic by holding up their hands against it, and so kept quiet. (6.24.2-4)

Nicias, according to Ober, “embark[s] on a deceitful rhetorical strategy,” accepting “the claim that even the best democratic politician will be unable to accomplish anything good except by deception. But in the event, Nicias’ deception results in evil

outcomes for the Athenians.”⁵⁸ The Sicilian Debate, then, turns into an extreme version of the problematic democratic contests of debate that Thucydides spends so much of the *History* discussing: Nicias and Alcibiades “solve the political/epistemological dilemma posed by Thucydides [...] by rejecting contradiction and combining Alcibiades’ argument that there must be an expedition with Nicias’ argument that it must be impossibly huge.”⁵⁹ In addition to the poor knowledge of the *dêmos* that had caused an inaccurate understanding of the Sicilian “archaeology,” Smith argues that the Athenians did not really even know why they were going to Sicily even after making their decision. “[T]he over-abundance of points of view about Sicily and the reasons for invading it given throughout the beginning of Book Six are consciously designed to make the reader feel like they are not sure what the real reason [for the expedition] was.”⁶⁰ Based on 6.24.3 alone, Smith cites four different reasons for the Athenians to go on the expedition: the old men believe they will not be harmed; the young men have a desire to see the foreign land; everyone involved in the expedition thinks that they will get paid for their services; and, similarly, everyone thinks that the empire will earn more money if they successfully conquer Sicily.⁶¹

Wohl, moreover, argues that Alcibiades leads the people with a *philotimia* (“the thirst for honor that leads aristocrats to use their wealth for the good of the

⁵⁸ Ober (1998) 113.

⁵⁹ *ibid*, 116.

⁶⁰ Smith (2004) 47.

⁶¹ *ibid*, 46-7.

city”⁶²) that becomes tyrannical: “In his speech in support of the Sicilian Expedition, he unabashedly argues for the public benefit derived from his quest for personal honor. [...] His opponent Nicias has a different interpretation: Alcibiades wants to glorify himself and raise money for his costly pleasures at the public expense [...] and to reap private benefit from disastrous public policies.”⁶³ Alcibiades’s personal goals are incompatible with those of the polis; Nicias’s personal goals are incompatible with the advice he gives. The politicians’ failures and weakness combine to create a very problematic course of action. Subsequently, the Athenians choose to carry out the Sicilian expedition, with devastating results, as we see in book 8 of the *History*. Before moving into an analysis of hope in the final book of the *History*, some specific details of Alcibiades’s and Nicias’s speeches warrant further analysis.

Nicias delivers a pragmatic first speech in the sixth book. He states, for example, that the war in Sicily is not Athens’s business (6.9.1), that defeat in Sicily would result in Athens’s vulnerability to other hostile states (6.10.1-2), and that Sicily cannot and will not repay Athens for its assistance (6.12.1). Alcibiades’s rebuttal (6.16-18) only addresses Nicias’s attack on Alcibiades’s age (6.13) and the suggestion that Athens will be fighting a “formidable force” in Sicily, stating rather that Sicily’s force is “mixed rabble” (*ochlois xummeiktois*, 6.17.2), no match for the Hellenic hoplites. The last part of Alcibiades’s speech, though, illuminates the contrast

⁶² Wohl (2002) 139.

⁶³ *ibid*, 140.

between his tactic and that of Nicias: Nicias advises, whereas Alcibiades panders to the collective memory and pride of the people.

More specifically, after responding to some of Nicias's claims, Alcibiades's speech turns into a charge for the Athenians. Thucydides writes that Alcibiades was "exceedingly ambitious of a command by which he hoped to reduce Sicily and Carthage, and personally to gain in wealth and reputation by means of his successes" (6.15.2). Alcibiades's effort to convince the Athenians to go to Sicily makes an appeal to their collective character:

And let not the policy of inaction (*apragmosynê*) that Nicias proposes, or his putting the younger at variance with the older men, divert you from your purpose, but in our usual good order, just as our fathers, young men taking counsel with older men, raised our power to its present height, do you now also in the same way strive to advance the state. In short, I declare that a state which is accustomed to activity (*polin mê pragmona*) would very quickly be ruined by a change to inactivity (*apragmosynês metabolêi diaphtharênai*); and that those men live most securely whose political action is least at variance with existing habits and institutions (*tôn anthrôpôn asphalestata toutous oikein hoi an tois parousin êthesi kai nomois*), even when these are not the best. (6.18.6-7)

Alcibiades's speech conflates a potential choice of inaction with a habit of inactivity. The common ideology of the people, Alcibiades says, is active imperialist expansion (again, this is something that Pericles recognized and effectively advised the *dêmos* to avoid). The city, according to Alcibiades, must act in a way that corresponds with their nature, not only because it is good to act in accordance with one's nature, but because destruction is inevitable should the Athenians choose a path that *diverges* from their nature. It is important to note that Alcibiades, both in and before this

passage, has situated his speech in an ancestral frame in his evocation of father-son / young-old dichotomies: “For our fathers (*hoi pateres*) had as enemies these same men whom, as they say, you would be leaving behind if you should sail thinner, and the Persians besides as a foe, yet acquired their empire without being strong in anything else than in the superiority of their fleet” (6.17.7). He also recalls the foundation of the Athenian empire:

It was in this way that we acquired our empire (*ektêsametha tèn archên*) — both we and all others that have ever won empire — by coming zealously to the aid of those, whether barbarians or Hellenes, who have at any time appealed to us; whereas, if we should all keep quiet or draw distinctions of race as to whom we ought to assist, we should add but little to our empire and should rather run a risk of losing that empire itself. (6.18.2)

Alcibiades borrows the technique of the Periclean funeral oration in connecting the contemporary state of affairs to the past, articulating the civic ideology that in this case he attempts successfully to manipulate, and framing his objective around the nature of the Athenian polis. Therefore, he does not enable the Assembly to use brute fact and think critically about the matter at hand.

Alcibiades attempts to appropriate some of the tropes and ideals described in the funeral oration in order to profit from its authority. It is my belief, therefore, that by so doing Alcibiades leads the *dêmos* poorly in order to achieve his objective of going to war in Sicily. While Pericles was able to act as a physician for the patient / *dêmos*, who prescribes medicine and advice even if it is bitter, Alcibiades’s proposal rests on the momentum of the city’s nature and desire (or *erôs*). While Pericles led the

city instead of being led by them (2.65), Alcibiades leads the city the way that they desire to be led.

3: Hope

As we will soon see in Part II, one of the most effective — and, ultimately, most unused — ways to analyze the public support for oligarchy throughout the oligarchic transition of 411 is by examining the role of hope and hopelessness. In order to make effective use of a framework such as this, it is helpful to start with an analysis of the presence of hope in the speeches of Pericles and in the Sicilian Debate as discussed above. Joel Alden Schlosser notes that many scholars have ignored the topic of hope in their assessment of the *History*.⁶⁴ The *History*, Schlosser argues, is ambivalent about hope. The nature of hope oscillates between “delusive and dangerous as well as constructive and necessary.”⁶⁵ Hope, he writes, “deludes political leaders and communities into destructive behavior even while it provides the ultimate bulwark against despair — and thus often the basis for a community’s survival.”⁶⁶ This analysis of hope in Thucydides, while helpful, is too narrow, and

⁶⁴ Schlosser (2012) 169.

⁶⁵ *ibid*, 170.

⁶⁶ *ibid*. This is a convoluted position. As we see in book 8, hope (*elpis*) does reemerge after the *dēmos* is in despair. A better way to phrase Schlosser’s statement might be “in the face of” or “in response to” despair instead of “against” despair.

Note: I consider “survival” to be analogous to the Greek words *sôtēria* and *sôthēsesthai*, which can mean “safety,” “salvation,” or “deliverance.” Each of these words implies the continued life — i.e., the survival — of either the person or the polity that is hoping for (or desperate for) *sôtēria*.

could benefit by considering the variety of ways in which hope appears in the *History*.

In his book *Hope without Optimism*, Terry Eagleton provides the definitions of what he calls “simple” and “fundamental” hope. When mapped onto hope in Thucydides’s text this distinction will help us to understand how the *dêmos*’s hope operates. I will be using the terms as defined here. “Simple” hope refers to “a confidence that one’s project will prevail.”⁶⁷ Additionally, “the more rational one’s grounds for faith, the more one may hope, since the more probable it is that one’s faith will be vindicated.”⁶⁸ Simple hope, then, is an expectation of the potential, and often probable, desired future: it is frequently grounded in a calculated assessment of the present which provides a good reason to suppose that the present will necessarily result in the desired future. “Potentiality [...] articulates the present with the future, and thus lays down the material infrastructure of hope.”⁶⁹ Radical or “fundamental” hope, on the other hand, emerges out of despair. Fundamental hope “is what one is thrown back on when all specific hopes have failed, rather as psychoanalytic theory is what remains once one has subtracted from it all specific demands. It thus is not always easy to distinguish from despair.”⁷⁰ Fundamental hope is a specific hope that can emerge from desperation, and it focuses more on survival than on a specific outcome, as simple hopes tend to do. Eagleton makes a distinction between the verb

⁶⁷ Eagleton (2015) 41.

⁶⁸ *ibid*, 42.

⁶⁹ *ibid*, 52.

⁷⁰ *ibid*, 71.

“to despair” and the adjectival phrase “to be desperate”: “To despair is to do nothing about your situation, whereas to be desperate is to be prepared to do almost anything.”⁷¹ The opposite of hope, he argues, “may not be despair but a courageous spirit of resignation.”⁷²

When Pericles advocates to the Athenians that they go to war with the Peloponnesians in 1.140-4, he operates on a simple hope: “I have many other reasons to hope for a favorable outcome (*polla de kai alla echô es elpida tou periesesthai*)” (1.144.1). The Athenians’ navy is superior, and they have plenty of money. Pericles provides the Athenians with further arguments that serve as evidence in favor of the probability that the present will produce the desired future. Pericles’s and the Athenians’ hope in 1.144 is decidedly not radical or fundamental. The Athenians understand their desired outcome to also be the most probable outcome.⁷³ This hope is more or less neutral. It does not significantly affect the decision to go to war. The Athenians do not give heavy consideration to their hope when deciding whether to go to war or not: they rather give consideration to their material resources, and they allow these resources to motivate their hope in the early stages of the war. The hope of Pericles and the Athenians results in neither a miscalculation in their judgement nor a significant part of their decision-making. It is rather their careful judgement that engenders it.

⁷¹ *ibid*, 75.

⁷² *ibid*, 85.

⁷³ Hope must be desired. You cannot hope for something which you do not also desire. Eagleton (2015) 59: “Roughly speaking, hope consists of desire plus expectancy. One can expect without desiring, but one cannot hope without desiring [...] there is no hope without wanting.”

During the plague, we see a different kind of hope. The plague of 429 causes the Athenians significant strife and distress and threatens the cohesiveness of the city. In advising the *dêmos* to devote themselves to the preservation of the polis and to persevere in the ongoing war with the Peloponnesians, Pericles reminds them: “And where the chances are the same, knowledge fortifies courage by the contempt which is its consequence, its trust being placed, not in hope (*elpidi*), which is the prop of the desperate (*hês en tôi aporôi hê ischys*), but in a judgement (*gnômêi*) grounded upon existing resources (*apo tôn hyparchontôn*), whose anticipations are more to be depended upon” (2.62.5). Here, Pericles does not suggest to the Athenians that they should not hope. Rather, he suggests that they base their action on something other than hope: judgement (or *gnômê*). According to Eagleton, “by and large, we do not choose to hope. [...] One might decide that it would be imprudent to hope, or simply not worth it.”⁷⁴ Recognizing that he cannot simply encourage the Athenians to choose not to hope, Pericles asks that the Athenians base their decision upon the *hyparchonta* — “whose anticipations are more to be depended on.”

In this speech, Pericles connects hope to desperation. The hope that is “the prop of the desperate” then must be a hope that emerges *from* desperation, which, following Eagleton, is a fundamental hope rather than a simple hope. The Athenians’ hope in 2.60-64 is not the simple hope from earlier, expressed by Pericles in 1.140-144. Pericles here is advocating that the Athenians abandon or disregard their fundamental hope in making their decision regarding the war, and instead develop an

⁷⁴ Eagleton (2015) 70.

anticipation based on existing resources. To use Eagleton's terms, he advocates for the kind of hope which articulates the present with the future in terms of its potentiality. Rather than telling the Athenians that they should not hope at all, Pericles is again emphasizing the importance of *simple* hope based on existing resources instead of the perilous fundamental hope. The latter arises from desperation and undermines the support of true reason in decision-making, because those in despair are "prepared to do almost anything." From the speeches we have of Pericles, we can see that he considers hope to be productive when it is simple rather than fundamental: in other words, there is a kind of hope that gives positive momentum to decision-making and it emerges from *gnômê* rather than desperation.⁷⁵ Pericles's advice here raises an important question: what is the opposite of hope, if not desperation? Eagleton suggests that the opposite of hope is not despair or even hopelessness, but rather "pure self-determination" — i.e., that the desired future is not merely one of many possibilities but the *only* possibility, or that the ability to actualize the desired future is infallible, which makes pure self-determination not a hope.⁷⁶ Pericles cannot ask the Athenians to rely on pure self-determination: their circumstances make it clear that their objective of winning the Peloponnesian War is not a guarantee. Nevertheless, his emphasis on *gnômê* resists the fundamental hope for survival present at the time.

⁷⁵ cf. Schlosser (2012) 175: "Trying to remind the Athenians that the foundations of their former hopes remain — that Athens herself persists despite the ruin of the plague — Pericles connects the knowledge of Athenian strength to their ability to withstand the present crisis. Judgement must stand alongside hopes, as we have seen: judgement about the reality of the situation and thus about the chances for success or survival."

⁷⁶ Eagleton (2015) 3. Eagleton argues that, while a hope must be possible, it also must not be totally guaranteed: hopes must be fallible.

The Sicilian Debate provides a different presentation of hope, one which is not desperate but relies too heavily on desire. In the Sicilian Debate, “hope comforts its dangers, not inciting but smothering them so that these lovers can forget the dangerous path they have chosen.”⁷⁷ Eagleton’s condition that hope must be fallible⁷⁸ is very evident in the case of the Sicilian Debate. As Schlosser says, the ruinous hopes result in tumultuous disaster.⁷⁹ The desire of the *dêmos* in the Sicilian Debate is erotic. The situation of Athens at the time of the Sicilian Debate does not require a fundamental hope in order for the Athenians to proceed in the war. In fact, the lull in the war efforts provides the Athenians the ability to conceptualize of a feat such as the Sicilian Expedition and thus to develop a simple hope which they ultimately lose control over, both because it is based on miscalculation and because the eroticism of and the desire for the expedition cause this simple hope to grow exponentially and beyond the point of reason. This is partly because Alcibiades manipulates the desire of the *dêmos* in his discussion of the expedition. As Smith argues, the Athenians are not even sure why they want to go on the expedition. One element of the *dêmos*’s hope in the Sicilian Debate that will become increasingly important is that they hoped or expected that they would return safely (*euelpides ontes sôthêsesthai*). Even though this hope grows out of control, it is significant that their hope for safety is an operative part of the decision to sail to Sicily, and the idea of safety will become even more significant as we see how it changes after the disaster in Sicily.

⁷⁷ Schlosser (2012) 172.

⁷⁸ Eagleton (2015) 3.

⁷⁹ Schlosser (2012) 175.

As we will see in Part II, hope takes on a different form after the Sicilian Expedition ends in failure, and it continues to play a part in the decisions of the *dêmos*. I will return to this analysis of hope at the end of Part II.

Part II: The oligarchy of 411

“History is full of examples of states, even democracies, abandoning their ordinary practices in wartime, especially in times of crisis. Great Britain put aside ordinary political competition in 1940 and formed a national government. The cabinet was changed, placing the administration in the hands of a very few men and almost dictatorial power in the hands of Winston Churchill, who was both prime minister and minister of defence. There was every reason, even for loyal democrats, to favor some limitation on the democracy, and this was even truer for its enemies.”⁸⁰

“[We cannot save the state] unless we have a more moderate form of government, and put the offices into fewer hands (*es oligous mallon tas archas poiêsomen*).”⁸¹

The final book of Thucydides’s *History* tells the story of the Athenians after the Sicilian Expedition, a major defeat that led the Athenians to replace their democracy with an oligarchy, briefly, in 411. I will consider the Athenians’ situation after the disaster in Sicily (8.1), the beginning of the oligarchic transition in Samos (8.47-51), and, finally, the proposal for the transition in Athens primarily through an analysis of Peisander’s role (8.53-54.1). I will conclude, as in Part I, with a discussion of the role of hope (and hopelessness) in these passages.

Book 8 departs significantly from the earlier books of the *History*. First, it differs in terms of content, with a focus more on domestic political affairs between Athenian individuals and groups rather than the inter-state affairs which populated the earlier books. It also differs narratively: while Thucydides provides many *logoi* (direct speeches) in his earlier books, there is only one direct speech in book 8, which

⁸⁰ Kagan (1987) 112.

⁸¹ *Thu.* 8.53.3.

is very brief, taking up less than a full chapter (8.53).⁸² Scholars have argued that Thucydides's last book is incomplete,⁸³ because it ends in what appears to be the middle of a sentence⁸⁴: it is possible that he died before finishing the book. Some have also argued that book 8 is unrefined or unrevised and does not match Thucydides's earlier style of writing.⁸⁵ The debate surrounding the completeness of book 8 has long influenced how scholars interpret the book as a whole.⁸⁶ While there are undeniable differences between the composition of the last book and that of the earlier books, I suggest that book 8 deserves consideration because it presents the Athenians making a democratic decision to dissolve their democracy in the midst of a crisis; the crisis at hand is considerably greater than the earlier crises that had affected the Athenians during the time of Pericles's speeches, most significantly the plague. The events recounted in book 8 are illuminating about how the Athenians reacted to a crisis of this degree, on both the individual and the community level, and can be suggestive of the potential shortcomings of a democracy under pressure.

The passages I will consider in this section are those that I suggest to be the most telling concerning the *dēmos*'s transition to oligarchy in 411. It is important to

⁸² See Rawlings (1981) 176, who argues that Thucydides would have inserted more *logoi* than *erga* had he completed book 8; Rengakos (2006) 292 also notes the peculiarity of the absence of direct speeches.

⁸³ See, for instance, Connor (1984) 210; Dewald (2005) 156; Conford (1971) 54-5; Raaflaub (2006) 189, 214; Canfora (2006a) 24; Rengakos (2006) 291; Hornblower (2006) 616-7. See also Canfora (2006b) 744 for an analysis of the perception in antiquity of the incompleteness of book 8.

⁸⁴ Rawlings (1981) 177.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, 176; Cartledge, Debnar (2006) 581.

⁸⁶ See Dewald (2005), who argues in favor of the near-completeness of Thucydides's last book, for a discussion (156) of the "new kinds of narrative organization" present in book 8. She does note (158) that book 8 is missing an "end or interpretive cornerstone." She writes (159) that in book 8 Thucydides preferred "a more flexible, integrated, and ongoing narrative that emphasized links among superficially disparate moments."

reiterate that I am not examining the *actual* oligarchy that the conspirators imposed in 411. Scholars often focus on the conspirators' terrorism, seeing it as evidence for the overall manipulation of the *dêmos* to abolish their democracy and institute an oligarchy. My focus is rather to provide an analysis of the *dêmos*'s endorsement of the proposal to become an oligarchy before the occurrence of any terrorism or violence, for which Peisander's meeting with the Athenians in 8.53-54.1 is central.⁸⁷ From this point on, I will be referring to the early part of the transition to oligarchy as the *dêmos*'s and the leaders' *initial endorsement* of an oligarchy; when referring to the narrative of the oligarchy as a whole, I will use the phrase *transition to oligarchy*.

Thucydides does not make the task of interpreting the initial endorsement of the oligarchy *or* the overall transition to oligarchy easy for his readers. In his text, there is a plan or conspiracy to abolish the democracy beginning with the Athenians in Samos; a discussion among the *dêmos* in Athens about changing their constitution in which the *dêmos* agrees to institute an oligarchy; and violence and terrorism, later, from the oligarchic conspirators. In a rare statement clarifying his own judgement, Thucydides states that "it was no light matter to deprive the Athenian people of its freedom" (8.68.4). How we interpret this statement influences how we interpret the transition to oligarchy as a whole and what weight, if any, we give to the *dêmos*'s initial endorsement of the oligarchy in our analysis of the overall transition. Scholars tend to approach the whole of the movement (generally speaking) in two different ways: either by placing more emphasis on the violence of the oligarchic conspirators

⁸⁷ Some who discuss book 8 do not mention this episode at all. *cf.* Connor (1984) 210-230.

(8.65-70); or by placing more emphasis on the discussions between Alcibiades and the Athenians in Samos (8.47-51) and the subsequent Assembly discussions in Athens (8.53-54).

Those who choose to interpret the violence of the movement as the most influential in the oligarchic transition privilege Thucydides's statement that instituting the oligarchy was "no light matter." Such a reading also falls in line with a general pro-democracy sentiment, allowing modern scholars to argue that the *dêmos* itself did not undermine their own democracy, but that it was rather the stealth, violence, and terror of the oligarchs that, as Donald Kagan argues, would cause the Athenians to "think such unthinkable thoughts"⁸⁸ as those that the conspirators were proposing concerning the abolishment of their democracy. Martha C. Taylor, on the other hand, convincingly argues that readers should not take Thucydides's comment about the difficulty of instituting the oligarchy as an absolute truth about the entire transition to oligarchy. Thucydides's narrative as a whole occasionally contradicts his judgements about the events he is describing.⁸⁹ The judgement in 8.68.4, as we will see, is no different.

Before we continue, it is necessary to address briefly the sources available for the events of 411. In addition to Thucydides's account, the pseudo-Aristotelian *Athenian Constitution* (the *Athênaiôn Politeia*, or *AP*) provides another version of the events of the Athenians' transition to oligarchy.⁹⁰ It however only briefly narrates the

⁸⁸ Kagan (1987) 121. *cf.* Taylor (2002) 95.

⁸⁹ These judgements are infrequent. His assessment of Pericles (2.65), discussed in detail in Part I, is one of these judgements. *cf.* Taylor (2002) 92.

⁹⁰ Rhodes (1981) 362.

overthrow of the democracy, and it credits the transition to the misfortunes of the Athenians in the Peloponnesian War.⁹¹ The *AP* presents the events of the Peloponnesian War with little detail. Rhodes notes that the details of the war in Thucydides provide “narrative background” to the *AP*; and that, “on the establishment of the intermediate régime [it] tells us nothing that is not in Thucydides except the change of the archon.”⁹² The *AP*, moreover, includes a judgement of the transition to oligarchy that is not in line with Thucydides’s narrative, by describing the regime change as “leisurely constitution-making” — that is, the very opposite of the terror and propaganda that many scholars have seen in Thucydides.⁹³ And by including that the Athenians “were compelled to overthrow the democracy [...] chiefly due to the belief that the king would help them more in the war if they limited their constitution” (29.1),⁹⁴ it bypasses the complex issue of garnering the necessary support of the *dêmos* (through civil discussion, violence, or both) that Thucydides’s text addresses.

The pseudo-Aristotelian view of the transition to oligarchy, then, is markedly different from Thucydides’s depiction of it: Aristotle removes much of the context, with no discussion of the interactions between the people and Alcibiades or Peisander. Taylor argues that it is appropriate to read Thucydides’s *History* apart from and without the *AP* because Thucydides’s text “is more nuanced.”⁹⁵ However, there has been a tendency to interpret Aristotle’s text as a “correction” of Thucydides’s,

⁹¹ *ibid.*

⁹² *ibid.*, 366.

⁹³ Taylor (2002) 92.

⁹⁴ *ibid.*

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, 101. (I agree with Taylor here: in this project, I am also relying exclusively on Thucydides’s text for information about the transition to oligarchy.)

influencing scholars to “treat Aristotle as a negative reflection of Thucydides and use Aristotle to interpret Thucydides.”⁹⁶ This difference between Thucydides’s text and Aristotle’s, Taylor argues, often results in a “misreading.”⁹⁷ The impact of Thucydides’s judgement that it was “no light matter” to abolish the democracy, as well as the interpretation of *AP* as a “negative reflection” of Thucydides, have caused scholars to give the terror and propaganda of 8.65-69 “a starring role that they do not deserve.”⁹⁸

Taylor’s argument requires us to (re)consider Kagan’s interpretation of the movement and other interpretations that are similar to Kagan’s.⁹⁹ Kagan, for instance, suggests that there is “evidence of the powerful general support for the traditional full democracy” in the fact that the oligarchic movement began abroad, in Samos instead of in Athens,¹⁰⁰ that the conspirators softened their proposition by using less alarming language (i.e., Alcibiades promised his return to Athens if they were not a democracy [*ei mē dêmokratointo*, 8.48.1], not if they were an oligarchy;¹⁰¹ the conspirators

⁹⁶ Taylor (2002) 94.

⁹⁷ *ibid.*

⁹⁸ *ibid.*

⁹⁹ 8.48.1-3 is a significant passage that has led to various interpretations and is useful in full for context: “This plan was first raised in the camp, and afterwards from there reached the city. Some persons crossed over from Samos and had an interview with Alcibiades, who immediately offered to make first Tissaphernes, and afterwards the King, their friend, if they would give up the democracy, and make it possible for the King to trust them. The most powerful citizens, who also suffered most severely from the war, now had great hopes of getting the government into their own hands and of triumphing over the enemy. Upon their return to Samos the emissaries formed their partisans into a cabal, and openly told the army generally that the King would be their friend and would provide them with money if Alcibiades were restored and the democracy abolished. The multitude, if at first irritated by these intrigues, were nevertheless kept quiet by the advantageous prospect of pay from the King; and the oligarchic conspirators, after making this communication to the people, now reexamined the proposals of Alcibiades among themselves, with most of their associates.”

¹⁰⁰ Kagan (1987) 111.

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*, 115-6.

propose not being a democracy [*mê dêmokratoumenôn*, 8.48.2], rather than proposing to institute an oligarchy¹⁰²); that the conspirators deceptively suggested to the Athenians (8.53-54) that the democracy would continue functioning in the same way “except that there would be a limitation on officeholding”¹⁰³ (i.e., they were going to put the offices into the hands of a few [*es oligous mallon tas archas poiêsomen*, 8.53.3]). Kagan’s reading, according to Taylor, “[exaggerates] the element of deceit required to get the Athenians to vote for oligarchy, and [underplays] the role in the switch to oligarchy of the Athenians themselves.”¹⁰⁴ Thucydides’s text is more nuanced than this, and it suggests that the Athenian *dêmos* did not display a significant resistance to oligarchy, even at the time of Peisander’s first meeting with them wherein he suggested that they abolish their democracy.¹⁰⁵ Thucydides “subvert[s] the interpretation that the great mass of people would have opposed ‘the party’ if it were not for ‘the terror.’”¹⁰⁶ While Thucydides’s account provides decisively more information than Aristotle’s, our analysis of the movement is at risk of supplying information that does not exist in the text if we insist on reading Thucydides’s account as (entirely) a violent coup, the negative or opposite of the “leisurely constitution-writing” of pseudo-Aristotle’s version. Thucydides’s text does not deny the use of violence in the movement; yet, in spite of his judgement about the difficulty for the conspirators in putting an end to the Athenians’ liberty, the text

¹⁰² *ibid*, 131-2.

¹⁰³ *ibid*, 133.

¹⁰⁴ Taylor (2002) 100.

¹⁰⁵ *ibid*, 101.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid*, 102.

asserts that there was no significant attachment to the democracy among the *dêmos* and that abolishing the democracy was, in fact, an easy task.¹⁰⁷

The selections from Thucydides's text that I will consider bring out the agency of the *dêmos* and suggest that the *dêmos* was more willing to abolish democracy than some commentators who focus on later sections of book 8 might lead us to believe. My analysis will attempt to contextualize the actions of the *dêmos*, without assuming naiveté or ignorance on their part.¹⁰⁸ The decision of the *dêmos* in 411 takes place in a period of great crisis and contributes to its own undermining. In book 8, not only is the paradigmatic Periclean politician no longer present; the crisis that the Athenians are experiencing (as we will soon see in detail) is more extreme than any crisis they had suffered under Pericles's leadership. The passages under discussion from book 8 may indicate, I suggest, a weakness inherent in democracy: the inability to effectively make reasonable decisions during a crisis, which causes despair or hopelessness for safety (*sôtêria*). I will continue the discussion of hope and its role in democratic decision-making that I began in Part I, as hope and hopelessness provide an illuminating and important lens through which to consider the *dêmos*'s initial endorsement of the proposal. Ultimately, I suggest that Thucydides's final book shows a weakness in democracy without providing simple answers for remedying it: here, *dêmokratia* does not provide for its citizens the simple hope (*elpis*) of continued

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*, 94.

¹⁰⁸ *cf.* Taylor (2002) 96, 100. Taylor's discussion about the importance of interpreting the early movement toward oligarchy without supplying terror or violence where there is none is useful in my research. While her approach is useful in addressing *how* to interpret Thucydides's text, I do not entirely agree with her interpretation of *why* the Athenians were supportive of the oligarchy, which is primarily that they were ignorant, credulous, and naive.

safety or survival (*sôtêria*) grounded in the correct assessment or judgement (*gnômê*) of existing resources (i.e., the *hyparchonta* of Pericles's plague speech, 2.62.5). The different members of the *dêmos* thus prioritize their individual *sôtêria*, ultimately indifferent toward to the nuances of decisions that will provide more *sôtêria* to one group than another: in this case, the fact that the *oligarchia* will provide *sôtêria* with decision-making enfranchisement to the *oligoi*, and *sôtêria* without such enfranchisement to the *polloi*.

1: The Athenians after the Sicilian Disaster

Thucydides's final book begins with the arrival in Athens of the news of the disaster in Sicily — the expedition that had been decided democratically in the Assembly after the speeches of Nicias and Alcibiades. Thucydides tells us that the news causes the Athenians to be angry, both with “the orators who had joined in promoting the expedition, just as if they had not themselves voted it,” and with “the reciters of oracles and soothsayers, and all other omenmongers of the time who had encouraged them to hope that they should conquer Sicily” (8.1.1). The *dêmos*'s frustration does not merely concern the defeat of Athens in Sicily but extends back to the various *rhêtores* and the process of decision-making that resulted in the decision

in 415 to sail to Sicily with such a large force.¹⁰⁹ The *dêmos*'s frustration with the decision to go to Sicily intentionally ignores the fact that they had indeed made the decision themselves. Matthew Simonton argues that this is a feature of democracy: the *dêmos* can “transfer blame onto individual rhetors on the grounds that they did not personally agree with the decision at the time,” even though they are responsible for the decision that they had made.¹¹⁰ The first chapter of book 8 shows this disparity in action.

The disaster in Sicily caused a financial and military crisis in Athens.¹¹¹ The Athenians lost many hoplites that they did not have the resources to replace; and their naval superiority over the Peloponnesians, which had been a point of reassurance and confidence during the disastrous circumstances of the plague, was now severely limited, suggesting that confidence in the Athenians' ability to succeed in the war would no longer be found in the strength of their navy. The Athenians also now came to believe that their enemies would attack them because of the common perception among the Greek states (*cf.* 8.2ff) that Athens was now vulnerable. In addition, they thought that their inter-state security is at risk: their enemies in the Peloponnesus have

¹⁰⁹ Smith (2004) 61 notes that the *dêmos* is directing their anger at “Nicias and Alcibiades, rather than the democratic system that allowed such poetically misinformed and dramatically deluded decisions to be made.” I do not think that this is entirely the case. While it is clear that their anger is directed at the *rhêtores*, this does not necessarily mean that the *dêmos* is not also aware of the problems that the Sicilian Expedition has illuminated in the process of democratic decision-making.

¹¹⁰ Simonton (2017) 87.

¹¹¹ Kagan (1987) 2, 110 provides the following assessments: the Athenians in the hoplite census class or above (i.e., the classes who bore the financial burden of the war) had been reduced from 25,000 at the beginning of the war to 9,000 after the Sicilian Expedition. The Athenians also lost a significant number of ships in Sicily, which undermined their naval superiority. With their now very limited funds (from 1,000 talents in 431 to 500 after the Sicilian Expedition), they could not afford to repair or replace their damaged or destroyed triremes — they lost at least 216 triremes in Sicily and had no more than 100 available.

now acquired new allies in Sicily, and their own subject cities are now likely to revolt.¹¹² Thucydides writes, “they began to despair (*anelpistoi*) of salvation (*sôthêsesthai*)” (8.1.2). Yet, despite the precariousness of their economic and military situation, the Athenians are nevertheless committed to continuing on in the war (8.1.3). Thucydides ends the first chapter of book 8 with an interesting, yet perplexing comment: “In short, as is the way of a *dêmos* (*hoper philei dêmos poiein*), in the panic of the moment they were ready to obey discipline and be orderly (*eutaktein*)” (8.1.4).

The readiness to be “orderly,” or *eutaktein*, is the result of panic. Beyond the material concerns of the economy and the military discussed above, which certainly contribute to this panic, Thucydides details the Athenians’ response upon accepting that the news of the disaster is accurate (8.1.1): “Already distressed (*elypei*) at all points and in all quarters, after what had now happened they were seized by a fear (*phobos*) and consternation (*kataplêxis*) quite without precedent” (8.1.2). The Athenians thus find themselves in a state of despair or hopelessness (*anelpistoi*, 8.1.2). Thucydides tells us that the despairing community now intends to “secure their confederates and above all Euboea,” “reform things in the city upon a more economical footing,” and elect a board of elders, *probouloi*, “to advise upon the state of affairs as occasion should arise” (8.1.3).¹¹³ These intentions are all part of the Athenians’ determination to observe *eutaxia*, or good order. This emphasizes that, in

¹¹² *ibid*, 2.

¹¹³ See Ostwald (1986) 338-43 for a discussion of the ten *probouloi*, and whether the institution of the *probouloi* was in itself oligarchic. Of particular importance in his discussion that the *probouloi* did not represent a dramatic move toward oligarchy is his assertion (340) that, of the two *probouloi* whose names survive to us, Hagnon and Sophocles, neither can “be described as oligarchs or opponents of the democracy.” Hornblower (2008) 752-3 also echoes this assertion, stating that Hagnon and Sophocles both had “good democratic credentials.”

the present situation, observing *eutaxia* requires actively modifying or moderating the institutions of their government. The institution of the *probouloi* — which we will return to shortly — emphasizes this preparedness to moderate or alter their system of government, even if it does not constitute as drastic a change as the oligarchy that would follow.

The introduction to the book, then, provides us with both a glimpse of the *dêmos*'s emotions and of some practical measures which they implement after the disaster in Sicily. The political and emotional landscape in which the oligarchy would later take hold is telling because it is so markedly different from the atmosphere in Athens at earlier times of crisis, e.g., during the plague, when the Athenians' naval superiority was nevertheless still dependable. To analyze this landscape, certain elements of other scholars' interpretations, as follows, have been particularly useful.

For my analysis, I draw from Martha C. Taylor's framework about the "idea of Athens" as well as Martin Ostwald's discussion about the fragility of popular sovereignty. Ostwald argues that the institution of popular sovereignty is vulnerable after the failed Sicilian expedition, with the Athenian democracy bearing the bulk of the responsibility for the disaster in Sicily.¹¹⁴ Ostwald explains that the *dêmos*'s institution of the *probouloi* in response to the disaster in Sicily does not signify the beginning of the oligarchic movement but rather the strength of popular sovereignty, which, under the democracy, is "flexible enough to adjust its institutions to a very

¹¹⁴ Ostwald (1986) 337.

grave emergency.”¹¹⁵ The *probouloi* are a temporary, expedient response to the crisis at hand. Ostwald argues that this shows the Athenian *dêmos*’s preparedness to make changes to their government in order to survive after Sicily.¹¹⁶ Taylor argues that the Athenians have a common idea of Athens that is its backbone and that book 8 proves that this could be adjusted and that Athens would not have to remain a democracy in order to be Athens.¹¹⁷ The failure of the Sicilian Expedition, then, prompts the Athenians to redefine what their city is and what it needs to be in order to survive the crisis. Taylor and Ostwald both analyze the sentiment after the Sicilian Expedition without assuming that a violent uprising against the democracy is already underway.

W. Robert Connor and Eli Sagan, on the other hand, both provide analyses of the transition to oligarchy but rely heavily on the violence and terrorism of the oligarchic conspirators. Connor argues that the Athenians’ situation after the Sicilian disaster is not as bad as they think, evidenced by the statement that they were ready to carry on with good order (8.1.4). The biggest threat to Athens is “not the Sicilian disaster, nor the revolt of her allies, nor the power of Sparta and Persia, but the dissolution of her political coherence.”¹¹⁸ The text, however, does not support this analysis: the *dêmos* certainly does not believe that their fears are unwarranted or unrepresentative of the situation. In analyzing the *dêmos*’s initial endorsement of oligarchy, the democratic knowledge of the situation must be given consideration as

¹¹⁵ *ibid*, 341.

¹¹⁶ *ibid*, 343.

¹¹⁷ Taylor (2010) 190.

¹¹⁸ Connor (1984) 214.

well. There is nothing to suggest that the *dêmos* does not believe their own assessment of the situation. Eli Sagan considers the transition to oligarchy a “moderate antidemocratic movement”¹¹⁹ and that this movement had moderate antidemocratic leaders who believed that it was right “to impose various checks on the democracy for the good of the state.”¹²⁰ Sagan argues that the gradual increase in Athens’s potential to lose the war was directly related to an increase in blame or frustration against the democracy.¹²¹ He argues that the “strong and widespread opposition to the democracy”¹²² manifests itself in “two fundamentally different antidemocratic political positions and two fundamentally different prescriptions for the ‘reform’ of the Athenian state.”¹²³ The moderates, he argues, want a limited democracy with the franchise belonging to five thousand citizens; they are also dedicated to continuing their efforts in the Peloponnesian War, but their biggest priority was continuing on in the war: they would rather continue on with the radical democracy and persevere in the war than transition to oligarchy and give up to Sparta, if those were the only two options. The oligarchs, on the other hand, intend to institute a tyranny and “were prepared to use any available terror.”¹²⁴ The evidence available in 8.1 does not suggest that a specifically “antidemocratic” movement is (already) underway. This analysis, like Connor’s, presupposes factioning and the

¹¹⁹ Sagan (1991) 117-26.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*, 136.

¹²¹ *ibid.*

¹²² *ibid.*, 121.

¹²³ *ibid.*, 122.

¹²⁴ *ibid.*, 122-3.

dissolution of political coherence before the evidence introduces either, analyzing the individual moments of the transition based on a judgement of the final outcome.

Thucydides's text tells us that the Athenians are in a state of fear (*phobos*) and consternation or anxiety (*kataplêxis*) and that they are hopeless (*anelpistoi*). The emotional landscape following the disaster paves the way for what Thucydides calls orderly action (*eutaktein*). This orderly action is not necessarily antidemocratic, but 8.1 does evidence a period wherein the Athenians are prepared to put their city on a surer footing (i.e., an *eutaxia*) by adapting the institutions of popular sovereignty to match the need of the city during the precarious situation after the Sicilian Expedition. This information will be important to keep in mind as we analyze the *dêmos*'s later response to and subsequent endorsement of the oligarchic proposal.

2: Alcibiades and the Athenians in Samos

“It all began — as did so much in Athens during these wartime years — with Alcibiades.”¹²⁵ Alcibiades is the first to propose modifying the democracy and instituting the oligarchy to the Athenians in Samos. As we saw earlier, he had supported the Sicilian Expedition: but before taking up his role as general on the expedition, he had been cast out of the city for accusations of perverting the Eleusinian Mysteries as well as for his involvement in the desecration of the Herms of Athens. What renders Alcibiades's role instrumental in book 8 becomes apparent if

¹²⁵ Sagan (1991) 117.

we look briefly at his history as it leads up to the oligarchy. Plutarch's *Life of Alcibiades* provides information missing in Thucydides.¹²⁶

According to Plutarch's *Life*, after the Herms had been mutilated, Androcles, the popular leader, led an accusation against Alcibiades for destroying the sacred images. Alcibiades felt secure enough to defend himself to the *dêmos* because he believed that the people needed him too much in the upcoming Sicilian expedition to punish him — and his enemies believed this as well. Alcibiades set sail, but the *dêmos* quickly recalled him to Athens, where in his absence his enemies had convinced the public to blame him for the destruction of the Herms as well as his perverted conduct at the Eleusinian Mysteries. Because the Athenians had impeached him and condemned him to death, he quickly sailed away and began to actively undermine the Athenians' agenda by robbing them of their allies, first Messene. Alcibiades then arrived at the Peloponnesus, where he denounced the Athenians and promised to help the Spartans in the war, and they received him. He adapted quickly to the Spartan way of life, and the people loved him and respected him. Nevertheless, his reputation was destroyed when he impregnated the Spartan king Agis's wife while Agis was away on a military campaign. The king thus ordered Alcibiades to be put to death.¹²⁷ Alcibiades then moved his allegiance to Tissaphernes, the Persian king's satrap, and began working to convince the Tissaphernes to aid the Athenians and not the Spartans (18.3-25.1). As we will see, Alcibiades's (re)introduction in book 8 of

¹²⁶ Plutarch's *Life of Alcibiades* provides a more holistic view of Alcibiades's life between the time of the Sicilian Debate and 8.47ff in Thucydides, when he returns to Thucydides's text.

¹²⁷ At this point, Plutarch tells us that this injury occurred after the Athenian disaster in Sicily (24.1), synchronized with Thucydides 8.1.

Thucydides brings the first mention of instituting an oligarchy and abolishing the democracy in Athens. It is important to consider how Alcibiades pursues his own self-preservation and self-interest, which is evident both in Plutarch and in Thucydides, when analyzing the initial proposal of oligarchy and the subsequent endorsement among the Athenians in Samos. Thucydides, however, does not suggest that Alcibiades's actions are the sole reason for the Athenians' suspicion of Tissaphernes's (potential) change in allegiance from Sparta to Athens.¹²⁸ Thucydides rather presents Alcibiades as capitalizing on an existing Athenian suspicion that Tissaphernes's alliance with the Spartans was at risk of dissipating.

In Thucydides 8.45ff, Alcibiades advises Tissaphernes not to give a large amount of aid to the Peloponnesians (8.46.5). According to Thucydides, Alcibiades gives this advice "not merely because he thought it really the best" (8.47.1), but because he wants to salvage his relationship with the Athenians: if his friendship with Tissaphernes became known, the Athenians would want to recall him in order to get Tissaphernes's money. His wishes are realized: when the Athenians in Samos hear about his influence with Tissaphernes (partly because Alcibiades himself sends word to the Athenians in Samos about the matter), they organize a meeting between him and ambassadors from Samos (8.47.2). Thucydides calls the men to whom Alcibiades appeals "*hoi dynatôtatoi*," or the "most powerful." Alcibiades's message to the Athenians catalyzes the oligarchic transition: he tells them that he will return "if only

¹²⁸ Hyland (2004) 79: "Thucydides does not give Alcibiades all the credit for Tissaphernes' growing fear and mistrust of his Spartan allies. As he notes, the root of Tissaphernes' suspicion of the Spartans was his argument with Likhas (8.52)."

there were an oligarchy in the place of the corrupt democracy that had banished him” (*hoti ep’ oligarchiai bouletai kai ou ponêriai [oude dêmokratiai] têi auton ekbalousêi katelthôn*, 8.47.2).¹²⁹ The *dynatôtatoi* had no problem supporting the regime change (8.47.2).

The *dynatôtatoi* are ready to change the government to carry on in the war,¹³⁰ but this does not necessarily mean that they are ideologically oligarchs or democrats; rather, they appear to be invested in (or they are willing to invest in) whichever constitutional system will maximize their own profits. Some scholars have provided helpful commentary on the identity of the *dynatôtatoi*, arguing that their identities can inform our understanding of the early movement.¹³¹ Of the some 15,000 Athenians who are in Samos at this time, we know the most about Phrynichus, one of the *dynatôtatoi*, though we know little about his history before the time of the oligarchic movement.¹³² The members of the *dynatôtatoi* band together in support of the

¹²⁹ The Greek here is problematic: *oude* typically should not be written between *ponêriai* and *dêmokratiai*, as this placement prevents *ponêriai* from being taken as an adjective of *dêmokratiai*. The 1942 OCT gives “*ou ponêriai oude dêmokratiai...*” The Loeb accepts the deletion of “*oude dêmokratiai*,” providing the following English translation: “[Alcibiades] wished to come home on condition of there being an oligarchy and not the villainous mob-rule that had banished him.” (There is nothing in the text, without *oude dêmokratiai*, to be translated as “mob rule.”) Hornblower (2008) 893 accepts “*ponêriai oude dêmokratiai*,” as literally “villainy and democracy,” translating *ponêriai* adjectivally: “the villainous democracy which had driven him out.” Hornblower argues that taking “*oude dêmokratiai*” as a gloss complicates the participial phrase “*têi auton ekbalousêi*.” I side with Hornblower, but it does not make a significant difference either way, because Alcibiades is very clearly advocating for an oligarchy to replace the villainous “mob rule” or “democracy” that threw him out — whether *oude dêmokratiai* is a mistake or not, the meaning is clear. Raaflaub (2006) 214 does not translate explicitly the *oude dêmokratiai* but he summarizes the text well in a way that shows the lack of ambiguity in Alcibiades’s speech regardless of one’s interpretation of *oude dêmokratiai*: “Alcibiades informs the ‘most influential’ and ‘best’ Athenians in Samos that he will consider returning to Athens only under an oligarchy, not under the ‘wicked system’ (*ponêria*) of democracy (8.47.2).” See Hornblower (2008) 893 for further commentary on 8.47.2.

¹³⁰ Sagan (1991) 119.

¹³¹ Ostwald (1986) 346.

¹³² *ibid.*, 344.

oligarchy, except for Phrynichus, whose response to Alcibiades's proposal is more complicated, as we will soon see. Thucydides notes that the *dynatôtatoi* support the institution of an oligarchy "principally of their own motion," and not exclusively because of Alcibiades's proposal. As Thucydides writes, "The most powerful citizens (*hoi dynatôtatoi*), who also suffered most severely from the war, now had great hopes of getting the government into their own hands and of triumphing over the enemy" (8.48.1). The *dynatôtatoi*'s support for the oligarchy appears to be associated with what they perceive as an inequality in Athens: they are the ones who suffer most severely because they bear the most significant financial responsibility in the present war efforts. It is necessary, though, to consider this in terms of the contemporary effects of the war in Athens — this response of the *dynatôtatoi* does not necessarily imply a weakness that persists in Athenian democracy at all times, that the wealthiest and most powerful men will perpetually see themselves as providing an undemocratically higher contribution to the Athenian government.¹³³ In this particular crisis, the number of people in the hoplite census or above has decreased dramatically along with the amount of money available for the war efforts. The burden of the war falls more heavily on the *dynatôtatoi* than the usual burdens of Athens's government, through the mandate of *eisphora*.¹³⁴ Thus, while the *dynatôtatoi* immediately support

¹³³ Ober (1989) 199: "Class differences based upon economic inequalities were not regarded by the Athenians as innately undemocratic."

¹³⁴ *ibid.*, 199-200: "The *eisphora* was levied upon leisure-class citizens on an occasional basis, usually at a time of military emergency. The *eisphora* was a regressive tax in that it was assessed at a simple percentage of capital, but the poorer citizens were exempt in any case. The *eisphora* caused the rich to finance warfare, particularly by providing funds for military pay. Provision of pay allowed the poorer citizens, who could not otherwise afford to serve, to do their part in defending the state."

the oligarchy of their own volition, Thucydides explicitly states the burdensome effects of the burdens of the present war on the *dynatôtatoi* and does not suggest that the Athenian *dynatôtatoi* were necessarily oligarchs in their ideology.

After the initial message from Alcibiades to the Athenians, some Athenians in Samos went to Alcibiades for an interview (8.48.1). They were immediately convinced by Alcibiades's proposition to abolish democracy in Athens and to recall him, thereby making the Persian king Tissaphernes their friend (*philon*, 8.48.1). Those who met with Alcibiades returned to Samos and informed them of their intention (8.48.2). The people were upset at first, but they were silenced rather quickly because of the hope (*tês elpidos*) of pay (*misthou*) from the Persian king (8.48.3). Like the *dynatôtatoi*, the *ochlos* is also interested in profit more than their current constitution. Unlike the *dynatôtatoi*, however, the *ochlos* will very likely be disenfranchised under the new constitution, as they are much less wealthy than the *dynatôtatoi*. The *ochlos* understands that the hope of pay from the king will nevertheless be beneficial for them, even if they are not enfranchised in decision-making in the oligarchy.

Thucydides tells us that the conspirators, after establishing the support of the people or the masses (*ho ochlos*), then retreated privately among themselves in order to (re)consider Alcibiades's proposals: this emphasizes a separation between the many and the few not unlike the oligarchic government Alcibiades and the *dynatôtatoi* are proposing. The oligarchic conspirators will soon send Peisander and other envoys to

Athens to propose the oligarchy in the Assembly there. Before I discuss this, it is necessary to explore Phrynichus's response to the oligarchy in more detail.

2.1: Phrynichus

In the meeting of the *dynatôtatoi*, Phrynichus rises as a critic to the proposal of the oligarchy.¹³⁵ Thucydides tells us that he “rightly thought” Alcibiades had no more care for an oligarchy than for a democracy and that he did not trust that the Persian king would side with the Athenians, considering that the Athenians’ once superior naval power had become, after the Sicilian disaster, equal to the Peloponnesians’ naval force (8.48.4).¹³⁶ Phrynichus argues that Athens’s allies would not prefer an oligarchy any more than a democracy, because the best people (*kaloï k’agathoi*) would not be less oppressive than “the People” (*ho dêmos*). The *dêmos*, Phrynichus thinks, is the refuge (*kataphygên*) for the Athenian subject cities as well as the chastiser (*sôphronistên*) of the “best people” (8.48.5-6). He “was certain that the cities had learned this by experience (*par’ autôn tôn ergôn*) and that such was their opinion” (8.48.7). Phrynichus’s opposition appears at first glance to be almost

¹³⁵ Though Thucydides does not provide *logoi* to most of the opponents of the oligarchy (*cf.* 8.48.3, 8.53.2-3, 8.54.1), he describes Phrynichus’s stance explicitly *as* disapproval (*Phrynichôi [...] ouden êresken*, 8.48.4), and he details the points of his disapproval thoroughly. Even though Phrynichus’s disapproval does not last, it is significant, given that resistance to the oligarchy in Thucydides’s text is not often presented in detail. We will return to this momentarily.

¹³⁶ *cf.* Hyland (2004) 85: “The one Athenian who speaks out against the likelihood of Persian support for Athens, Alcibiades’ bitter enemy Phrynikhos, states that even if the [Persian] King did not distrust the Athenians, it would be difficult for Persia to switch sides with a Spartan army present in its territory (8.48.4). Thucydides [...] certainly shares Phrynikhos’ analysis of the unlikelihood of Persian aid.”

Periclean, as he is a supporter of democracy (if not the *sole* supporter of democracy in Samos). I suggest that Phrynichus's initial resistance to the oligarchy can provide an analogy of sorts for the *dêmos*'s later resistance. The *dêmos* too will initially resist the proposition of the oligarchy. Even though he is one of the *dynatôtatoi*, Phrynichus distrusts Alcibiades's proposition. It is useful to trace elements of this distrust as well as the reasoning for his subsequent change in position. Ultimately, one of the most significant questions in Thucydides's discussion of Phrynichus is the question of why he was included: As Taylor argues, Thucydides's text does not present any noble hero who resists the oligarchy.¹³⁷ If Phrynichus's brief resistance can offer an analogue for the *dêmos*'s resistance, his portrayal can help us analyze the *dêmos*'s capacity briefly to resist the oligarchy and preserve their democratic ideology in the present situation. I suggest that he can be seen as an analog for collective psychology, which seems to be a focal point of the *History* and in the workings of democracy.

Phrynichus's initial defense of the democracy is in line with many of the attributes of the ideal citizen that Pericles discussed in his funeral oration, notably his emphasis on the importance of participation by all citizens (2.37.1). Phrynichus's defense of the democracy and his opposition to the oligarchy mentions that the *dêmos* chastises or moderates the *kaloi k'agathoi*, preventing the rule of the elite from getting out of hand. He also embodies the Periclean ideal of *eklogizesthai* (2.40.1, discussed above in detail), when he dissects Alcibiades's *logos* proposing the oligarchy. Alcibiades's proposition simply could not "meet with [Phrynichus's]

¹³⁷ *ibid.*, 201.

approval” (8.48.8). Thucydides’s text acknowledges the accuracy of Phrynichus’s perception: his understanding of the situation at hand was *hoper kai ên* (8.48.4), or “just as it was.” Phrynichus uses the reasoning Pericles had passionately defended as one of the backbones of democracy, deliberating the speeches he heard alongside the facts he had witnessed, in order to form an accurate impression of the situation at hand. Thucydides notes that the biggest priority for Phrynichus in his resistance to the oligarchy is to avoid *stasis*, or civil discord, in Athens (8.48.4), suggesting that Phrynichus may not be defending democracy for the sake of democracy itself but rather for the sake of the unity of the *dêmos*. His opposition to the oligarchy is only for a moment: just as the *ochlos* was “at first (*parautika*) irritated by [Alcibiades’s] intrigues” (8.48.3), Phrynichus’s defense of the *dêmos* and the democracy is also *parautika*.

Phrynichus begins to panic when he hears that the cabal (i.e., the ones in the conspiracy, the *xynômosia*) has decided to ignore his opposition and to go with their original plan by sending Peisander to Athens to advocate for the oligarchy there (8.49.1). Phrynichus’s subsequent actions, however, make clear that he is not the proponent of democracy he may have appeared to be. His fear for himself seems to outweigh any personal democratic ideology. He defects from the *dynatôtatoi* and betrays Athens by warning a Spartan naval general, in a letter, that Alcibiades “was ruining the Peloponnesian cause by making Tissaphernes the friend of the Athenians” (8.50.2). Here, Phrynichus is intending to turn the Spartans against Alcibiades, without realizing that they already had done so due to Alcibiades’s

offense against Agis. Phrynichus's plan fails when the contents of the letter become known to Alcibiades (8.50.3). Subsequently, Alcibiades attempts to inform the Athenians in Samos about Phrynichus and suggests that they put him to death (8.50.4), though Phrynichus intercepts his letter. Phrynichus panics and responds by sending more information to his Spartan contact, Astyochus, about how to "destroy the whole Athenian armament at Samos," because Samos had not yet been fortified, which is again revealed to Alcibiades (8.50.5). Phrynichus realizes that Astyochus has been "playing him false," and he decides to manipulate the situation to protect himself should a letter from Alcibiades arrive at Samos informing them of the attack: Phrynichus (still general, possessing the "authority to carry out these measures," Thucydides reminds us) instructs the Athenians to fortify Samos, because the enemy had seen that Samos was unfortified and would attack it (8.51.1). Alcibiades's next letter declared that the enemy would attack the unfortified Samos (8.51.2-3). But instead of turning the Athenians against Phrynichus with a letter detailing Phrynichus's deceit, Alcibiades's letter appeared instead to confirm that Phrynichus was wise to instruct the Athenians to fortify Samos, attesting that — as Phrynichus had told them too — they would be vulnerable unless they fortified Samos. In this very confusing passage, we see Phrynichus looking out for himself, abandoning any democratic ideology he previously had for the sake of his own survival.

As Thucydides notes twice, Phrynichus is *stratêgos* (8.48.4, 8.51.1) during this time, and it is within his power to affect these changes. Also worth noting is the fact that the language in 8.48.4 (*stratêgôi eti*) and 8.51.1 (*estratêgei*) echoes

Thucydides's earlier strategy of reminding readers of Pericles's status as *stratêgos* before his speech at the time of the plague in 2.59.3 (*eti d' estratêgei*). Thucydides's reiteration of Peisander's position during this precarious situation after the Sicilian Expedition may invite the reader to compare his character and actions to those of Pericles during the plague.

Thucydides's presentation of Phrynichus at first shows him "as something resembling a statesman. His opposition to *stasis* suggests that he has a loyalty to Athens beyond Alcibiades' petty concerns about his own position there and beyond even the question of its political constitution."¹³⁸ Phrynichus provides an impassioned defense of the existing order. Taylor adds that "Phrynichus serves as a warner figure who alone can see what is coming."¹³⁹ Her analysis of Phrynichus's opposition, however, emphasizes the *parautika* or brevity of it, treating the discussion of his opposition as "supreme irony"¹⁴⁰ given that Phrynichus would later betray his city to the Spartans.

In order to answer the question of why Thucydides includes Phrynichus, we should treat Phrynichus's resistance and his abandonment of resistance as equally significant. The text suggests that something about either the situation or his capacity to lead prevents Phrynichus from being a leader of Periclean caliber, which likely is also a problem for the individuals of the *dêmos* as well. As discussed in Part I, Thucydides believes that a shift in the quality of leaders occurred after Pericles's

¹³⁸ Taylor (2010) 200.

¹³⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.*

death (2.65.10). But Thucydides also acknowledges that the situation in the city after the Sicilian Expedition would be different than the situation in Pericles's time: they had lost "most of their fleet" in Sicily, and "faction [was] dominant in the city" (2.65.12). The faction Thucydides mentions here can be mapped onto the later separation between the oligarchic conspirators and the *dêmos*, but Thucydides's analysis in 2.65 does not provide the entire picture of the sociopolitical landscape in Athens after the disaster in Sicily. The situation then, as discussed above, was dire: fear (*phobos*) and consternation (*kataplêxis*) had taken hold of the *dêmos*, and the survival of the city was not guaranteed (*anelpistoi [...] sôthêsesthai*, 8.1.2). Phrynichus foresees the intended direction of the *xynômosia*, or the conspirators: they are going to continue on with their plan to recall Alcibiades. Ostwald asserts that Phrynichus could not have decided to betray the city only through his fear of Alcibiades,¹⁴¹ but the text says otherwise. Thucydides writes that Phrynichus feared (*deisas*) for himself "after what he had said against it that Alcibiades, if restored, would revenge himself upon him for his opposition" (8.50.1). This fear ultimately influences Phrynichus not to stand against the *dynatôtatoi* and the proposal to transition to oligarchy, because he knows that they will later recall Alcibiades after establishing the oligarchy (8.50.1) — if he resists the *dynatôtatoi*, Alcibiades may retaliate.

Thucydides's text provides analyses of human psychology including the emotional responses of individuals and communities to certain events in the

¹⁴¹ Ostwald (1987) 350.

democratic community that Athens is. *Phobos*, *kataplêxis*, and hopelessness or despair (*anelpistoi*) had seized the *dêmos* after the disaster in Sicily. Survival was at stake. We learned from Pericles's earlier speech during the plague (2.60-64) that when survival of the individual is at stake, a thriving commonwealth provides better chances for such an individual. When Phrynichus learns that Alcibiades will be returning to Athens and that the Spartans will not provide the refuge for him that he had hoped for, he goes to great lengths to appear in sync with the *dêmos*. He demands the fortification of Samos, with the result that he appears to be a leader of the people who prioritizes the safety of the Athenians. Phrynichus succeeds in his effort to win (or retain) the favor of the people.

This episode shows the effects of the lack of a coherent community during times of despair, fear, and consternation. As stated above, Phrynichus is the only individual whose opposition Thucydides details. His fear upon realizing he is outnumbered (8.50.1) causes him to attach himself to whichever community he believes will guarantee his survival. Phrynichus's elevated leadership status as *stratêgos* allows us to see a magnified version of the human psychology of an individual within a distressed *polis* or *dêmos*, the human psychology which Ober asserts is a foundational element of Thucydides's text.¹⁴² The *dêmos*, Phrynichus realizes, is in the process of redefining itself in order to secure the salvation that is at risk. If an individual were to break away from the *dêmos* during this period of redefinition, the *dêmos* may not include him in its new iteration. Phrynichus realizes

¹⁴² Ober (2006) 140.

on his own that he has two options, and they are the same two options which Peisander will soon propose to the Athenians: oligarchy or bust. The text thus allows us to see Phrynichus's resistance with a detail that is not present in the discussion of the Athenians' resistance. Nevertheless, the similarities between the trajectory of Phrynichus's and the Athenians' hesitation and subsequent acceptance of the oligarchy can be read alongside each other, with the details present in Phrynichus's description providing insight into the psychology of the Athenians later.

3: Peisander in Athens

After the Athenians in Samos agree to Alcibiades's oligarchic proposal, they send ambassadors to Athens to convince the Assembly to support the oligarchy as well. The delegation from Samos arrives with Peisander as their leader, the one who would respond to the Athenians' questions about the proposed changes. P.J. Rhodes notes that, while Peisander moved to an endorsement of oligarchy in 411, he had maintained his appearance as a "loyal democratic citizen,"¹⁴³ but other evidence supports that he was neither pro-democracy nor pro-oligarchy, but rather supportive of whichever constitution provided for his immediate self-interest.¹⁴⁴ Peisander is incredibly significant both as the only person in all of book 8 with a direct speech¹⁴⁵ and as the spokesperson who first proposes the oligarchic transition.

¹⁴³ Rhodes (2000) 133.

¹⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 133 n.79.

¹⁴⁵ Hornblower (2008) 914.

The objective of the envoys from Samos, in sum, is to advocate to the Athenians what they had heard from Alcibiades: that the best option in order to continue the Peloponnesian War is “the restoration of Alcibiades and the abolition of the *dêmos* in the city (*tês tou ekei dêmou katalyseôs*), and thus to make Tissaphernes the friend of the Athenians” (8.49). It is important to note that Alcibiades was not directly involved in the presentation to establish an oligarchy in Athens: he could not yet return to Athens without the *dêmos* agreeing to recall him; and, further, Thucydides tells us that, during the discussions in Athens, “Alcibiades was soliciting the favor of Tissaphernes with an earnestness proportioned to the greatness of the issue” (8.52). This statement reveals to the reader that the money Alcibiades argued would be available from Tissaphernes should he be recalled was not yet accessible. The movement toward oligarchy thus proceeded without Alcibiades’s presence. Here, we are reminded of Connor’s comment that no single character “serves as a center of focus around which the events of the book might be arranged.”¹⁴⁶ No individual person spearheads the oligarchic movement from conception to completion. Alcibiades’s role as leader has, for the moment, shifted to Peisander. This highlights the fact that, while Alcibiades was the originator of the proposal to receive money from the Persians, the Athenians believed this was a possibility independently from Alcibiades’s involvement.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Connor (1984) 214.

¹⁴⁷ *cf.* Hyland (2004) 72.

When Peisander arrived in Athens with the other delegates from Samos, he “made a speech before the people (*en tōi dêmōi*), giving a brief summary of their views, particularly insisting that if Alcibiades were recalled and the democratic constitution changed (*mê ton auton tropon dêmokratoumenois*), the Athenians could have the King as their ally, and would be able to overcome the Peloponnesians” (8.53.1). Many Athenians opposed Peisander’s propositions concerning Alcibiades and the abolition of democracy (8.53.2). While the *ochlos*’s resistance to oligarchy in Samos is articulated only once, the Athenian *dêmos*’s resistance to the proposal is articulated three times (“A number of speakers opposed them...”, “in the midst of much opposition and abuse,” 8.53.2; “The People were at first highly irritated,” 8.54.1).¹⁴⁸ The text thus suggests that garnering support for the movement toward oligarchy would be more difficult in Athens than in Samos.

The direction of the *dêmos*’s opposition is telling. Kagan argues that “Thucydides’ description makes it clear that [Peisander] rose to speak to a wild and tumultuous assembly that interrupted him with contradictions and complaints.”¹⁴⁹ While Kagan states that both proposals (abolishing the democracy and recalling Alcibiades) “met strong resistance,”¹⁵⁰ Thucydides gives the *dêmos*’s opposition to changing their democracy much less detail than their opposition to recalling Alcibiades. “A number of speakers opposed them on the question of democracy (*antilegontôn de pollôn kai allôn peri tês dêmokratias*)” (8.53.2), Thucydides writes,

¹⁴⁸ *cf.* Taylor (2010) 205 and 205 n.30.

¹⁴⁹ Kagan (1987) 132.

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.*

which Kagan characterizes as an opposition “against any alteration in the democracy.”¹⁵¹ The *antilegontes*, however, do not seem to argue against *all* alterations in the constitution. On the other hand, Thucydides presents the arguments against Alcibiades’s recall as having more specificity: “the enemies of Alcibiades cried out against the scandal of a restoration to be brought about by a violation of the constitution, and the *Eumolpidae* and *Ceryces*¹⁵² protested in behalf of the Mysteries, the cause of his banishment, and called upon the gods to avert his recall” (8.53.2). The contrast here between the opposition against changing the democracy and the opposition against recalling Alcibiades shows that those who opposed Alcibiades’s restoration made their outrage known with much more specificity. In comparing these two instances of opposition, I do not suggest that one opposition was quantifiably greater than the other, because that cannot be proven. Yet, it is necessary to consider these differences closely since, as I noted with Taylor above, Thucydides rarely provides a voice to opposition or resistance to the oligarchy.¹⁵³ Kagan’s interpretation of the *dêmos*’s resistance as being “against any alteration in the democracy” seems to assume violence, deceit, and manipulation would be necessary in order to attain the public’s support of the proposed regime change. Yet, we do not seem to have sufficient evidence for such strong opposition — an absence that is telling.

¹⁵¹ *ibid.*

¹⁵² *cf.* Strassler (1996) 511 n.8.53.2a: “The *Eumolpidae* and *Ceryces* were the only two families from whom officials who led and conducted the Mystery rites at the shrine of Eleuses [...] could be selected. Since Alcibiades had been condemned for blaspheming against the ‘Mysteries’ (see 6.27-29 and 6.61), they would naturally be concerned at his recall.”

¹⁵³ Taylor (2002) 102.

Peisander addresses the challenge of his dissenting critics by speaking to each of them individually (*hena hekaston*) and questioning each one: “In the face of the fact that the Peloponnesians had as many ships as their own confronting them at sea, more cities in alliance with them, and the King and Tissaphernes to supply them with money, of which the Athenians had none left, had he any hope of saving the state (*tina elpida echei sôtêrias têi polei*) unless someone could induce the King to come over to their side?” (8.53.2). This rebuttal by Peisander recalls and responds to Thucydides’s earlier depiction of the Athenians immediately following the disaster in Sicily, discussed in detail above.¹⁵⁴ Peisander also uses similar language regarding hope. Whereas Thucydides had earlier described the Athenians as “begin[ning] to despair of salvation (*anelpistoi [...] sôthêsesthai*¹⁵⁵)” (8.1.2), Peisander’s proposition offers a possible path, albeit the *only* possible path, for a hope of salvation (*elpida [...] sôtêrias*). Peisander begins to mobilize the people first by acknowledging the cause of their despair or hopelessness, which, it should be remembered, also prompted the *phobos* and *kataplêxis* that preceded their institution of the *probouloi*

¹⁵⁴ Each of Peisander’s points of rebuttal has a counterpart in Thucydides’s earlier description of the affairs in Athens immediately following the Sicilian disaster:

a) Peisander (8.53.2): “the Peloponnesians had as many ships as their own confronting them at sea.” Thucydides (8.1.2): “[the Athenians] had not sufficient ships in their docks.”

b) Peisander (8.53.2): “[the Peloponnesians] had more cities in alliance with them.” Thucydides (8.1.2): “[the Athenians] thought that their enemies in Sicily would immediately sail with their fleet against the Piraeus, inflamed by so great a victory; while their adversaries at home, redoubling all their preparations, would vigorously attack them by sea and land at once, aided by their own revolted confederates.”

c) Peisander (8.53.2): “[the Peloponnesians had] the King and Tissaphernes to supply them with money, of which the Athenians had none left.” Thucydides (8.1.2): “[the Athenians had not sufficient] money in the treasury.”

¹⁵⁵ The root word of the adjective *anelpistos* is the noun *elpis*, meaning “hope” or “expectation.” *LSJ* translates *anelpistos* as “having no hope,” “hopeless,” or “desperate,” i.e., the adjectival opposite of *elpis*. Likewise, *sôthêsesthai* and *sôtêria* both have the same root, *sôs*, having to do with safety or salvation.

(8.1.2-3); and, then, by offering a solution that would alleviate or relieve the feeling of *anelpistôs* and the emotions of *phobos* and *kataplêxis*. Safety (*sôtêria* or *sôthêsesthai*) becomes central throughout Peisander's speech as well as the *dêmos*'s response.

Peisander first mentions *sôtêria* in his proposal to the Athenians in 8.53.2. Throughout his speech and in our analysis of it, he constructs his advice to the Athenians as a choice between *sôtêria* (only possible under a revised and more limited constitution, or *politeia*) and defeat. What follows is the core passage in the oligarchs' (successful) attempt to persuade the public to favor the oligarchy.

Upon their replying that they had not, [Peisander] then plainly said to them (*saphôs elegen autois*): “This we cannot have unless we have a more moderate form of government (*ei mê politeusomen te sôphronesteron*), and put the offices into fewer hands (*es oligous mallon tas archas poiêsomen*), and so gain the King's confidence, and forthwith restore Alcibiades, who is the only man living that can bring this about. Our safety, not the form of our government (*mê peri politeias to pleon bouleusomen en tôi paronti ê peri sôtêrias*), is for the moment the most pressing question, as we can always change afterwards whatever we do not like (*hysteron gar exestai hêmin kai metathesthai, ên mê ti areskêi*).”

The People (*ho dêmos*) were at first highly irritated at the mention of an oligarchy (*tês oligarchias*), but upon understanding clearly from Peisander (*saphôs de didaskomenos hypo tou Peisandrou*) that this was the only resource left (*mê einai allên sôtêrian*), they took counsel of their fears, and promised themselves some day to change the government again (*hama epelpizôn hôs kai metabaleitai*), and gave way (*enedoken*). (8.53.3-54.1)¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ I have intentionally included quotation marks in this translation in order to reflect the following comment from Hornblower (2008) 914: “[Thucydides] introduces the only piece of direct speech in the entire book [...]. The effect of this is startling.”

This should be considered a turning point in the transition to oligarchy, whether or not one holds the later terrorism of the oligarchs to be most influential. Since this passage details the first conversation between the leaders of the oligarchic transition and the *dêmos*, it provides the first instance in which the entire Athenian *dêmos* is made aware of the proposal. Several details must be explored thoroughly.

Peisander's strategy includes an appeal to the Athenians' hope (*elpis*) of safety (*sôtêria*). He defends his position by arguing that the only choice available to them is between safety and their present constitution: they can either keep their current constitution and face inevitable defeat in the Peloponnesian War, or change their constitution and preserve their *sôtêria*. The Athenians face a host of unwinnable challenges, Peisander argues. Their existing resources are slim, and they cannot compete with the Peloponnesians. The Peloponnesians currently possess a navy that is equal to that of the Athenians,¹⁵⁷ whose own navy had once been far superior; they have more allies; and they have more money as a result of their alliance with the Persian king. Under a new, more moderate constitution, however, the Athenians will have much better chances. They will be able to recall Alcibiades, who in turn will sway Tissaphernes's alliance¹⁵⁸ to the Athenians; Alcibiades is the only man who can make this come about, and he will return to Athens only if their constitution is more moderate. This new government will allow them to gain confidence from

¹⁵⁷ *cf.* 2.63.2: In 430, Pericles advised that the Athenians persevere in the war with an evocation of their naval superiority over the Peloponnesians.

¹⁵⁸ Tissaphernes's alliance with the Peloponnesians was already shaky. Hyland (2004) 78: "Tissaphernes' relationship with Sparta, though, grew shaky in the winter of 412/11, due to a series of disagreements over treaty terms (8.36, 43) and the rate at which the satrap paid the Peloponnesian fleet (8.29)."

Tissaphernes and the Persian king. By placing *sôtêria* in opposition to *politeia*, Peisander is clearly arguing that the Athenians need to prioritize their safety (*sôtêria*), not their constitution (*politeia*).

There are parallels between Peisander's argument in 8.53-54.1 and Pericles's much earlier speech to the assembly during the plague (2.60-64). Pericles too constructed his argument around *sôtêria*. The plague had devastated the Athenians, and they were focusing inward on their own private suffering, ignoring laws as well as religious and social customs. As is the case in 8.53-54.1, the Athenians were at war with the Peloponnesians at the time of Pericles's speech. Moreover, during the plague, their lack of social cohesion threatened their ability to carry on in the war, and many of them wanted to concede to the Peloponnesians (2.59.3). Pericles too presented the Athenians with a choice: they could either prioritize their own affairs and focus on their individual safety, or devote themselves to the safety of the commonwealth (*sôtêria tou koinou*, 2.60.4, 2.61.4). On an inter-state level, Pericles argued that the safety of the commonwealth derives from independence. Submission to the Peloponnesians would thus result in a loss of independence, self-definition, and, therefore, safety. Pericles reminded the Athenians that a safe commonwealth can provide *sôtêria* to individual members of the commonwealth when they are suffering (*kakotychôn*); yet a prosperous man will necessarily be ruined if his state is ruined (2.60.3). Pericles ultimately advised each individual Athenian to prioritize the *sôtêria* of Athens as a community over his own *sôtêria* as an individual.

The contrasts between Peisander's address to the *dêmos* and Pericles's earlier speech in book 2 are particularly illuminating. In his speech, Pericles spoke against the common sentiment of the *dêmos* by defending his own authority as a leader of the people when they were not in favor of his leadership.¹⁵⁹ As *stratêgos* during the beginning of the plague, Pericles's leadership was under attack, and the Athenians' despair (*aporoi*, 2.59.2) was directed against him. In my earlier analysis in Part I, I examined Pericles's strategy of defending himself and his authority to advise the *dêmos* during the plague (2.60-64). Pericles's speech ultimately gave advice (to persevere in the war) that was contrary to the *dêmos*'s desire (to give up). There was, therefore, a need for Pericles to defend himself if he expected the *dêmos*, being angry at him, to take his advice. He indeed defends his own authority and capacity as a leader (and, more generally, the importance of a leader in a democracy). Even though the Athenians voted him out of office, they eventually came to agree with him and reinstated him as *stratêgos* (2.65). Pericles's advice to the people — to retain their resolve, to move past their anger, and to cease their private grieving even though the triggers of that grief were still abounding — was good advice, according to Thucydides, but it was quite understandably a difficult prescription for the people to hear. Peisander, on the other hand, does not defend the legitimacy, authority, or necessity of the democracy or the importance of perseverance in retaining the state's

¹⁵⁹ cf. 2.59.2: "Their despair was now complete and all vented itself upon Pericles (*pantachothēn te tēi gnōmēi aporoi kathestēkotes enekeinto tōi Perikleī*)."¹⁵⁹ This language is very similar to the description of the Athenians in the beginning of book 8. 8.1.2: "Already distressed at all points and in all quarters (*panta de pantachothēn autous elypei*) [...] they began to despair of salvation (*anelpistoi êsan en tōi paronti sōthēsesthai*)."

identity. He addresses the *dêmos*'s despair with a course of action that abolishes the institution — i.e., democratic decision making — that led to that despair. The lack of hope for salvation (*anelpistoi* [...] *sôthêsesthai*, 8.1.2), which accompanied the *phobos* and *kataplêxis* among the Athenians after the Sicilian disaster, is replaced by a hope for safety (*elpida* [...] *sôtêrias*, 8.53.2) that acknowledges, validates, and channels their grief in the direction of a new *politeia*.

The very grammatical construction of the speeches points to a significant difference in the way *sôtêria* is conceived. Pericles's discussion of *sôtêria* is never abstract but rather concerns *to koinon* (i.e., *sôtêria tou koinou*, the safety of the commonwealth, 2.60.4, 2.61.4). *To koinon*, or the commonwealth, for Pericles, is how *sôtêria* is possible for the individual members of the *dêmos*. Such a commonwealth gives an opportunity to all people to decide on the affairs of the city. Peisander's *sôtêria*, by comparison, is vague and ambiguous: instead of clarifying the type of safety for which he is advocating, he simply presents *sôtêria* in opposition to the current form of the constitution. This contrast is revealing. For Pericles, *sôtêria* derives from a healthy commonwealth that is independent and subject to no one. The commonwealth requires the participation of all citizens, with each person devoting themselves to the common good rather than to their own private circumstances or afflictions. According to Peisander, on the other hand, *sôtêria* in the present situation requires a commonwealth with a different constitution, one that places the rule in the hands of the *oligoi*, an enfranchised body of decision-makers. This necessitates a

polloi without political enfranchisement whom the *oligoi* will regulate and for whom or on whose behalf they will make decisions.

In other words, for Peisander, *sôtêria* does not seem to depend on equal participation in the commonwealth: individuals in the *dêmos* can have *sôtêria* without being enfranchised members of the decision-making body. Peisander's *sôtêria* must also mean something other than complete independence on an inter-state level: the Athenians find themselves negotiating their constitution because they need financial help from Tissaphernes and the Persian king, and therefore they are required to consider the desires and terms of the Persians in political decision making, which undermines the Athenians' ability to define themselves. The ability of independent self-definition is in conflict with their need for money to persevere in the war. Peisander mentions the lack of the naval resources (8.53.2) which Pericles's earlier argument also emphasized (2.63.4): the *hyparchonta* that, as Pericles suggested, would contribute to the Athenians' success and that needed to be considered in determining to maintain their resolve were seriously depleted when Peisander addressed his audience in 411.

Peisander's speech, alongside Thucydides's narrative, suggests that *sôtêria* can coexist with — or even requires — dependence, submission, and a lack of self-definition, which is very different from the Periclean idea of *sôtêria*. Importantly, Peisander, the leaders of the oligarchic transition, and the *dêmos* seems to define *sôtêria* as inextricably connected with retaining their empire. Earlier, for instance, Phrynichus had considered the response of the Athenian subject cities to a new

regime change in his initial resistance to the oligarchy, suggesting that the subject cities would not respond more favorably to an oligarchy than to the democracy and that they would revolt. This suggests that *sôtêria* for the Athenians, in this case, depends on the retention of their empire more than the lack of independence. Peisander's and the *dêmos*'s opposition to losing the empire is actually in line with the ideology Pericles had earlier espoused in his speech during the plague. The Peloponnesian War, according to Pericles, was a fight to retain their empire and to avoid any danger (*kindynou*) that would come from losing it (2.63.1). Whether it was wrong (*adikon*) to create an empire or not was not as important as the danger (*epikindynon*) that would result from letting go of it (2.63.2). Peisander, the oligarchs, and the *dêmos* all seem to accept the importance of retaining the empire in avoiding danger.

Beyond the similarities in their prioritization of the empire, Peisander's ideology is decidedly different from Pericles's. Pericles's *sôtêria tou koinou* cannot easily map onto Peisander's *sôtêria*, which stands alone, without a *tou koinou* to follow. Pericles advocated for a commonwealth wherein all citizens are recipients of *sôtêria* because all citizens are enfranchised. On the other hand, Peisander's new constitution will disenfranchise many members of the commonwealth. It appears that Peisander's *sôtêria* concerns mere survival of the community rather than the thriving of the community which Pericles's speech aimed to construct. It is hard to imagine that Pericles, who eulogized Athens as the "school of Hellas" in his funeral oration, would support the Athenians' decision to become an undemocratic society for whom

mere survival was the main objective. Yet the *dêmos* was capable not only of conceiving the idea of an undemocratic Athens but ultimately of voting for it. It is necessary to consider how that was possible: why did the *dêmos* accept (or why was it capable of accepting) Peisander's proposal?

Peisander's proposal asks the Athenians to aim at a basic sort of *sôtêria* — mere survival — rather than to preserve the current form of their *politeia*. The evidence in Thucydides's text denies that rhetorical trickery occurred in Peisander's proposal. Kagan argues that Peisander's speech was moderate and that phrases like “more moderate government” and “into fewer hands” (8.53.3) would only have registered as oligarchic or ambiguous to the “shrewder and better informed” listeners.¹⁶⁰ He adds: “Thucydides says that the assembly was not pleased by what Peisander had said ‘about the oligarchy.’ He must be referring to those listeners who understood what lay behind the ambiguity of ‘more sensibly’¹⁶¹ but surely not to the majority, for the assembly as a whole accepted Peisander's arguments.”¹⁶² Yet the text tells us that Peisander speaks clearly to the Athenians (*saphôs elegen autois*) and that he specifically uses political language (*es oligous mallon tas archas poiêsomen*, 8.53.3).¹⁶³ Although Peisander does not use the term *oligarchia* specifically in his speech, Thucydides notes that the Athenians understood his argument clearly (using

¹⁶⁰ Kagan (1987) 133.

¹⁶¹ i.e., the “more moderate” (*sôphronesteron*) government (8.53.3).

¹⁶² Kagan (1987) 133.

¹⁶³ See Simonton (2017) 40 for the importance of the *archai* (offices) in oligarchic *politeiai*: “*oligarchia* was a *politeia* in which access to authoritative magistracies (*archai*) was restricted to those in possession of a certain (usually quite exclusionary) property requirement (*timêma*), who constituted the sovereign ruling element (*kurion politeuma*).”

the same word, *saphôs*, as he used in Peisander's speech): "The People (*ho dêmos*) were at first highly irritated (*chalepôs ephere*) at the mention of an oligarchy (*peri tês oligarchias*), but upon understanding clearly (*saphôs de didaskomenos*) from Peisander that this was the only resource left (*mê einai allên sôtêrian*), [...] they gave way" (8.54.1). The initial proposal of oligarchy to the Athenian *dêmos* does not appear to produce a divided response: there is no evidence to suggest that the *dêmos* did not share the same understanding.¹⁶⁴

While the oligarchic conspirators *did* engage in terrorism and violence (8.65ff), Thucydides portrays the Athenians as unattached to their democracy and suggests that they do not go to great lengths to defend their constitution,¹⁶⁵ especially in this early instance where the *dêmos* first hears of the proposal to become an oligarchy. Thucydides's text is "more nuanced" than to support that the Athenians were terrorized into accepting the oligarchy; rather, Thucydides suggests that "many Athenians strongly supported the oligarchy without compulsion."¹⁶⁶ A significant reason for their initial acceptance of the oligarchy is that the Athenians believe Peisander's suggestion that they will later be able to change their government back to a democracy if they want to. Taylor argues that this proves Peisander's deception as

¹⁶⁴ cf. Taylor (2010) 204: "Especially because of Thucydides' explicit statement that Peisander spoke clearly to the people, I read these words to mean that the people responded poorly at first to a proposal that they perceived to be about oligarchy."

¹⁶⁵ Taylor (2010) 194-5.

¹⁶⁶ *ibid.*, 211.

well as the Athenians' naiveté.¹⁶⁷ Taylor's argument requires further consideration. The discussion in Athens about the possibility of *changing* the constitution later reflects a way that Peisander proposes the Athenians can engage with the problem at hand. The Athenians' perception of the legitimacy and validity of this claim affects how they interpret the whole of Peisander's argument. The *dêmos* agrees to not retain its former sovereignty (*dêmokratia*) in the new constitution (*oligarchia*), yet they are persuaded by the suggestion that the new limited government will respect, acknowledge, and act in accordance with their will. Although Peisander's argument may seem to have obvious flaws, it is possible to reconstruct why it was effective.

Previous instances of decision-making during the Peloponnesian War show us that the democracy allowed and often made use of opportunities to deliberate on or reevaluate policy which had already been decided. Earlier in this thesis, I discussed Josiah Ober's framework of *erga* and *logoi* as different forms of knowledge, and especially how Pericles's funeral oration praised the innate Athenian ability to deliberate and use rationalization to arrive at a common knowledge in making decisions. Athenian democracy, moreover, provided a safeguard when the understanding from *logoi* was not sufficient or accurate.¹⁶⁸ The practice of *parrhêsia*, freedom of speech in the Assembly, meant that occasionally *logoi* would be affected by the rhetorician's bias or personal agenda, since every Athenian had the right of free

¹⁶⁷ *ibid*, 205-209. The other two facets of Taylor's explanation for Peisander's ultimate success are in line with my own interpretation and do not need as much engagement: first, that the Athenians are convinced by Peisander's argument that there is no way to move forward other than as Peisander advises and that they will not be able to carry on in the war without help from the Persians; and, second, that Peisander's audience accepts that they have a choice between *sôtêria* and *politeia*.

¹⁶⁸ Saxonhouse (2006) 146-178.

speech, and *logoi* provided the basis for determining *erga* and therefore making decisions about policy. When someone abused their right to *parrhêsia* to push their own agenda, it was crucial for the Athenians to be able to revisit and reevaluate the decisions that had been made based on bad *logoi*.

Deliberation and reevaluation occur in both the Mytilenean¹⁶⁹ and Sicilian¹⁷⁰ Debates: Thucydides, in fact, does not provide an account of the original deliberations concerning Mytilene and Sicily in his *History*, recounting instead the reevaluation of each. The Mytilenean Debate, as Thucydides reports it, follows the decision to kill the men of Mytilene and enslave the women and children: the reemergence of the question offers an example of Athenians revisiting, reassessing, and ultimately revising a decision that they had already made, arriving at a much less violent agenda.¹⁷¹ Thucydides reports the Sicilian Debate similarly, providing in his *History* the speeches of Nicias and Alcibiades that occur *after* the Athenians have agreed on and ratified an agenda.¹⁷² Nicias forces the deliberation back to the Assembly floor,¹⁷³ and although his anti-expedition position ultimately loses, his dissenting speech is further proof of the possibility of reevaluation in the Athenian Assembly.

Considering this history of reevaluation in the Assembly does not altogether solve the problem in Peisander's speech. He is suggesting a type of reevaluation that

¹⁶⁹ Saxonhouse (2006) 151ff.

¹⁷⁰ *ibid.*, 163ff.

¹⁷¹ *ibid.*, 152: "Another Assembly is called without delay and the Athenians reconsider the decision of the previous day."

¹⁷² *ibid.*, 163: "As in the case of the Mytilenean Debate, the Assembly at Athens becomes a session devoted to a reconsideration of an action decided upon at an earlier meeting."

¹⁷³ *ibid.*, 164.

does not have an immediate precedent in Thucydides's text: that the Athenians make a decision with the explicit goal that they will later revise it. The Mytilenean and Sicilian Debates both occurred rather quickly after a decision had been reached and concerned policy to be enforced immediately. The Athenians in 8.53-54 are tasked with the objective of (re)defining and (re)creating their *politeia*, and they have not yet even decided the specifics of the oligarchy: the *dêmos* "gives in" (*enedôken*) assuming that they will have input on the decisions of the oligarchy. The task of redefining the *politeia* of the state is a process. The *dêmos* in 8.53-54.1 is faced with the responsibility of deciding how to proceed with decision-making in the city. The decision to modify the dynamic process of decision-making itself is much different from, for instance, the specific military decision to send troops to Mytilene the very next day, or the decision to quickly send troops to Sicily, both of which involve an agenda that is to be acted upon with expediency.

If we consider the argument that the Athenian *dêmos* will be able to later revise their decision to abolish the democracy as a plausible outcome of the situation, we should therefore treat it as a significant component in the *dêmos*'s initial endorsement of the oligarchy. Thucydides's *History*, as Cynthia Farrar argues, "offers a story of the actual experiences of persons placed in a context which, properly interpreted, reveals the connection between their actions and the reality of the situation."¹⁷⁴ In studying the early oligarchic movement and the transition to oligarchy that follows, we must consider the context and how it differs from the

¹⁷⁴ Farrar (1988) 132.

situations of Pericles's speeches as well as the context of the Sicilian Debate. Pericles's speeches delineated a specific ideology for the Athenians as well as a defense of a specific brand of democracy, one which Thucydides calls a "nominal" democracy wherein the "first man" was the leader (2.65.9). Post-Periclean Athens saw a reduction in the quality of leaders but nevertheless a retention in the stability of the situation in the war, minus the manpower lost as a result of the plague; at the time of the Sicilian Debate, the Athenians were experiencing a lull in the demands of the Peloponnesian War during which they did not feel the need to be frugal. The situation in Athens after the Sicilian Expedition, on the other hand, was very different, yet the mindset of the people had not necessarily shifted. At the time of Peisander's discussion with the Athenians, the *dêmos*'s initial response to the proposal is cohesive: after some initial resistance, they come to accept an altered *politeia* if their city is to survive. Again, to borrow Farrar's words: "For Thucydides, what there is to know about human nature can only be known historically. There are no static truths about men, only experience of them and understanding of particular situations."¹⁷⁵ The ideology of the Athenians cannot be understood in a vacuum: rather, it proves to behave dynamically throughout the history of the Peloponnesian War. In the transition to oligarchy, the Athenians do not necessarily abandon their human nature or their ideology, and our analysis of the transition benefits from considering what elements of the Athenians' ideology and nature is displayed throughout the transition and in their initial endorsement of the proposal.

¹⁷⁵ Farrar (1988) 131.

It seems too simplistic to say that the Athenians are naive or cowardly¹⁷⁶ in their initial endorsement of the oligarchic proposal. Before the oligarchic terrorism began, they displayed reason and a clear understanding of the proposal which they were hearing. The text suggests that the Athenians were able to conceive of an “idea of Athens” as an oligarchy without overt manipulation by the oligarchic leaders. Of course, this is not the full story of the oligarchy. As Farrar writes, Thucydides’s objective is to understand human nature and human interests through history, which is “possible only through an accurate narrative embodiment of human experience.”¹⁷⁷ At this point in the movement, there is no terror, and there is arguably no deception: the words of Peisander’s proposal are clear, as is its understanding by the *dêmos*. The people are in fear, experiencing anxiety, hopelessness, and despair, and a severe lack of resources. These circumstances do not negate the validity of their vote; rather, they clarify how the ideology of the Athenians manifests itself at this moment. As the circumstances of the oligarchic movement changed very rapidly after Peisander’s meeting, so did our analysis of the *dêmos*’s behavior. If we do not try to impose a “static truth” on the behavior of the Athenians throughout the transition, it is possible to analyze their sociopolitical practices and behaviors at each moment of the transition.

Peisander’s meeting in Athens, of course, was not the whole story of the transition to oligarchy. Nevertheless, in order to further clarify the importance of

¹⁷⁶ Taylor (2002) 102.

¹⁷⁷ Farrar (1988) 128.

studying the *dêmos*'s initial endorsement of the oligarchy, it is helpful to have an understanding of the scope of the transition. Terrorism and factioning begin to emerge after Peisander's meeting with the Athenians. Immediately after the meeting, the Athenians vote to send Peisander and ten others to negotiate the best arrangement (*arista*) with Alcibiades and Tissaphernes (8.54.2). Before leaving Athens, Peisander asks for help from the clubs in putting down (*katalysousi*) the *dêmos* (8.54.4). Yet, when they go to meet with Alcibiades and Tissaphernes, they find Tissaphernes's demands to be unreasonable: he requires both the cession of Ionia (and other cessions) and the ability for the Persian king to build ships and to sail along the Persian coast whenever he pleases¹⁷⁸ (8.56.4). The Athenians determine not to yield to Tissaphernes's demands and resolve "that they had been deceived by Alcibiades" (8.56.4). Tissaphernes and the Persian king will continue to fund the Peloponnesians (8.57-59). After returning from the meeting with Tissaphernes and Alcibiades to Samos, Peisander and the envoys determined to cut ties with Alcibiades; they resolved, "now that they were once embarked on this course, to see for themselves how they could best prevent the ruin of their cause, and meanwhile to sustain the war, and to contribute without stint money and all else that might be required from their own private estates, as they would henceforth labor for themselves alone" (8.64.4). The transition to oligarchy would proceed.

¹⁷⁸ Strassler (1996) 514 n.8.56.4a: many scholars argue that this implies the existence of a treaty between Athens and Persia concerning ships and sailing, and that Tissaphernes's proposal is a violation of the terms agreed upon in this treaty.

Peisander and the envoys dispatch some of the conspirators to Athens to “do what was necessary [there]” (8.64.1), and others to other Athenian subject cities to abolish their democracies and institute oligarchies. Upon returning to Athens, the envoys found that their companions had already done much work (*kai katalambanousi ta pleista tois hetairois proeirgasmena*, 8.65.2). Peisander’s *hetairoi* had assassinated Androcles, who was one of the best of the *dêmos*: being a popular leader (*tês te dêmagôgias*), he was responsible for the banishment of Alcibiades in the first place. In doing this, they believe they can “recommend themselves to Alcibiades, who was, as they supposed, to be recalled, and to make Tissaphernes their friend” (8.65.2). Thucydides notes that the *hetairoi* had killed several other men secretly (8.65.2). The *hetairoi* propose to the public (*logos te ek tou phanerou*) that the new *politeia* abolish public pay except to people serving in the war and that the business of the state be managed by not more than five thousand people (8.65.3). The conspirators, however, never intend to allow these five thousand to govern (8.66.1). Thucydides writes that fear prevents people from speaking against this proposal, as the oligarchic conspirators engage in political assassinations, killing people if they “ventured to rise in opposition.” The *dêmos*, he says, is “thoroughly cowed” (8.66.2), believing the number of conspirators to be greater than it was because they had no means to determine what the actual number was (8.66.3). “At this juncture [Peisander] and his colleagues arrived, and lost no time in completing the job” (8.67.1): the new government would be comprised of five presidents who would elect one hundred men, and each of these one hundred would bring forward three

more, totaling a ruling body of four hundred men, who “should enter the council chamber with full powers and govern as they judged best, and should convene the five thousand whenever they pleased” (8.67.3). According to Thucydides, Phrynichus is among the greatest supporters of the oligarchy: “Afraid of Alcibiades, and assured that he was no stranger to his intrigues with Astyochus at Samos, he held that no oligarchy was ever likely to restore him, and once embarked in the enterprise, proved, where danger was to be faced, by far the staunchest of them all” (8.68.3). The democracy was finally officially abolished in the summer of 411. Thucydides here notes, as I discussed above, that “it was no light matter to deprive the Athenian people of its freedom” (8.68.4), and then states that “the assembly ratified the proposed constitution, without a single opposing voice, and was then dissolved; after which the Four Hundred were brought into the council chamber” (8.69.1).

The scope of the transition to oligarchy is clearly very broad, but the events following Peisander’s proposal in 8.53-54.1 provide evidence that the terrorism and violence of the oligarchs, or the *hetairoi*, did not occur until after the initial proposal. The violence following the initial proposal makes it difficult, if not impossible, to suggest that the *dêmos* would have officially voted the oligarchy into power had the violence not occurred. Nevertheless, the analysis of the *dêmos*’s initial endorsement of the oligarchy provides, as I hope to have shown, illuminating insights into the functioning of Athenian democracy. Now, I will shift my focus to the presence of hope and hopelessness in book 8, leading up to the *dêmos*’s and Peisander’s discussions, continuing the analysis that I began in Part I.

4: Hope(lessness)

Here, I continue my earlier discussion of hope that I began in Part I by returning to Schlosser. While his analysis of hope is helpful, it overlooks the implications of *elpis* in book 8, stating that, after 8.1, the Athenians are hopeless, and “hope does not return” in book 8.¹⁷⁹ This statement cannot be totally true. In order to extend Schlosser’s analysis, it is necessary to consider the definitions from Eagleton that I discussed earlier: simple hope, hopelessness or despair, and fundamental hope. A careful analysis of hope and hopelessness in book 8 can illuminate certain issues in democratic decision-making that are telling about the workings of democracy in crisis. While we do see the *dêmos* as *anelpistos* or hopeless in 8.1, *elpis* returns in 8.47ff. Building on my analysis in Part I, I suggest that we consider the hope that emerges from hopelessness in book 8 to be a fundamental hope, similar to the hope of the Athenians during the plague, rather than a simple hope. The fundamental hope is not a simple hope as under Pericles’s first speech, because the hope here is for survival instead of a specific outcome. Likewise, it is not formed by poor guidance or ignorance, as the *dêmos*’s hope is in the Sicilian Debate. The text suggests a clear understanding of the resources that are available (or unavailable) to the Athenians. The knowledge of the *dêmos* is detailed in 8.1 and Thucydides appears to consider

¹⁷⁹ *ibid*, 173. Schlosser admits that book 8 is more complex than his statement suggests. 173 n.14: “Book VIII provides an interesting case study of how the Athenians proceed once disabused of their hopes, that is, how a polity proceeds once hope appears to be totally crushed.”

their assessment to be accurate. The fundamental hope that comes from this hopelessness, I suggest, ultimately leads to the undermining of democracy in Athens.

After the news of the disaster in Sicily reaches Athens, we see the frustration of the Athenians directed at those who led them to hope (8.1.1) that they would succeed in their efforts there. Here, hope is portrayed not as a disposition but as “an acquired habit of thinking, feeling, and acting in a specific way.”¹⁸⁰ Thucydides writes that orators and oracle-mongers coached their hopes into the pursuit of a specific agenda. These hopes were ruinous. The *hyparchonta* that supported those earlier simple hopes under Pericles and that had allowed the simple hope to go so terribly wrong in the Sicilian Debate have faded away: the navy is weak, there is much less money available, ships are irreparably damaged and soldiers are dead. The disaster in Sicily caused significant devastation. Thucydides’s note that the Athenians are *anelpistoi* occurs within the same assessment of their lack of resources or *hyparchonta*.¹⁸¹ We do not, however, see the Athenians give up: they resolve to “resist to the last” (8.1.3). Their momentary hopelessness, then, does not prevent hope from returning, as we have seen; the type of hope that returns, however, does not have the basis that simple hope does, but it is rather a fundamental hope bred from desperation. This is the kind of hope that Pericles wished to suppress in decision-making during the plague in particular, when fundamental hope was arguably present. Yet

¹⁸⁰ Eagleton (2015) 57.

¹⁸¹ 8.1.2 is useful in full, for context: “Already distressed at all points and in all quarters, after what had now happened they were seized by a fear and consternation quite without precedent. It was grievous enough for the state and for every man in his proper person to lose so many hoplites, cavalry, and able-bodied troops, and to see none left to replace them; but when they saw, also, that they had not sufficient ships in their docks, or money in the treasury, or crews for the ships, they began to despair of salvation.”

Thucydides's text does not provide evidence for existing resources that would have prevented this desperation from taking hold.

Hope that emerges from hopelessness or despair looks different from any hope that is present before the hopelessness or despair strikes. Although the story of Ady Barkan is anachronistic, the language he uses for hope is helpful here. Barkan is a 34-year-old man with ALS, a degenerative disease that often results in paralysis and is fatal, with most patients only surviving a few years after their diagnosis. Barkan has risen to prominence as a healthcare activist since his diagnosis in 2016; as of April 2018, his life expectancy is between two and three years. Barkan was recently interviewed about Stephen Hawking, the renowned physicist who died in 2018 who lived an astounding fifty years after his own ALS diagnosis. Barkan said, "I am hopeful that I'll be able to have many years, even if they're very different from the years I expected to have when I was healthy."¹⁸² Barkan's hope allows for envisioning a possibility, even if it is an improbability: Stephen Hawking lived five decades after his diagnosis, so Barkan could live for a long time as well. Eagleton writes that "hope must intend the possible, or at least what those in the grip of it regard as possible."¹⁸³ Barkan's hope, however improbable, is not impossible.

After the Sicilian Expedition, the Athenians act positively, but not hopefully.¹⁸⁴ Similarly to Barkan before his diagnosis with ALS, who expected a

¹⁸² Barkan (2018). Though he only says "hope" once, it is useful to remember that *elpis* can mean both "hope" and "expectation." Thus, in Thucydidean language, and for our purposes, Barkan's statement invokes *elpis* twice: *elpis* before diagnosis, and *elpis* after diagnosis.

¹⁸³ Eagleton (2015) 48.

¹⁸⁴ *ibid.*, 61: "You can act positively even when you regard the situation as hopeless, but you cannot act hopefully if you regard it as hopeless."

healthy life, the Athenians had envisioned or expected a future involving success in the Peloponnesian War under Pericles's leadership. This success, as we know from Pericles's last speech (2.60-64), entailed a preservation of independence and self-definition, which is to say, the *sôtêria tou koinou*. As the realities of the war begin to take hold, the safety of the commonwealth becomes more precarious. The Athenians work to preserve themselves and to adapt to their present circumstances (just as Barkan became an activist and advocate for better healthcare after his diagnosis), so that their circumstances would become more conducive to a future of survival, even if not exactly the same as the future they had desired when their *hyparchonta* were more dependable. As a healthcare advocate, Barkan has worked to reshape his present situation so that a future within the realm of the desirable becomes possible. Yet, while his hope during his years before diagnosis was to live healthily for many more decades, this hope would no longer be possible under his new diagnosis. Hope requires a desire for something that is possible: for someone to hope for something desirable, the desirable must be (understood to be) possible. In Barkan's case, the desirable thing has become survival: "I am hopeful that I'll be able to have many years." Thucydides constructs the Athenians' hope similarly, from hopelessness regarding survival immediately after Sicily (*anelpistoi [...] sôthêsesthai*, 8.1.2) to hope for survival (*elpida [...] sôtêrias*, 8.53.2) after Peisander proposes instituting an oligarchy to the Assembly.

If hope is connected to the specific future fulfillment of a desire,¹⁸⁵ then hopelessness is the absence of the ability to project oneself into that desired future. It is the death of the present's potential future. The Athenians after Sicily take measures to redefine their state so that their state will persist into the future, even though their hopes for this altered future will necessarily be different than what they had hoped for under Pericles. As Taylor argues, the Athenians here prove that Athens does not have to be a democracy in order to fit within the broad "idea of Athens." For Athens to be anything, Athens must survive: one cannot have a simple hope if one cannot be sure of one's own survival; in the precarious situation of desperation for survival, fundamental hope is the only breed of hope that can persist.¹⁸⁶ Much of Eagleton's philosophy about hope considers the role of (different types of) hope for the individual. Nevertheless, Eagleton briefly argues — in a statement that is of paramount importance to our analysis of the Athenians after the Sicilian disaster — that a civilization (or, in our case, a *dêmos*) is unfavorable to permanent hopelessness or despair. "In what conceivable meta-language could a civilization take the full measure of its own nonexistence, a situation which it could properly grasp only by leaping outside its own skin?"¹⁸⁷ As Schlosser writes, Thucydides's text makes the argument that hope, for better or for worse, is a necessary condition for a polity: an

¹⁸⁵ *ibid.*, 52.

¹⁸⁶ *cf.* Eagleton (2015) 72: "Perhaps this fundamental species of hope is what persuades us that even in the midst of calamity, life is still worth living. It may be no more than a question of wishing to persist — not for the sake of anything in particular, but because such persistence is the precondition of coming to want or achieve something particular. Life is a necessary if not sufficient condition of hope. Fundamental or unconditional hope is thus a kind of metahope, the transcendental possibility of all our more palpable aspirations."

¹⁸⁷ Eagleton (2015) 113.

“examination of *elpis* in the *History* can inform reflection about hope’s place in political theory and hope’s significance for politics more generally.”¹⁸⁸ Under Pericles’s leadership, the simple hope of 1.140-44 threatened to become a fundamental hope in 2.60-64 from the desperation of the plague, but his guidance (at first rejected, but later adhered to) prevented this hope from replacing *gnômê* based on existing resources. The hope of the Sicilian Debate revolved around unchecked and overly erotic desire without enough consideration of resources: it was a simple hope gone wrong, informed by inaccurate knowledge or ignorance. In 8.1*ff*, the Athenians do not have resources, nor do they have a leader like Pericles to advise them, and they are unable to hold onto (or retain) a simple hope for survival. Desperation and hopelessness ensue. “As is the way of a *dêmos*” — to borrow Thucydides’s language (8.1.4) — the Athenians cannot be permanently hopeless, but the circumstances do not allow for a simple hope. Instead, the Athenians seem to develop a fundamental hope, because their simple hope had turned into hopelessness.

Then, Alcibiades introduces the Athenians to a hope-creating proposal: if they abolish their democracy and institute an oligarchy, Alcibiades, with his connection to the money of the Persian king, will return and provide Athens with the money they need (the *hyparchonta*) to carry on in the war. Hope reemerges from hopelessness, but the form it takes does not unify all the Athenians any longer, despite it emerging from what seemed to be an all-encompassing hopelessness. The elite, or the *dynatôtatoi*, begin to develop a hope of control of the government upon Alcibiades’s proposal of

¹⁸⁸ Schlosser (2012) 170.

the oligarchy. This hope is simple. It is grounded in a present resource (the budding oligarchic movement) which results in the desired future (control of the offices). The *dêmos* or *ochlos*, on the other hand, does not initially desire an oligarchy. When the oligarchy becomes aligned with a fundamental hope for salvation or survival, it is nevertheless easy for them to latch onto this idea. While these types of hope are different, they are equally needed: the fundamental hope of salvation among the *dêmos* and the simple hope of control among the *dynatôtatoi* are both hopes that are based on the same alteration of the present (the institution of an oligarchy) that results in a desired or desirable articulation of the future (some form of *sôtêria*). Desperation or hopelessness for survival is the individual concern of each of the Athenians: it thus undermines the individual's capacity to be an effective participant in democracy and democratic decision-making. In the throes of hopelessness, the individuals who make up the *dêmos* cannot effectively distinguish between an agenda that is equally good for all of the individuals of the *koinon* and an agenda that distributes *sôtêria* unequally, including political enfranchisement for some and disenfranchisement for others.

As Eagleton argues, to be desperate is to be willing to do almost anything. Thucydides's text tells us both that Peisander spoke clearly and that the *dêmos* understood him clearly (8.53.3-54.1). It is certainly possible that there was deception in Peisander's speech, but another question of significant importance — whether or not there was deception in Peisander's speech — might be why the Athenians were not attached to their democracy and in what way the circumstances influence this lack

of attachment.¹⁸⁹ One answer to this question, I suggest, has to do with hope. After the Sicilian Expedition, the *dêmos* was bereft of hope. By the time of the Athenians' response to Peisander's proposal (8.54.1), the *dêmos* had regained hope, even if the mode of hope was different among the different classes of the *dêmos*, with some experiencing simple hope and others experiencing fundamental hope. In this case, the state's emergence from hopelessness causes the individual members of the *dêmos* to be blind to the subtleties of their own new fundamental hopes. Their fundamental hope is for survival, and democracy is not how this survival will occur.

Much of Thucydides's *History* deals with democratic decision-making. Book 8 is no different. But rather than narrating the process of decision-making, book 8 brings out how that process can be undermined. Decision-making can certainly be manipulated by deceptive leaders, as we see with Alcibiades in the Sicilian Debate; but we also see how the *dêmos* can undermine itself. Hopelessness causes the *dêmos* to become inadequate decision-makers. Just as *erôs* and desire outweigh reason and undermine productive hope in the Sicilian Debate, hopelessness and the subsequent fundamental hope of the *dêmos* challenge the capacity for individual involvement and effective reasoning in decision-making that is of paramount importance in a well-functioning democracy.

Thucydides's text has long been taken as a defense of the moderate Periclean democracy — which is to say, a democracy in name that needs the psychological leadership and political acumen of an aristocrat or *dynatôtatos*, as Pericles was. The

¹⁸⁹ cf. Taylor (2002) 96: "Thucydides paints [the Athenians] as [...] little attached to their democracy and fully complicit in their own loss of liberty."

movement toward oligarchy suggests a deeper implicit argument of Thucydides's text: that the effective functioning of democracy requires the basic needs of the *dêmos* to be met. The *hyparchonta*, or resources, provide the basis for a simple hope of survival of both the commonwealth and the individual. Without these needs being met — without appropriate resources — the *dêmos* will be desperate or hopeless for survival, resulting in an inability to rise to the task of effective debate or *logizesthai*. As Schlosser writes, Athens is “a hopeful democracy where the members of the *dêmos* find strength for individual action in the endurance of the *dêmos* as a whole beyond the bounds of a single human life.”¹⁹⁰ Hope is intertwined with the strength of the *dêmos*; conversely, hopelessness undermines the strength of the *dêmos* by preventing the members of the *dêmos* from finding strength for their individual action in the endurance of the *dêmos* as a whole beyond the bounds of a single human life. Hopelessness or despair, as we saw during the plague, causes those in its grasp to focus more on their individual survival than the survival of the commonwealth. In the case of the oligarchy, not only is the Periclean leadership figure missing, but the *hyparchonta* are missing as well. Resources are lacking.

The Athenians' desperation for survival results in a fundamental hope. As Pericles suggested, “hope is the prop of the desperate.” And as Schlosser argues: “Hope can inspire political action and sustain communities through catastrophe, yet it can also overwhelm apparently sagacious judgements, swamping these same hopeful

¹⁹⁰ Schlosser (2012) 175.

communities.”¹⁹¹ Fundamental hope, then, as the prop of the desperate, undermines democratic institutions because it prevents the *dêmos* from exercising good judgement. If we read the two instances of hopelessness and desperation in Thucydides’s text together (the plague and the Sicilian disaster), we can apply the framework around hope to develop a conclusion about democracy as a whole. If fundamental hope undermines democratic institutions because it is the prop of the desperate, then *hyparchonta* or resources are a prop upon which democratic decision-making can be built. The effects of desperation are mitigated during the plague through Pericles’s advice to focus on the *hyparchonta*; even though the Athenians initially reject him and his advice, they ultimately do not succumb to their desperate desire to end the war with the Peloponnesians. In 411, there is no Pericles, and it is understood that there are not sufficient *hyparchonta*. Fundamental hope thus comes to be associated with the institution of an oligarchy, which, as Peisander argues, is the only option that provides *sôtêria*. The desperate *dêmos* is blind to the nuances of the proposal; they do not resist the fact that many of them will soon be disenfranchised. By applying this framework of simple hope, hopelessness, and fundamental hope, we can see a possible explanation for why this ambivalence or lack of attachment toward democracy was present among the *dêmos* at the time of Peisander’s proposal.

One thing that must be considered here is the way that knowledge of *hyparchonta* or resources is created in a democracy. Smith, in writing about the disastrous Sicilian Expedition and the ignorance surrounding the decision to sail to

¹⁹¹ *ibid*,177.

Sicily, emphasized that Thucydides's text is a critique of the "casual, haphazard manner in which [the Athenians] have come to acquire their information: rumor and gossip in the agora, anecdote and conjecture in the stoa, opinion and disagreement in the assembly."¹⁹² This same critique can be applied here, but it is useful to adapt the critique somewhat. The Athenians are desperate because of their perception of the lack of resources. Smith notes that in 8.1 the anger of the *dêmos* is directed toward Nicias and Alcibiades for causing the *dêmos* to understand the situation in a flawed way.¹⁹³ Yet there is no specific *rhêtôr* in 8.1 who brings the news of the situation in Sicily and the resources that have been lost. The rumor, gossip, anecdote, and conjecture surrounding the *dêmos*'s perception of the situation is significant. Smith's analysis renders ignorance a "failure of democratic knowledge."¹⁹⁴ It is certainly possible that hopelessness can be a failure of democratic knowledge as well.

Thucydides's text demonstrates that hopelessness and fundamental hope can be detrimental to democratic processes because they limit the *dêmos*'s ability to judge carefully in decision-making. Whether manipulation occurred in the *dêmos*'s initial endorsement of the oligarchy is a difficult question. The subjectivity of learning about and evaluating *ta hyparchonta* is also a significant problem in periods of crisis in a democracy.

I suggest that the passages of Thucydides's text that I have examined from book 8 offer a few conclusions about democracy both in Athens and more broadly.

¹⁹² Smith (2004) 45.

¹⁹³ *ibid.*, 61.

¹⁹⁴ *ibid.*, 43.

First, the text brings out the importance of having resources that can provide the basis for a well-reasoned simple hope for the continued survival of the individuals of the *dêmos*. Without such resources, the *dêmos* can lose their ability to be discerning and can potentially undermine their capacity to make decisions that preserve political equality. Secondly, Thucydides makes an argument for the importance of transparency concerning the affairs of a democratic city. Such knowledge is necessary for decision-making and contributes to the formation of simple hope. I do not suggest that we should read Thucydides's text as saying that democracies cannot function in crisis. His text rather suggests that coherence, unity, and an accurate understanding of both the situation at hand (including the *hyparchonta*) are necessary in order to carefully deliberate when making decisions, which is ultimately the cornerstone of a successful democracy — and moreover that preserving these institutions is necessary in order for democracy to function well.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have attempted to raise questions about how the Athenian democracy makes use of democratic processes to transition to an oligarchy in 411 BCE. In focusing on the specifics of the transition to oligarchy itself, rather than on an analysis of the oligarchy as a whole, I have attempted to provide an analysis of the democratic political processes, ideologies, and collective emotion that lead the Athenians to abolish their democracy. If we leave aside unsubstantiated assumptions of early deception and violence on the part of the oligarchs, the *dêmos*, this analysis suggests, emerges as more supportive of the transition than many scholars who focus on the later violence of the conspirators would assert.

This thesis began with an examination of Pericles as a paradigmatic political figure and an integral part of a well-functioning Athenian democracy. After Pericles's death, the combination of less-qualified leaders and less-than-ideal circumstances led to an inability of the *dêmos* to make decisions that are in their best interests. I have attempted to show how hope and hopelessness, along with the collective emotions of fear and panic, are significant contributors to the Athenians' inability to make good decisions for themselves.

Above all, I hope to have shown the importance of effectively contextualizing decisions that, at first glance, may seem counterintuitive. It is very easy to assume that the Athenian oligarchs forced the *dêmos*'s decision through violence. If we are to believe Thucydides, a careful analysis of his text suggests popular support among the

dêmos for oligarchy and provides valuable and illuminating insights about the functioning of Athenian democracy and about democracies more broadly.

Bibliography

- Azoulay, Vincent. *Pericles of Athens*. 2014. Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- Barkan, Ady. "Ady Barkan On Stephen Hawking And ALS." NowThis News. 2018.
<https://nowthisnews.com/videos/news/ady-barkan-on-stephen-hawking-and-als>
- Cartledge, Paul, and Paula Debnar. "Sparta and the Spartans in Thucydides." 2006.
Brill's Companion to Thucydides, eds. A. Rengakos and A. Tsamakis. Brill, Boston.
- Confora, Luciano. "Biographical Obscurities and Problems of Composition." 2006a.
Brill's Companion to Thucydides, eds. A. Rengakos and A. Tsamakis. Brill, Boston.
- . "Thucydides in Rome and Late Antiquity." 2006b. *Brill's Companion to Thucydides*, eds. A. Rengakos and A. Tsamakis. Brill, Boston.
- Conford, Francis Macdonald. *Thucydides Mythistoricus*. 1971. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia.
- Connor, W. Robert. *Thucydides*. 1984. Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- Dewald, Carolyn J. *Thucydides' War Narrative*. 2005. University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Eagleton, Terry. *Hope Without Optimism*. 2015. University of Virginia Press, Charlottesville.

- Hornblower, Simon. *A Commentary on Thucydides: Volume I: Books I-III*. 1991. Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- . “Thucydides and the Argives.” 2006. *Brill’s Companion to Thucydides*, eds. A. Rengakos and A. Tsamakis. Brill, Boston.
- . *A Commentary on Thucydides: Volume III: Books 5.25-8.109*. 2008. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Hyland, John O. “Waiting for Tissaphernes: Athens and Persia in Thucydides VIII.” *Syllecta Classica*, volume 15.
- Kagan, Donald. *The Fall of the Athenian Empire*. 1987. Cornell University Press, Ithaca.
- Loraux, Nicole. *The Invention of Athens: The Funeral Oration in the Classical City*, tr. Alan Sheridan. 2006. Zone Books, New York.
- Nichols, Mary P. *Thucydides and the Pursuit of Freedom*. 2015. Cornell University Press, Ithaca.
- Ober, Josiah. *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens: Rhetoric, Ideology, and the Power of the People*. 1989. Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- . *Political Dissent in Democratic Athens: Intellectual Critics of Popular Rule*. 1998. Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- . “Thucydides and the Invention of Political Science.” 2006. *Brill’s Companion to Thucydides*, eds. A. Rengakos and A. Tsamakis. Brill, Boston.

- . “Thucydides’ Criticism of Democratic Knowledge.” 1993a.
Nomodeiktes: Greek Studies in Honor of Martin Oswald, eds. R.M. Rosen and J. Farrell. University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor.
- . “Public Speech and the Power of the People in Democratic Athens.” 1993b. *PS: Political Science and Politics*, volume 26, no. 3.
- Ostwald, Martin. *From Popular Sovereignty to the Sovereignty of Law*. 1986. University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Podlecki, Anthony J. *Perikles and his Circle*. 1998. Routledge, New York.
- Raaflaub, Kurt. “Thucydides on Democracy and Oligarchy.” 2006. *Brill’s Companion to Thucydides*, eds. A. Rengakos and A. Tsamakis. Brill, Boston.
- Rawlings, Hunter R. *The Structure of Thucydides’ History*. 1981. Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- Rengakos, Antonios. “Thucydides’ Narrative: The Epic and Herodotean Heritage.” 2006. *Brill’s Companion to Thucydides*, eds. A. Rengakos and A. Tsamakis. Brill, Boston.
- Rhodes, P. J. *A Commentary on the Aristotelian Athenaion Politeia*. 1981. Clarendon Press, Oxford.
- . “Oligarchs in Athens.” 2006. *Alternatives to Athens: Varieties of Political Organization and Community in Ancient Greece*, eds. R. W. Brock and S. J. Hodkinson. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Roberts, Jennifer Tolbert. “Athens’ So-Called Unofficial Politicians.” 1982. *Hermes*

- Rusten, J. S. *Thucydides: The Peloponnesian War, book II*. 1989. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Sagan, Eli. *The Honey and the Hemlock: Democracy and Paranoia in Ancient Athens and Modern America*. 1991. BasicBooks.
- Samons, Loren J. *What's Wrong with Democracy?: From Athenian Practice to American Worship*. 2004. University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Saxonhouse, Arlene W. *Free Speech and Democracy in Ancient Athens*. 2006. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Simonton, Matthew. *Classical Greek Oligarchy*. 2017. Princeton University Press, Princeton.
- Smith, David G. "Thucydides' Ignorant Athenians and the Drama of the Sicilian Expedition." 2004. *Syllecta Classica*, volume 15.
- Steinbock, Bernd. *Social Memory in Athenian Public Discourse: Uses and Meanings of the Past*. 2012. University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor.
- Taylor, Martha C. *Thucydides, Pericles, and the Idea of Athens in the Peloponnesian War*. 2010. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- . "Implicating the Demos: A Reading of Thucydides on the Rise of the Four Hundred." 2002. *The Journal for Hellenic Studies*, vol. 122.
- Visvardi, Eirene. *Emotion in Action*. 2015. Brill, Boston.
- Wohl, Victoria. *Love among the Ruins: The Erotics of Democracy in Classical Athens*. 2002. Princeton University Press, Princeton.

Primary texts and translations:

Thucydides. *History of the Peloponnesian War*. Translated by C. F. Smith. Loeb

Classical Library: Volume I (Books 1-2), 1919. Volume II (Books 3-4), 1920.

Volume III (Books 5-6), 1921. Volume IV (Books 7-8), 1923. Harvard

University Press, Cambridge.

———. *History of the Peloponnesian War*. Edited and translated by Robert B.

Strassler. *Landmark Thucydides: A Comprehensive Guide to the*

Peloponnesian War. 1996. Free Press, New York.

———. *Historiae*. Edited by H. Stuart Jones. Oxford Classical Texts: Volume I

(Books 1-4), 1942. Volume II (Books 5-8), 1942. Clarendon Press, Oxford.

Aristotle. *Athenian Constitution*. Translated by H. Rackham. In *Aristotle Volume XX*.

Athenian Constitution. Eudemian Ethics. Virtues and Vices. Loeb Classical

Library. 1935. Harvard University Press, Cambridge.

Plutarch. *Life of Pericles*. Translated by Bernadotte Perrin. In *Lives Volume III*:

Pericles and Fabius Maximus. Nicias and Crassus. Loeb Classical Library.

1916. Harvard University Press, Cambridge.

Plutarch. *Life of Alcibiades*. Translated by Bernadotte Perrin. In *Lives Volume IV*:

Alcibiades and Coriolanus. Lysander and Sulla. Loeb Classical Library. 1916.

Harvard University Press, Cambridge.

Plato. *Republic*. In *Platonis Opera Volume IV*. Edited by John Burnet. Oxford

Classical Texts. 1922. Clarendon Press, Oxford.