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Oaths, Phantoms, Contagion, Truth: The Crisis of Logos in Fifth-Century Athenian Culture

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Oaths, Phantoms, Contagion, Truth:

The Crisis of Logos in Fifth-Century Athenian Culture

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Languages and Literature
of Bard College

by
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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Introduction: Athens and the Peloponnesian War

In the early spring of 431 BCE, shortly before the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War, Euripides' *Medea* was performed at the City Dionysia in Athens. In the middle of this drama, we see Medea compelling Aegeus, king of Athens, to take an oath. This oath marks the pivotal point in the plot: Medea, enraged by her husband Jason's disregard of their marriage oath, now sets in motion her plan for a terrible revenge, which depends on the efficacy of the new oath with Aegeus. The repercussions of Jason breaking this marriage oath will, we know, be severe: Medea goes on to kill Jason's new bride and, more horribly still, their children.

Even though she later goes on to commit acts of violence that will, throughout millennia of reception, define her as a "madwoman," Medea's reasoning is clear as she addresses Jason in the first part of the play, when she calls attention to the grave potential consequences of his breaking their oath:

...After all I'd done
for you, worst of men, you betrayed me.
We had children, but you took a new wife.
Had you been childless, I could forgive
lust for a new woman. Now your **oaths**
mean nothing. I can't know if you think
the gods in power then no longer rule,
or now new laws are laid down for men.
For you surely know you haven't honored
your **oath** to me. Pheu! Right hand and knees
so often clasped by you, evil man—how empty
your supplication! And I'd placed my hopes in you.
(Eur. *Med.* 491-498; emphasis mine)¹

¹ Rachel Kitzinger, trans., In *The Greek Plays*, eds. Mary Lefkowitz and James Romm, (New York: Modern Library 2016). Unless otherwise noted, all translations of *Medea* are from this work.

The oath with Jason, in which she put her faith, has lost its meaning due to his betrayal; but Medea's complaint indicates that a larger, existential anxiety about *logos* and its ability to effect action is what really preoccupies her.

Occurring as it did nearly simultaneously with the start of the Peloponnesian War (431-404 BCE), the premiere of *Medea* proves to be a telling artifact of the fraught intellectual, cultural, and political atmosphere in Athens during the late years of the Thirty Years' Peace (446-431).² Just as a central concern for this tragedy is oaths—and, more expansively, *logos*—and their relation to reality and action, so too the relationship between *logos*, power, and politics was of great concern in contemporary Hellenic politics, where the making and breaking of oaths, not only between individuals, but between political entities, was of particular importance.³

The Peloponnesian War, which lasted from 431 BCE to 404 BCE,⁴ began after a violation of the oath that had established the Thirty Year' Peace in 446. The war, which pitted the Delian League, comprised of Athens and its allies, against the Peloponnesian League, comprised of Sparta and its allies, is traditionally divided into two main phases. The first phase was the Archidamian War (431-21), also known as the Ten-Years-War. The second phase (415-404) began with the Sicilian Expedition of 415-413 and lasted until the eventual Athenian surrender in 404. These two main phases of the war were separated by the Peace of Nicias (421-414). It is important to note that the Thirty Years' Peace and the Peace of Nicias, both of which

² Simon Hornblower, "Thirty Years Peace," In *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

³ Throughout this project, *logos* will be used rather than a translation. The Greek word *logos* encompasses the English words reasoning, deliberation, reason, speech, and speech (to name just a few). See note on terminology below.

⁴ This is sometimes referred to as the Second or Main Peloponnesian War to distinguish it from the so-called First Peloponnesian War, the name given to the struggle between Athens and Corinth in 461-446 BCE. This was ended by the Thirty Years' Peace.

were unable to prevent further war, were founded upon oaths. It is, moreover, interesting to note that both Sparta and Athens were guilty of violating oaths of peace:

In all the years since the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War the Spartans had fought with a guilty conscience. They knew that the fighting had begun when their Theban allies had violated a truce with their attack on Plataea. Even more serious, the Spartans recognized that in refusing to submit grievances to arbitration in the years before 431, they had broken their sworn oaths and violated the Thirty Years' Peace. To the pious and superstitious Spartans these transgressions were explanation enough for their sufferings in the war. But here, too, everything had changed in the year since the speech of Alcibiades. It was the Athenians who, by attacking Spartan territory in Laconia, had now broken the oaths that they had taken in the Peace of Nicias; they were now the ones who refused arbitration. The gods could be expected to visit upon the Athenians the kind of retribution hitherto suffered by the Spartans. "At this time, therefore, the Spartans believed that the Athenians had come round to commit the same transgression of which the Spartans had been guilty before and were eager to go to war."⁵

Oaths were fundamental to the Greek political and religious worlds; indeed, they partook of both spheres of activities. An oath, by definition, is "an utterance whereby the speaker—the *swearer*—does the following three things instantaneously":

- (1) The swearer makes a *declaration*, either *assertory* (about the present or past) or *promissory* (about the future);
- (2) The "swearer specifies, explicitly or implicitly, *superhuman power or powers* as witnesses to the declaration and guarantors of its truth;
- (3) "The swearer *calls down a conditional curse* on him/herself" in the case of the assertion being false or the promise being broken.⁶

Oaths enact treaties and hold different parties to agreed-upon conditions. The significance of oath-taking is indicated by their use in a variety of circumstances. Often oaths were required of signatories to treaties, of parties to legal disputes, commercial and private contracts, conspiracies, marriages, and of government officials, judges, and jurors. Oaths were common but significant. Breaking an oath was thought to bring punishment and in law courts it was treated as perjury.⁷

⁵ Donald Kagan, *The Peace of Nicias and the Sicilian Expedition*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 230.

⁶ Alan H. Sommerstein and Andrew J. Bayliss, *Oaths and State in Ancient Greece*, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 3-4.

⁷ Jon D. Mikalson, "Oaths," in *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 4th ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Gods were often invoked; and so religion and adherence to proper religious custom were likewise tied to oath-taking. Breaking oaths had broader implications and transgressed different aspects of the social and political foundations of Greek society. The political ramifications for broken oaths are of particular interest during the Peloponnesian War, because “regardless of who gave and who received them, oaths were central to all alliances (*summachiai*) between Greek states.”⁸ The two powers in this war, Athens and Sparta, were defined by their respective *summachiai* with their own allies, and furthermore by the oaths of peace they take — and break.

Although the Greek world was not unified under a central governmental system, the Peloponnesian War as a whole can be viewed as a type of *stasis*, where regions with marked similarities turned against one another. Despite the fact that there were various local dialects, the city-states of the Greek world were linked by a common language. Contact, exchange of ideas and trading between regions had long been going on, and despite a lack of an all-encompassing political alliance, similar customs and interests linked, at least loosely, various polities throughout the Hellenic world. The Peloponnesian War went beyond the struggles of any of these individual cities. As Thucydides notes in the opening of his account of the war, “this was certainly the greatest disturbance to affect the Hellenes and a considerable number of barbarians—one might say the majority of mankind” (1.1).⁹ Hence, as symbolized by the widespread breaking of oaths that preceded the outbreak of war, the breakdown in social norms, including *logos* — verbal expression itself, with its capabilities and its fallibilities — became a matter of great import throughout the Greek world in the second half of the fifth century.

⁸ Sommerstein, *Oaths and State*, 185.

⁹ Unless otherwise noted, translations of Thucydides are those of Steven Lattimore.

The anxiety about this breakdown of *logos* haunted Athenian intellectual life during the “Athenian Century”—and never more so than during the war. It particularly haunts the work of the four authors who will feature prominently in this project, representing a variety of genres. Each of these fifth-century writers contributes to the discussion of Athenian intellectual culture during the Peloponnesian War; their respective treatments of common themes, when considered together, paint a powerful image of the intellectual culture of a civilization in crisis.

Featured Authors and Works

In each of the two main sections that follow, I will begin with an analysis of the “crisis of *logos*” as it is presented in a significant prose work (Thucydides, Gorgias); I will then explore the way in which the themes illuminated in those works were reflected in works composed for the tragic stage—Athens’ preeminent literary vehicle for the exploration of civic themes.¹⁰

In Part 1, “*Logos* and the Crisis of Politics,” I begin with Thucydides’ *History*, our main source for the events of the Peloponnesian War. Born between 460-455 BCE, Thucydides went on to become an Athenian *strategos* in 424, and thus was a participant in the conflict about which he wrote. His *History* consists of eight books, which detail the events of the war until 411, at which point the narrative breaks off abruptly.¹¹ He is believed to have died around 400. To an educated, politically aware and militarily experienced Athenian citizen such as Thucydides, the “crisis of *logos*” that unfolded in the final three decades of the Athenian century must have been

¹⁰ For the civic implications of tragedy see, for example: Simon Goldhill, *Reading Greek Tragedy*, (Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986); Karl Reinhardt, *The Intellectual Crisis in Euripides*, In *Euripides*, edited by J. Mossman, (Oxford, Oxford Univ. Press, 2003); Froma Zeitlin, *Playing the Other*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1995).

¹¹ Xenophon (born c.430), in the first part of his *Hellenica*, documents the remaining history of the war, beginning where Thucydides’ narration breaks off in 411 and continuing until the destruction of the Athenian walls, the overthrow of Athenian democracy, and the surrender of Samos in 404 (Christopher J. Tuplin, “Xenophon,” in *Oxford Classical Dictionary*).

riveting to behold; for a historian, it was crucial to narrate—as indeed he did, particularly in three justly famous passages: the so-called Funeral Oration of Pericles (2.35-46), the subsequent narration of the plague that struck Athens in Book 2 (2.47-55), and the account in Book 3 of the *stasis* in Corcyra (3.68-85). As presented in the *History*, all three events present a complex conception of the political impact of *logos* in regard to power. In Thucydides, *logos*, seen as a rational process of thought and expression, is a kind of *nomos*, or custom. The corruption of *logos* as a result of political turmoil is linked, in the historian's account, to further degradation of still other *nomoi*. The final result of this process is gross deviation in normative human behavior, as people are represented as neglecting the fundamental norms of conduct.

This deterioration of *nomos* is particularly characteristic of *stasis*, which Thucydides likens to a kind of epidemic afflicting Hellas. The spread of this *stasis* reveals that civil turmoil was not occurring in isolated instances. Rather, it was widespread, uniting the experiences of the various city-states across Hellas. I shall investigate, among other things, the historian's striking use of the metaphor of disease, linking it to other narrative tropes employed as part of his investigation of the connections between *logos*, power, and politics. Indeed, Thucydides presents events in many different ways. At times he writes matter-of-factly about the movements of armies and number of ships. Elsewhere he reports the speech of particular individuals, reporting what they are likely to have said. His endeavor involves representing the historical figures as characters whose traits reflect reality. In the description of the plague, he writes authoritatively as a survivor of the plague. This style gives rise to further questions about narration, as epideictic features of reported speeches occur within the ostensibly more "objective" style that Thucydides promotes and adheres to elsewhere: that is, the narrative that purports to record only what he was

able to verify. The *History*, therefore, is a work that worries as much about how events are represented as it does about the events themselves.

In connection with my treatment of the crisis of *logos* in relation to political life as presented in Thucydides, I shall discuss two dramatic works. The first, as I indicated in my introductory comments, is the *Medea* of Euripides (born in the 480s, died in 407/6), which will provide insight into the Athenian intellectual climate at that early stage of the conflict, specifically with respect to the crisis of *logos* and its relation to real-world action. The second tragedy that I will treat in Part 1 is the *Philoctetes* of Sophocles (c.496/5-406/5), a figure who brought together literature and history in his own person. (Among other political offices he held, he is known to have served as *strategos* alongside Pericles, likely during the revolt of Samos in 441/0—a key event in Athens’ emergence as a major political power during the *pentakontaetia*.¹²) *Philoctetes*, produced in 409, notably contains discussions of morality in wartime—specifically about how a deed considered immoral in peacetime can be justified in the name of a greater good. Morals, as I shall discuss, are a part of *nomos*, part of a system intended to guide human behavior; because morals are an aspect of normative social behavior, the straying from morals in wartime—a phenomenon at work in Thucydides and Sophocles both—allows for analysis of how other *nomoi* can break down in war. *Logos* in particular can be seen as an aspect of this disintegration as examined in Sophocles’ drama, through its use and abuse by Odysseus, who tries to mastermind a complex scheme to trick the injured Philoctetes. Moreover, this tragedy draws upon themes that will be familiar from both Thucydides’ *History* and Euripides’

¹² The Pentekontaetia is the period of almost 50 years between the end of the Persian Wars in 479 and the beginning of the Peloponnesian War in 431 (Ehrenburg, “Pentekontaetia in *OCD*). Samos contributed ships to the Delian League until the revolt in 440. The revolt took Pericles approximately eight months to suppress. After the installment of a cleruchy, Samos remained pro-Athenian for the duration of the Peloponnesian War (Shipley, “Samos” in *OCD*).

Medea—language, persuasion, speech, trustworthiness—in other ways. Metaphors of disease and the body are central to Sophocles’ drama, in which the ailing Philoctetes must be persuaded—whether through trickery or by brute force is a major conflict in the play—to return to Troy in order for the Greeks to win. The role of persuasion as a means to secure an ally in war highlights the issue of ulterior political motives. Moreover, the importance for the drama of the hero’s incurable illness suggests useful parallels to the theme of illness in Thucydides’ work, not only in his famous description of the plague in Athens (430-429) but in his use of illness as a metaphor for political stasis, which suggests again a significant connection between turmoil, trauma, and the language of disease.

In Part 2, “*Logos and the Crisis of Reality*,” I will again begin with a prose work: *The Encomium of Helen*, by Gorgias of Leontini (c.485 - c.380). One of the sophists, Gorgias was known for his rhetorical arguments. Unlike the other authors treated in this study, he was not an Athenian, but rather visited Athens as an ambassador in 437 and played an important role in the development of Athenian oratory. The *Encomium of Helen* (precise date unknown; 427 is a likely *terminus post quem*, though some have suggested as late as 393¹³) is a rhetorical showpiece intended as a defense of the mythical Helen, whom Gorgias attempts to exculpate for starting the Trojan War; in it, he investigates a series of possible causes for her actions and defends each of them, vindicating her of responsibility. Hence this work demonstrates *logos* in action, whereby the manipulation of language and rhetoric challenges a widely-held belief (in this case, that Helen was guilty) and removes the grounds for this belief. A potent symbol in prose rhetoric—and, by extension, in the world of the law-courts and political sphere—Helen

¹³ Jonathan Pratt, “On the Threshold of Rhetoric: Gorgias’ Encomium of Helen,” *Classical Antiquity* 34, no. 1 (2015): 172.

represents an issue that clearly vexed many intellectuals during the Athenian century: the tension between appearance and fact, word and deed.

And, indeed, I move from Gorgias' rhetorical work to a dramatic exploration of the same themes in the second part of Part 2. In his *Helen* (412 BCE), Euripides crafts a complex play which deals with issues of language, power, and reality in ways that both mirror and diverge from Gorgias's treatment of Helen, bringing to a new level of sophistication tragedy's engagement with the crisis of *logos*. In Part 1, I will have shown how the anxiety about oaths—about the relationship between speech and action — that is expressed in Euripides' *Medea* not only reflects contemporary concerns about the longevity of political agreements, but bespeak a related concern: the uncertainty as to whether language has the ability to influence reality. These larger philosophical concerns about the relation of language to power and reality will be addressed particularly in my discussion of the same playwright's *Helen* in Part 2, following as it does from the discussion of Gorgias. Like *Medea*, which premiered the year the war started, *Helen* was produced at another notable point in the history of the conflict: the catastrophic aftermath of the Sicilian Expedition (415-413), the campaign that definitively ended the Peace of Nicias and marked the beginning of the second phase of the Peloponnesian War.

Like its predecessor but with greater urgency and more sophisticated dramaturgic means, the *Helen* deals similarly in the concern about the validity of language in representing reality through the complicated relationship in the play among the “real” Helen, her *eidolon*, and the name “Helen.” The Trojan War, which obviously functions in the drama as a stand-in for, or parallel to, the Peloponnesian War, thus allows for a literary exploration of the effect of war upon language/*logos* and, in turn, its effect upon our perception of the world and its ability to communicate. The disjunct between Helen, her *eidolon*, and the name “Helen” can be seen as a

metaphor for the contemporary crisis at the moment of the renewed outbreak of war, as uncertainty and a dissolution of accustomed *nomoi* again permeated the Greek world.

As the above short summary suggests, the two main parts of this thesis will address different aspects of the larger theme — that is, the crisis of *logos* as witnessed by a range of texts emanating from Athens.

The first part will focus on the crisis of *logos* specifically with respect to social and political collapse. The exploration of how *logos* fails and how reality is navigated amidst this failure are central questions. *Logos*, as both an aspect of *nomos* and as an influence upon *nomos*, is a concept explored in a number of texts. I will focus in this section on Thucydides' ironic juxtaposition of Pericles Funeral Oration, the Athenian plague of 430, and the *stasis* of Corcyra; on Sophocles' *Philoctetes*, where *logos* as a means of persuasion for an ulterior motive is central to the plot; and on Euripides' *Medea*, which explores the ramifications of broken or meaningless oaths. Moreover, the use of medical language and metaphors of disease in Thucydides' plague description and its parallels in *Philoctetes* will further tie together the perception of discord as disease of *logos*, with connections to the Funeral Oration and emphasis on the Athenian body politic. This trope speaks to the Greek conception of the polis as being organic, like a body, both subject to health and sickness and vulnerable to infection and corruption; the metaphor of social discord as disease underscores the image of the rapid spread of unrest throughout the Greek world. Taken together, these texts, encompassing two genres and three authors, will give insight into the intellectual culture of the time and the perception of political and societal turmoil, trauma, suffering, and growing meaninglessness of *nomoi*.

A second major section will focus on matters of *logos* in its relation to truth and narration, using Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen* and Euripides' *Helen* as vehicles for a broader analysis of rhetoric and the representation of reality, particularly reality as it is distorted by *logos*. The sophistic movement had particular impact on this theme in contemporary Athenian politics, as is clear from critiques of sophism in other authors' writings, such as Aristophanes' *Clouds* and Plato's later writings (such as the *Gorgias*, which features the author of the *Encomium of Helen*). Gorgias' *Encomium* will provide insight into the concern about the perceived power of *logos* to undermine truth and justice in general; a close reading of Euripides' *Helen* allows us to see a growing anxiety about the way in which accepted truth could diverge from objective facts—with disastrous results.

In a short concluding chapter, I will examine some of the implications of my arguments about the relationship, in fifth-century Greek literature, among *logos*, power, politics, and history. For as we shall see, the dangers of committing events or even thoughts to writing or speaking preoccupied the minds of all these authors — a concern that brings us, at the end of my investigation, back to Thucydides, who, in his *History of the Peloponnesian War*, attempts to provide a remedy to this issue, by establishing the behaviors, or most *likely* behaviors, of historical characters in given circumstances. In engaging with this historically-informed imaginative reconstruction, connections to the analyses and conclusions about *logos* that the other authors — Euripides, Sophocles, and Gorgias — have made will be considered. The preoccupation with *logos* will be accounted for in the context of this web of authors, all of whom express concern about their own craft and means of communication during widespread war, and whose writings ultimately speak to the intellectual atmosphere of 5th-century Athens.

A Note on Terminology: *logos* and *nomos*

Particularly characteristic of the Greek word *logos* is its polysemy, the coexistence of many possible meanings (i.e., the coexistence of multiple English equivalents). Because of this polysemy, I have chosen not to translate the word *logos* in this project, but rather to include it in brackets where it is translated, in order to preserve the wide semantic range of the word, which I believe to be essential to its function in these texts. This is not only a matter of lexicography, but also a matter of philosophy, especially given the historical importance of this word from Ancient Greece onwards. Given the historical and philosophical import of this term and its complex cultural significance for this thesis, a fuller definition of *logos* is required, which goes beyond the standard *LSJ* definitions (“reckoning,” “reason,” “utterance,” “speech,” etc.).¹⁴ The following entry in Barbara Cassin’s *Dictionary of Untranslatables* aptly summarizes the essential meanings of *logos*:

The Greek *logos* retains, from the basic meaning “to gather” of the root $\lambda\epsilon/\omicron\gamma-$ and as an almost indelible connotation, the semantic feature of being syntagmatic. Of all the well-known semantic variations of *logos*—“conversation,” “speech,” “tale,” “discourse,” “proverb,” “language,” “counting,” “proportion,” “consideration,” “explanation,” “reasoning,” “reason,” “proposition,” “sentence”—there is barely a single one that does not contain the original sense of “putting together”: the constitution or consideration of a series, of a notionally complex set. As “counting” or “proportion,” *logos* is never an isolated “number”; as “tale,” “discourse,” “proverb,” “proposition,” or “sentence,” it is never (or only ever marginally) a “word,” and so on. [I]t is important to keep in mind that the Greek *logos* is connected to a polysemic etymon in which the sememes “to gather” and “to say” are closely related. This has to be the starting point of any reflection on the history of *logos* as a philosophical term.¹⁵

The coexistence of definitions like “language,” “reasoning,” and “proposition” has a great effect on interpretations of other language-related ideas in this project, such as oaths, treaties, and pledges, which cover both political, sociological, and religious fields. The interconnectedness of

¹⁴ *LSJ*, s.v. “λόγος”

¹⁵ Barbara Cassin, “Logos,” in *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 583. This text is more akin to an encyclopedia than a dictionary. It does not offer translations of terms, but seeks to define terms given their lack of simple equivalences in other languages.

language, audible speech, and reasoning forms an important part of the relationship between the political turmoil caused by the Peloponnesian War and the social ramifications across the Hellenic world.

The operating definition of *nomos* in this project will similarly rely upon the definition offered in the *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, because it establishes a more comprehensive picture of the word's cultural context:

The word *nomos* is derived from the root *nem-, "to attribute, to distribute according to custom or propriety." ...Not only is it a "habitual way of being" that would tend toward a meaning of "rule" ("law and order"); it also implies the idea of constraint: the notion of an "imposed division" is present from its very first uses (cf. Hesiod, *Works and Days* 276: if men, unlike animals, are subject to justice [dikê], this in fact results from a partition determined by Zeus, which establishes work as the means of subsistence, and not the devouring of other humans). [...] With *nomos*, the rule becomes something that is admitted: [...] the word in itself does not distinguish usage from custom, or from the law. The verb *nomizein* [νομίζειν] is derived from *nomos* and means "habitually using, recognizing, believing, thinking."¹⁶

An essential aspect of the above definition is the indistinguishability of usage/custom and law.

The general meaning of social constraints is the fundamental component of *nomos* that I will use in my discussions. In some analyses, *logos* is considered as a type of *nomos*, because language (as a particular component of *logos*) can be viewed as an established social construct, which is recognized and used by a larger community.

¹⁶ Ibid., 1127.

PART 1: *LOGOS* AND THE CRISIS OF POLITICS

1. CRISES OF *LOGOS* IN HISTORY

Thucydides: The Funeral Oration

In Book 2 of the *History*, Thucydides begins his documentation of the Peloponnesian War. The so-called Thirty Years' Peace ended after only fourteen years with the Spartan-allied Thebans' entering Plataea, an Athenian-allied territory. The Thebans anticipated war between Athens and Sparta and sought to seize Plataea before open war broke out. The Plataeans who belonged to the faction led by Naukleides desired alliance with Thebes "for the sake of their own personal power [ιδίας ἔνεκα δυνάμεως]" (2.2.2).¹⁷ The majority of the Plataeans, however, were not members of this faction and wanted to remain allied to Athens; after they realized that Thebans had entered their city, they decided to attack them at night (2.3.4). They killed many Thebans, and those left alive agreed to surrender.

Fearing retaliation, the Plataeans sent a herald to the Thebans, eschewing responsibility. They claimed that the Thebans were, in fact, the ones at fault, because they had "acted impiously in attempting to seize their city during a truce [*en spondais*]" (2.5.5). The auxiliary force of Thebans withdrew from Plataean territory, but the Plataeans nevertheless killed the Thebans who had remained prisoners in the city. These events at Plataea definitively broke the truce, and both the Athenians and Lacedaemonians prepared for war, although each held the other as culpable (2.7.1).

Both sides made preparations for war, and the Lacedaemonians and their allies quickly

¹⁷ Thucydides Greek text is from H.S. Jones and J.E. Powell, *Thucydides Historiae*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press).

assembled an army to invade Attica (Thuc. 2.10.1). The Athenian general Pericles, however, recognized the coming invasion, and made a radical proposal: that all Athenians move themselves, along with their property, into the walls of the city (Thuc. 2.13.2). The Peloponnesians eventually withdrew, and the Athenians made military advances. During the following winter, the Athenians held publicly-funded burial rites to commemorate the first men to fall in the war as per their established custom (Ἀθηναῖοι τῷ πατρίῳ νόμῳ χρώμενοι δημοσίᾳ ταφᾷ ἐποιήσαντο) (Thuc. 2.34.1). The following conditions were essential to the traditional, proper burial rites for the fallen men:

1. They erected a tent where lay out the bones of the dead. There, the relatives of the deceased may come and make offers (2.34.2).
2. There was a procession, where the wagons carry cypress coffins or chests. There was a coffin/chest for each of the ten Athenian tribes, in which the bones of the men are accordingly sorted.¹⁸ An empty but fully decorated bier was carried for the missing, who have died but whose remains were not recovered (2.34.3).
3. Citizens and foreigners could join the process if they wish. Female relatives were present at the graves, mourning the deceased. (2.34.4)
4. The chests were buried in a public tomb, which, Thucydides notes, lay in a beautiful suburb of the city (2.34.5).

In all of these actions, the surviving people of the city, both citizens and foreigners, showed respect for the physical remains of the deceased. The final part of this burial *nomos* involved *logos*: a man was chosen by the state to speak their praise. At this moment in the war, the chosen man was Pericles.

The rhetorical quality of Pericles' *epitaphios logos*, funeral speech, is evident in his opening statements, where he announces how his will differ from previous *epitaphoi*.¹⁹ He

¹⁸ These are the ten tribes instituted by Kleisthenes, into which the Athenian citizens were organized. Although the implication seems to be that these men are all citizens, the later mention of non-Athenians suggests that this funeral ritual process was not limited strictly to Athenian citizens (Hornblower, *Commentary on Thucydides* vol. 1, [Oxford, Oxford UP, 1991], 294).

¹⁹ Throughout this paper, I follow the conventions of terminology established by Nicole Loraux in her *The Invention of Athens: The Funeral Oration in the Classical City* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1986).

begins by summarizing the *nomos* of the Athenian funeral oration and by giving proper remembrance to the Athenian ancestors. He emphasizes the perceived connection to the land itself by referring to the *progonoi* who labored on behalf of Athens, handing it down “in freedom until the present time because of their bravery” (2.36.1). Occupation of the land and intergenerational lineage are important factors in Pericles’ conception and presentation of Athens. Although he praises the achievements of the forefathers, he does not list the wartime accomplishments of the deceased men; in fact, he refuses to do so. He suggests that the greatness of the ancestors finds expression in those now dying. They are great in part through their heritage. The perceived tie to the land itself is instrumental in Pericles’ formulation of Athenian democracy:

But I will turn to praise of the dead after I have first set forth the principles by which we came into this position and the form of government from which its greatness resulted, since I believe that these are not inappropriate to mention in the present circumstances and are advantageous for the whole gathering, both citizens and foreigners, to hear about. (2.36.4)²⁰

The position is rooted in Athenian democracy, the legacy of the lauded founders; the object of discourse is democracy. The elite roots of the founders make the contemporary populace great, a statement which establishes the authoritative claim the Athenians have to their inhabited land, making it an essential characteristic of Athenian identity. The established *nomoi* are rooted in the past, in the very foundation of Athens; the preservation of these ways of life, through adherence to these *nomoi*, reproduces democracy, a defining feature of the Athenian state. Pericles labors to distinguish the Athenian character from that of the other Greek *poleis*:

We have a form of government that does not emulate the practices of our neighbors, setting an example [παράδειγμα] to some rather than imitating others. In name it is called a democracy on account of being administered in the interest not of the few but the many, yet even though there are equal rights for all in private disputes in accordance with

²⁰ Unless otherwise noted, Thucydides translations come from Steven Lattimore’s translation.

the laws, wherever each man has earned recognition he is singled out for public service in accordance with the claims of distinction, not by rotation but by merit... (2.37.1)

The general characteristics of the Athenian citizenry transitions into a description of the individual qualities that defines the composite political entity of Athens. In addition to adhering to the established *nomoi*, Pericles touches upon the notion of a civic morality, where action for the sake of the common interest is key. Shame is a deterrent for the unwritten *nomoi*, which seem to be culturally held beliefs on right versus wrong:

But while we associate in private without undue pressure, in public we are especially law abiding because of fear [διὰ δέος], in our obedience both to anyone holding office and to the laws [τῶν τε αἰεὶ ἐν ἀρχῇ ὄντων ἀκροάσει καὶ τῶν νόμων], above all those established to aid people who are wronged [ἐπὶ ὠφελίᾳ τῶν ἀδικουμένων] and those which, although unwritten, bring down acknowledged shame [αἰσχύνην ὁμολογουμένην].” (2.37.3)

People hold themselves accountable through various social constraints such as fear, obedience (thus a sense of respect), and care on behalf of fellow citizens. These are public values, operating within the political realm of the *polis*. Pericles is characterizing the entire populace in these terms. The “we” is inclusive, describing not only the individual best men, but also, more generally, the fundamentally Athenian character. The person who avoids the *polis* is an aberration from the norm. Athenians, those to whom Pericles is speaking, are fundamentally and necessarily an active, political people, who call the man who takes no part in civic action not merely apolitical (ἀπράγμονα), but useless (ἄχρητον) (Thuc. 2.40.2). Pericles makes the further bold claim that,

Our city as a whole is an education [παίδευσις] for Hellas, and that it is among us as individuals, in my opinion, that a single man would represent an individual self-sufficient [τὸ σῶμα αὐτάρκης] for the most varied forms of conduct, and with the most attractive qualities. And that this is not boastful speaking for the occasion [οὐ λόγων ἐν τῷ παρόντι κόμπος] but factual truth [ἔργων ἐστὶν ἀλήθεια] our city’s very power, which we acquired because of these characteristics, proclaims clearly. For she alone of existing cities surpasses her reputation when put to the test, and only she brings neither chagrin to the attacking enemy as to the sort of men by whom she has been worsted nor reproach to the subject that he is ruled by the unworthy. Through great proofs, and by exhibiting

power in no way unwitnessed, we will be admired by this and future generations, thus requiring no Homer to sing our praises nor any other whose verses will charm for the moment and whose claims the factual truth will destroy, since we have compelled every sea and land to become open to our daring and populated every region with lasting monuments of our acts of harm and good. It is for such a city, then, that these men nobly [γενναίως] died in battle, thinking it right not to be deprived of her, just as each of their survivors should be willing to toil for her sake. (2.41)

Pericles' lofty presentation of Athens focuses on the superiority of both its individual citizens and the unique government (i.e., democracy) that allows its citizens to attain such excellence. Individuality is key, but the individuality operates within the defined *nomoi*, determined by tradition. The irony in Pericles' statement is strong. He claims that the factual truth of the city, its history and its social makeup, speaks for itself. They have no need of a "praiser," although it is true that Pericles' *epitaphios logos* extols of the virtue of the city, subsuming the individuals' achievements in war under the greatness of the city, yet nevertheless broadly referring to the power of individuals. Yet this individual power is not the final object of praise; rather, Pericles emphasizes the relationship between this individual virtue and the state. The object of the *epitaphios logos* remains Athens as a whole, as a polity. Arete, excellence or virtue, is dependent upon adherence to Athenian *nomoi*, and so receives much attention in Pericles' *epitaphios logos* because of its constitutive role in Athens' own identity. Quoting Hannah Arendt, David Arndt writes of the Greek *polis* that,

'The public realm itself, the polis, was permeated by a fiercely agonal spirit, where everybody had constantly to distinguish himself from all others, to show through unique deeds or achievements that he was the best of all.' The Greek polis was of course rife with conflict, rivalry, and enmity, but then so is every other form of human community. What was distinctive about the polis was that it made a place for such struggles, not as a domesticated form of warfare but as a competition among citizens, an *agon* that existed for the sake of the common good. Politics for the Greeks was agonistic but not essentially polemical.²¹

²¹ David Arndt, "Classical Political Philosophy," in *Arendt on the Political*, (New York, Cambridge Univ. Press, 2019), 63-64.

Competition among citizens for the sake of the common good of the city is an integral aspect of Athenian identity. In Pericles' *epitaphios logos*, establishing the *arete* of the citizen is essential for demonstrating the Athenian ideal, a *polis* where individuals work *in* and *for* the city, above all.

The emphasis given to *arete* in Pericles' *epitaphios logos* establishes important qualities of Athenian character, which will soon be challenged deeply by the plague. Of the forty-three total uses of the word *arete* in the whole of Thucydides' work, sixteen occur in Book 2; of these sixteen, no fewer than twelve occur in Pericles' funeral speech.²² His emphasis on *arete* is essential to the ideal image of Athens that he posits—an image which, in the following plague scene, strengthens the apparent divide between *logos* and reality during social unrest and panic. Five specific usages will prove useful for juxtaposing the plague narrative which follows soon after Pericles' *epitaphios logos*.

In the first, Pericles discusses the role of *arete* in democratic process:

In name it [i.e., our form of government] is called a democracy on account of being administered in the interest not of the few but the many, yet even though there are equal rights for all in private disputes in accordance with the laws, wherever each many has earned recognition he is singled out for public service in accordance with the claims of distinction, not by rotation but by merit [ἄπ' ἀρετῆς προτιμᾶται], nor when it comes to poverty, if a man has real ability to benefit the city, is he prevented by obscure renown. (37.1.7)

Pericles incorporates individuality in his description of Athens, which, he claims, sets Athenian culture and society apart from other *poleis*. Athenian democracy, claims Pericles, provides citizens with equal rights and governs with the composite citizen body in mind (as opposed to a small group of elites). Yet there is still room for distinctions, honors, recognition and fame.

²² Thuc. 2.35.1.7; 2.36.1.4; 2.37.1.7; 2.40.1; 2.40.5.1; 2.42.2.3; 2.42.2.5; 2.43.1.12; 2.45.1.4; 2.45.2.2; 2.45.2.5; 2.46.1.6

Citizens are recognized because of their *arete* for public service. Importantly, this recognition still functions as a further means of benefitting the city. The freedom established by the forefathers encompasses this individuality. The Athenian citizen is heir to a system of *nomoi* but also benefits from a certain degree of autonomy.

Later in the Oration, Pericles refers to Athenian *arete* as expressed in the context of social relations: in his vision, Athenians are givers, rather than takers, of social benefits—a dynamic that itself provides further benefits:

In matters of goodness [τὰ ἐς ἀρετήν], we also contrast with most people, since we acquire friends by conferring rather than by receiving benefits. (40.4.1)

The giver is more secure, through preserving the feeling of gratitude by good will toward the recipient, who is less fulfilled because he knows that he will repay the goodness [τὴν ἀρετὴν ἀποδώσων] not to inspire gratitude but to return an obligation. (40.5.1)

Pericles boldly claims that the Athenians surpass others in “the matters concerning excellence/virtue [τὰ ἐς ἀρετήν],” based upon his observation that Athenians are givers, not takers. Athenian excellence includes the idea of activity around a common set of principles, which includes a strong moral principle: the sense of obligation (ἐς ὀφείλημα, 40.5.1) rather than the desire to inspire gratitude (ἐς χάριν, 40.5.1). The value of these moral actions augments the greatness of the city, not the individual status of the individuals

The most important part of the eulogy has been said. For it is their virtues [ἀρεταί] and those of men like them that have given honor to the qualities I have praised in the city, and for few other Hellenes would it be manifest, as it is for them, that reputation is equal to the deeds [ὁ λόγος τῶν ἔργων φανείη]. (42.2.3)

Here Pericles further stresses that the individuals, though their *arete*, create the great city of Athens, his primary subject. But these men have received some aspect of their *arete* because of their contribution (i.e., sacrifice of their lives) to the Athens. A stronger sense of nationalism becomes clearer, with the emphasis being placed upon the state. Their deaths on behalf of the

city are honorable because they have participated in the perpetuation of the system of *nomoi* that has come to define Athens since its founding.

The final instance of *arete* within Pericles' funeral oration speaks more generally to the city:

In words, as much as I in my turn could say suitably in accordance with the custom has been said, and in deed, these have been honored in burial now, and from this time the city will rear their sons at public expense until they are of age, conferring on both the dead and their survivors a beneficial crown for such contexts as these. For it is among those who establish the greatest prizes for courage that men are the best citizens [ἄλλα γὰρ οἷς κέϊται ἀρετῆς μέγιστα, τοῖς δὲ καὶ ἄνδρες ἄριστοι πολιτεύουσιν]. (46.1.6)

Here, the leader claims that the best citizens are found where the greatest prizes for excellence are. Here the prize is the public funding of the remaining relatives of the deceased men. This too functions to center the superiority — and excellence — of Athens itself. Although individuals constitute the city, and the city of course depends upon these individuals, the discourse always come back to the city proper — and what the citizens do with a mind to benefiting the city.

Yet, immediately after Pericles' elevation of the Athenian character, Thucydides launches into the plague narration. Here — with an unmistakable irony — the deterioration of the social structure and wanton neglect of the Athenian *nomoi* that the historian will go on to describe is portrayed as starkly contradicting the claims that Pericles has just made. Thucydides turns Pericles' rhetoric on its head. This juxtaposition of the Funeral Oration and the plague narrative provokes larger questions, bespeaking as it does a more existential reflection on the stakes of warfare and effects upon humanity. One question is: if Athens is not, in fact, as it was portrayed, then for what values, precisely, have these men died? One inescapable conclusion to which the reader comes is the notion of the simultaneous inevitability and futility of war. In protecting their city in war, the citizens create a politically tumultuous environment, which begins to undo the

values the citizens sought to uphold and preserve. The undoing of culture through the attempt to preserve it is a larger overarching theme of Thucydides' portrayal of Athens.

The Plague in Athens

In the summer following Pericles' funeral oration (429 BCE), the Peloponnesians again invaded Attica (2.47.2). Not long after, the plague began in Athens. Until that time, Thucydides claims, nowhere was such an illness or such loss of life recorded as having occurred (2.47.3). Modern estimates suggest that about a third of the Athenian population, or as many as fifty thousand people, died as a result of the plague.²³

Thucydides describes the symptoms of the disease in detail. He repeatedly uses the adjective *ισχυρός* of the physical symptoms of the illness. Although having the basic meaning of "strong," *ισχυρός* is often used specifically to characterize personal strength and political, or state, strength; the devolution in the Plague Narrative from this adjective's positive, ethical connotation to a negative, epidemiological one may well be suggestive of the larger cultural collapse. This adjective occurs frequently in descriptions of attacks, both physical attacks of armies and of illness, having more negative connotations like "strong," "violent," and "severe."²⁴ In 2.49, where the majority of the description of the plague's physical symptoms happens, *ισχυρός* is variously used to describe temperature, coughing, spasms, and ulceration. This is an early indication of the devastating effects of the plague; the use of *ισχυρός*, with its quasi-martial overtones, to describe the symptoms further suggests the way in which wartime unrest threatens the stability and relevance of cultural *nomoi*.

²³ Pomeroy et al., *Ancient Greece: A Political, Social, and Cultural History*, (Oxford, Oxford Univ. Press, 2012), 330, 366.

²⁴ *LSJ*, s.v. "ισχυρός"

Other aspects of the language used to describe the plague are striking inversions of *topoi* used by Pericles in his Funeral Oration, the *epitaphios logos*. As Clifford Owen has pointed out, the Oration’s promise of immortality fades in the face of “dreadful physicality of a sick and suffering body.”²⁵ Likewise, the lofty image of Athenian *arete* and greatness finds negation in the stark reality of citizens’ actions during widespread panic. Pericles’ rhetoric, once used in praise, now finds use in emphasizing the perversion of *nomoi* enacted by the plague. Thucydides writes,

In addition to the existing suffering, the crowding in of people from the fields into the city oppressed them more, especially those just arriving. Because they lived in huts—since they had no houses—that were stifling-hot at that time of year, the destruction came about without order, but the bodies lay upon one another dying, and half-dead men rolled about in the streets and around all the springs because of their longing for water. The sanctuaries where they lodged were full of corpses, since they had died right there. Because this evil pressed heavily upon them, people, not knowing what might become of them, turned to contempt for sacred and profane alike. All previously-established burial customs were disturbed [νόμοι τε πάντες ξυνεταράχθησαν οἷς ἐχρῶντο πρότερον περὶ τὰς οἷς ἐχρῶντο πρότερον περὶ τὰς ταφάς], and they gave burials as each was able. Many, lacking provisions because so many others had already predeceased them, resorted to shameful modes of burial [ἐς ἀναισχύντους θήκας ἐτρέποντο]. Anticipating those who had already constructed pyres, some placed the corpse of one of their own upon the pyre of another and ignited it; and others, if another body was being burnt, threw whomever they were carrying on top of that pyre and departed. (2.52)²⁶

The detailed descriptions Pericles had outlined in his *epitaphios logos* about the adherence to *nomos* increases the shock of this description, where respect for the dead is absent. The destruction is defined by its chaos (οὐδενὶ κόσμῳ, 2.52.2). Dying men lie on top of one another (καὶ νεκροὶ ἐπ’ ἀλλήλοις ἀποθνήσκοντες ἔκειντο, 2.52.2), while others stumble through the streets in death throes. The ritualized respect, ordered laying out of bones, and funeral procession have long since lost relevance to society (Thuc. 2.34.3); these burial *nomoi* have been confounded (ξυνεταράχθησαν, 2.52.4)—a direct result of the widespread fear and lack of order.

²⁵ Clifford Owen, “Beneath Politics,” in *Thucydides and Political Order* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 119.

²⁶ My translation.

Bodies are treated as burdens: the more quickly one can relieve himself of this burden, the better. This haste, however, has effects not only on the immediate relatives of the deceased individuals, but on the others themselves in using their pyres. Some rush to beat others else to their already-constructed pyres (ἐπὶ πυρὰς γὰρ ἀλλοτρίας φθάσαντες τοὺς νήσαντας οἱ μὲν ἐπιθέντες τὸν ἑαυτῶν νεκρὸν ὑφήπτον, 2.52.4). Others simply add their own deceased relative onto the burning pyre of another and depart (οἱ δὲ καιομένου ἄλλου ἐπιβαλόντες ἄνωθεν ὄν φέροιεν ἀπῆσαν, 2.52.4). By doing so, they are perverting not only their own family virtue (in regards to funeral rites), but also the virtue and standard conduct of their fellow citizens, whose practices are also being corrupted by others' actions: the connection between proper observance of traditional funeral rites and virtue is negatively reinforced in this passage, in which the perverted “new customs” are as associated with shame (*aiskhynê*) as the earlier ones were with virtue (ἐξ ἀναισχύντους θήκας ἐτράποντο). The lack of virtuous action extends beyond immediate households. People are not simply acting contrary to *nomoi* in private; they are actively and publicly doing so—and, what is more, they are actively contributing to others' neglect of *nomoi*.²⁷

As the plague continues to spread more widely, virtue is no longer a consideration, as basic adherence to *nomoi* disappears. Neither religious nor secular customs mattered; people treated them both with the same contempt. The normative behavior of Athenian citizens shifts as a result of the turmoil brought about by the plague. Simply stated, they are afraid. People are unsure of their own life expectancies. This fear for their own lives, rather than the greater good, has detrimental effects for the overall order of the city. Periclean Athens depends upon citizens

²⁷ Or, as Clifford Owen puts it: “Honor dies hard: even the plague did not so much abolish it as invert it” (“Beneath Politics,” 121).

working for the common good; during the plague, this is no longer a priority (οὐκ ἔχοντες ὅτι γένωνται, ἐς ὀλιγωρίαν ἐτρέποντο καὶ ἱερῶν καὶ ὀσίων ὁμοίως, 2.52.3). The fear that Pericles claimed causes the citizens to obey the laws now becomes a fear that compels the citizens to act, intentionally, contrary to the laws. And in this state of fear and panic, people resort to extreme self-interest.

[53] And the plague initiated in the city greater lawlessness [ἐπὶ πλεόν ἀνομίας] in other matters. For everyone more readily dared [ἐτόλμα] to do what they had previously concealed their pleasure in doing [ἅ πρότερον ἀπεκρύπτετο μὴ καθ' ἡδονὴν ποιεῖν], since they saw that the change—both among people who were wealthy but suddenly died and among people who started with nothing but immediately took those others' property—was sudden. So they deemed it worthy to seek enjoyments that were quick and for pleasure, because they considered their bodies and their possessions equally ephemeral [ἐφήμερα τὰ τε σώματα καὶ τὰ χρήματα ὁμοίως ἡγούμενοι]. No one was eager to persist in what merely seemed good, since they considered it unclear whether they would die before attaining it. Whatever was immediately pleasurable [ὅτι δὲ ἤδη τε ἡδὺ], or whatever was in any way conducive to it, this became both good and useful [τοῦτο καὶ καλὸν καὶ χρήσιμον κατέστη]. Neither fear of the gods [θεῶν δὲ φόβος] nor human custom [ἀνθρώπων νόμος οὐδεὶς] checked them. They judged it the same whether they were pious or impious, since they saw everyone dying equally, and since no one expected to survive until a trial took place and to pay the penalty for wrongdoings; rather, they supposed that the penalty already pronounced against them, which was much greater, was impending, and that it was reasonable to get some enjoyment of life before it fell upon them. (2.53)²⁸

Thucydides notes that the plague instigated greater lawlessness in other matters, too (ἐπὶ πλεόν ἀνομίας, literally the state of “having-no-*nomos*,” 2.53.1). Now individuals were unrestrainedly pursuing things that previously they would have carefully concealed (ῥᾶον γὰρ ἐτόλμα τις ἅ πρότερον ἀπεκρύπτετο μὴ καθ' ἡδονὴν ποιεῖν, 2.53.1). These are activities that are pursued with an eye to pleasure: an end that does not benefit the greater Athenian *polis*, but which yields immediate gratification (ὅτι δὲ ἤδη τε ἡδὺ, 2.53.3) for the individual alone. These immediate gratifications become the highest good (τοῦτο καὶ καλὸν καὶ χρήσιμον κατέστη, 2.53.3).

²⁸ Translation mine.

Defined by being quick and pleasing, they now fill the role that *arete*—in part dependent upon what is good (καλόν) and useful (χρήσιμον)—used to occupy.

Most strikingly, in the absence of *arete*, a new system of evaluative language guides action. “Good” and “useful” do not lose their meanings; rather, the framework of action in which these terms hold value (traditionally, *arete*) shifts. In addition to the uncertainty about survival, physical possessions too were no longer guaranteed in this state of lawlessness (ἐφήμερα τὰ τε σώματα καὶ τὰ χρήματα ὁμοίως ἡγούμενοι, 2.53.2). Attempting to attain these pleasures is justified because death took people, regardless of their character at random (τὸ μὲν κρίνοντες ἐν ὁμοίῳ καὶ σέβειν καὶ μὴ ἐκ τοῦ πάντας ὄρα̃ν ἐν ἴσῳ ἀπολλυμένους, 2.53.4). And each judged themselves deserving of something enjoyable before their inevitably death came (ἦν πρὶν ἐμπεσεῖν εἰκὸς εἶναι τοῦ βίου τι ἀπολαῦσαι, 2.53.4). Self-interest eclipses interest in the common good of the *polis*.

This mass hysteria and destruction offer an alternative image of Athenian conduct, presenting a reality which destroys the idealized fictional Athens of the Funeral Oration. Darien Shanske reminds us that “[it] is a potent demonstration that the power of logos to gather together disparate ideas into a glorious vision presupposes the power to rip them apart.”²⁹ The ideals laid out by Pericles in his *epitaphos* include the arguments about fundamental Athenian qualities: “(1) Not striving after, or imitating (a form of *mimesis*), the *nomoi* of other, indeed being a paradigm, is an end in itself; (2) law in Athens is obeyed out of fear and shame; (3) Athenian life is characterized by games, by enjoying the products of the whole world, and by art; (4) ultimately, the Athenian

²⁹ Darien Shanske, *Thucydides and the Philosophical Origins of History*, (Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Press, 2009), 52.

way of life, in all of its blinding originality, is forcing *logos* itself to change all without the aid of the poets.”³⁰

Despite the fact that, in introducing the *epitaphos*, Thucydides says of the Athenians that “this is their burial practice, and throughout the whole war, whenever there was occasion, they followed the custom” (2.34), he also challenges his own assertions through this juxtaposition with the haphazard burial practices during the plague discussed above (2.53). A clear indication of the linguistic inversion lies in the language of excellence/virtue, which carries over into the Athenian plague description from the Funeral Oration (2.51.5):

If they were unwilling, in their fear [δεδιότες], to approach one another, they perished in isolation [ἀπώλλυντο ἑρῆμοι], and many homes were emptied for want of someone to give care; if they drew near, they were destroyed, especially those making some claim to virtue [εἶτε προσίοιεν, διεφθείροντο, καὶ μάλιστα οἱ ἀρετῆς τι μεταποιούμενοι]. For out of honor [αἰσχύνῃ], they did not spare themselves in visiting friends [παρὰ τοὺς φίλους], since even relatives, overcome by the prevailing misery, finally grew tired of the lamentations of the dying.

There are two categories of victims: those who died alone because of fear and those who died because of their *arete*. The former group emphasizes the prevalence of the plague in Athens; even those who remained alone, limiting contact with all others, were not spared. These people did not, however, remain in isolation out of fear for their fellow citizens. Rather, they remained alone for the sake of self-preservation. Not only is this death lonely for the individual, but it represents the increasing self-interest in the Athenian body politic. A person is acting for the sake of himself alone; care for one’s fellow citizen—and, importantly, care for the city above all—is no longer a factor in directing the behavior of the citizenry. This stands in stark contrast to the claim Pericles made during his *epitaphios logos*, where he claimed that publicly, the Athenians

³⁰ Ibid., 122.

are “especially law abiding” and obedient to both men holding office and the laws (τῶν τε αἰεὶ ἐν ἀρχῇ ὄντων ἀκροάσει καὶ τῶν νόμων, 2.37.3), particularly those “established to aid people who are wronged [ἐπὶ ὠφελίᾳ τῶν ἀδικουμένων] and those which, although unwritten, bring down acknowledged shame [αἰσχύνην ὁμολογουμένη]” (2.37.3). There is no longer a question as to whether someone is virtuous. In the current political circumstances, these value judgments lack all meaning. Regardless of a citizen’s valued moral worth, he died. The functioning categories which, in the framework of the funeral oration, compelled citizens to act in the best way for the benefit of the city have no relevance. *Arete* has no bearing upon death. The evaluative language ceases to have its normative guiding function. There is no benefit in having *arete*; its use in enforcing social behavior has lost any validity.

Fear of the gods and human custom (θεῶν δὲ φόβος ἢ ἀνθρώπων νόμος, 2.53.4) had no ability to affect behavior. The Athenians recognized the immorality of their actions. In spite of this, they chose to act otherwise, believing that since they would not live long enough to incur punishment, they could compensate through lawlessness. This shift in the moral evaluation of action reveals the wider disintegration of the social structure. The people no longer believe these *nomoi* apply to them; they *choose* to exempt themselves from the shame, a fact which shows the essential artificiality of the whole *nomos/arete* system to begin with: it is a construct that, once its usefulness/pertinence is felt to have lapse, can be discarded at any time. This suggests a deeper point: that morality *does not inhere in the universe (as religious morality claims to be): it’s a social arrangement that falls apart when society does*. The social unrest and related political turmoil influence the processing of actions, giving men the ability to justify things that they otherwise would not have attempted. Self-interest replaces the traditional *nomos*, where the end of action is benefit to the city—at least within the Periclean paradigm of Athenian

democracy: καὶ τὸ μὲν προσταλαιπωρεῖν τῷ δόξαντι καλῷ οὐδείς πρόθυμος ἦν, ἄδηλον νομίζων εἰ πρὶν ἐπ’ αὐτὸ ἐλθεῖν διαφθαρήσεται (“No one was eager to persist in what merely seemed good, since they considered it unclear whether they would die before attaining it,” [2.53.3]). The antithesis of the qualities of Pericles’ Athens always existed, kept at bay by the functioning social order governed by *arete* and adherence to *nomoi*. But when this *arete* ceases to have any influence, the virtuous city falls into this antithetical condition, that of ἀνομία:

For Thucydides, the *polis* is not an abstract entity that has laws of its own. The state cannot be separated from the human beings composing the society. Even if a state can be regarded as a legal abstraction, it is not the state that makes decisions. Rather, decisions are always made by individuals. This is why most of Thucydides’ ethical words and phrases are used interchangeably to describe both individuals and states. His ethical concerns, far from being an expression of abstract thinking, are related to the actual conditions in which states exist. A virtuous political society depends on the good qualities of its individual members, and above all on the quality of its leadership... The laudable characteristics of both individual character and a virtuous society, such as *respect for law, tolerance, openness, courage, moderation, justice, foresight, self-control, cautious deliberation, prudence, and fraternity*, mentioned in Pericles’ “Funeral Oration,” are absent.³¹

The final demonstration of devastating effect of the Plague comes in the manner in which Thucydides’ presents Pericles’ death. “For as long as he presided over the city in peacetime,” he writes, “he led it with moderation and preserved it in safety and it became greatest in his hands, and when war broke out it is clear that he foresaw the power it had at this time. He lived two years and six months longer, and after he died his foresight regarding the war was even more widely recognized” (2.65). Thucydides elaborates little on Pericles’ death; he merely indicates the time at which he died (ἐπεβίω δὲ δύο ἔτη καὶ ἕξ μῆνας [2.65.6]). The grandeur of the Funeral Oration stands, therefore, in stark contrast to the nonchalant manner of relating Pericles’

³¹ W. Julian Korab-Karpowicz, *On the History of Political Philosophy: Great Political Thinkers from Thucydides to Locke*, (Routledge, New York, 2016), 12.

death. The illness and death of Pericles, himself a historical character within Thucydides' larger project, parallels Athens' decline and fall. This societal collapse, however, is not limited to the Athenian *polis*. It manifests in other areas in Greece, instigated by the war and the fear on behalf of the self.

Stasis on Corcyra

In Book III of the *History*, Thucydides describes the *stasis* on the island of Corcyra, which becomes a “paradigm of social disintegration” (3.69-85).³² The ideological basis for the *stasis* lies in the partisan strife at Corcyra, a product of the uncertain political environment:

[T]he events of the civil war in Corcyra show that civilization opens up a possibility for violence even more virulent than anything that may have preceded it because both political society and the international arena provide a setting for fierce partisan strife. The ideological motivations created by various factions make strife more uncompromising, fanatical, and cruel than the individual violence of uncivilized people.³³

The *stasis* has its roots in the Corinthians' releasing of the Corcyraean prisoners, who were instructed to return to Corcyra and persuade the citizens there to break the city's alliance with Athens (and to reform the connection with Corinth). This becomes a conflict of forms of government: the released prisoners, having previously been leading citizens in Corcyra, desire a return to this status—which necessitates a break from the “pro-Athenian democratic regime which currently governed in Corcyra.” The returning prisoners initially sought to break the Athenian alliance through legal channels, by taking the matter to the assemblies for a vote. However, upon failure, the freed prisoners—termed oligarchs—charged the democratic leader Peithias with conspiracy and, later, violently attacked and killed him along with other

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

government officials and even private citizens. With short-lasting assistance from a Corinthian trireme, the oligarchs attacked the democrats. A peace is negotiated but falls apart. Further ships, both Athenian and Peloponnesian arrive; but, after a short reconciliation between the democrats and oligarchs, the democrats reverted to violence.³⁴

Now “they killed any of their foes they could lay hands on.”³⁵ The burgeoning violence was so intense that suppliants in the temple of Hera, witnessing it, “kill[ed] each other right there in the shrine; some hanged themselves from trees, while others killed themselves in the way each was able,” in a rush to avoid a cruel, painful death at the hands of an opponent (3.81.2).

Thucydides concludes 3.81 with the note that,

Death in every form took place, and everything likely to occur in such circumstances happened [καὶ οἷον φιλεῖ ἐν τῷ τοιοῦτῳ γίνεσθαι]—and even went beyond: for fathers killed their sons, people were dragged from temples and killed beside them, and some were even blockaded in the temple of Dionysus and perished there. (81.5)

Basic ethical tenets are gone—crime runs rampant. Fathers kill their children; temples lose their sanctity, as others remove them forcibly from the premises or even cause their death within the temple. However, this deterioration of order is not limited to *erga*, as shown in the following passage which I have chosen to quote in full:

καὶ τὴν εἰωθυῖαν ἀξιῶσιν τῶν ὀνομάτων ἐς τὰ ἔργα ἀντήλλαξαν τῇ δικαιοῦσει. τόλμα μὲν γὰρ ἀλόγιστος ἀνδρεία φιλέταιρος ἐνομίσθη, μέλλησις δὲ προμηθῆς δειλία εὐπρεπής, τὸ δὲ σῶφρον τοῦ ἀνάνδρου πρόσχημα, καὶ τὸ πρὸς ἅπαν ξυνετὸν ἐπὶ πᾶν ἄργον· τὸ δ' ἐμπλήκτως ὄξυ ἀνδρὸς μοίρα προσετέθη, ἀσφαλεία δὲ τὸ ἐπιβουλεύσασθαι ἀποτροπῆς πρόφασις εὐλογος. καὶ ὁ μὲν χαλεπαίνων πιστὸς αἰεὶ, ὁ δ' ἀντιλέγων αὐτῷ ὑποπτος. ἐπιβουλεύσας δὲ τις τυχῶν ξυνετὸς καὶ ὑπονοήσας ἔτι δεινότερος· προβουλεύσας δὲ ὅπως μηδὲν αὐτῶν δεήσει, τῆς τε ἐταιρίας διαλυτῆς καὶ τοῦς ἐναντίους ἐκπεπληγμένος. (3.82.4-5)

(82.4) And **people exchanged the conventional value of words in relation to the facts,**

³⁴ Jonathan J. Price, *Thucydides and Internal War*, (Cambridge Univ. Press, Cambridge, 2004), 8.

³⁵ The following translation are from Price, *Thucydides and Internal War*, 2008.

according to their own perception of what was justified. For reckless daring was now considered courage true to the party, whereas prudent hesitation was considered specious cowardice, moderation and discretion a cover for unmanliness, and intelligence which comprehended the whole an unwillingness to act in anything. Impulsive rashness was attributed to the part of a real man, while prolonged planning with a view to safety was written off as a nice-sounding excuse for evasion. (5) **The one who exhibited violent anger was always considered reliable, anyone who spoke against him was suspect. The one who succeeded in a plot was thought intelligent, but shrewder still was the one who suspected a plot was brewing; yet the one who took precautions to obviate the need for both plotting and suspicion was a destroyer of the faction and terrified of the opposition. In general, both he who anticipated another who was about to do some evil, and he who incited to evil someone who had no such intention, were applauded.**

Logos itself crumbles. In this deservedly famous passage, the author makes it very clear that a major casualty of stasis is *logos* itself: Thucydides' description forces us to see that, like so many other *nomoi*, it, too, can crumble under the right circumstances. The relationship between *logos* and the *polis* is made plain: when the *polis* falls apart, so does *logos*. *Logos* is political and the *polis* relies upon reason. Amid the collapse of social order, these both collapse. As Darien Shanske notes, "*Stasis* is not the war of all against all; it is the war of *logos* against itself."³⁶ He further suggests the shift in the "conventional value of words" is best understood "not as relating to words and their relationship to things, but rather to an altering of a sense of proportion." And he continues, writing that

Daring was always valued, but not beyond measure, and now the loyalty to particular friends has destroyed the measure, and this is the key here. The balance that was at the heart of an *agonistic* society was a self-reinforcing system of measurement (e.g., intense elite competition through public endowment), and it is this harmony that has been destroyed – not in a single blow, but by a self-reinforcing cycle of mismeasurement.³⁷

In this view, it is not the case that social and political unrest undo the fundamental signifying relationships between words and objects. Instead, the turmoil disrupts the evaluative rationality

³⁶ Darien Shanske, *Thucydides and the Philosophical Origins of History*, 79.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

inherent in *logos*. *Logos* has not disappeared in this society; an element of *logos*—its basic role in reason and calculation—has been disturbed. Through *logos* these men can justify their actions, insofar as their ability to abide by traditional values of proportion has been lost. The so-called agonistic quality of social order, whereby competition between citizens produced and reproduced *arete*, now creates bastardizations of traditional *arete*. Corrupted *arete*, where, for example, an abundance of daring exists, becomes the normative means for justifying action. The fear for personal safety created by the uncertainty and political chaos of the world shifts the range of acceptable action, making “virtuous” what used to be an abundance, or lack of, a certain characteristic.

The war is the catalyst for the baser sides of human behavior to arise and appear justified: an altered world is perceived to legitimize altered human motivations and actions. The root cause of this unrest—this disturbance of *logos* itself as a means for rationally approaching and analyzing the world—was “the hunger for power inspired by greed and personal ambition [ἀρχὴ ἢ διὰ πλεονεξίαν καὶ φιλοτιμίαν]” (3.82.8). Through this impulse, people

did not restrain themselves at the boundary of justice or the city's true interests, but limited their actions only by what their own immediate gratification required, and they were ready to satisfy their lust to dominate by seizing power either through an unjust vote of condemnation or through brute force. As a result, both sides abandoned all religious scruple but admired rather those who managed to accomplish some invidious act under the cover of a specious phrase [εὐπρεπεία δὲ λόγου οἷς ξυμβαίη ἐπιφθόνως τι διαπράξασθαι]. Citizens who maintained neutrality were destroyed by both sides, either for their refusal to join in the fight or out of envy of their survival. (3.82.8)

Justification for actions “under the cover of a specious phrase [εὐπρεπεία λόγου]” involves a distortion of *logos* (a mere appearance of *logos*), which, in turn, will appeal reasonable to the rational minds of others: manipulation of *logos* to appeal to *logos*. Actions counter to *nomoi* are *justified* by clothing irrational behavior with a semblance of rationality—just enough for

believability. This process of distortion is the tool of base desires (διὰ πλεονεξίαν καὶ φιλοτιμίαν).

And Corcyra is not home to an isolated instance of *stasis*. The causes of the turmoil, all based in the greater unrest caused by the Peloponnesian War, exist in other cities throughout the Greek world:

(82.3) So the cities were embroiled in stasis, and in those that were afflicted later, the mindset of the combatants, influenced by knowledge of the previous instances, was revolutionized to much further excesses, both in the ingenuity of their attacks and in the enormity of their acts of revenge.

Thus every form of wickedness [πᾶσα ἰδέα κακοτροπίας] arose in the Hellenic world because of the *staseis*, and that simple goodness which is a major part of nobility was derisively mocked out of existence, while the ranging-up of opposing camps on the basis of mutual distrust prevailed far and wide. For no word was reliable enough, nor any oath formidable enough [οὔτε λόγος ἐχυρὸς οὔτε ὄρκος φοβερὸς], to bring about reconciliation, and all who found themselves in a superior position, figuring that security could not even be hoped for, made provisions to avoid injury rather than allow themselves to trust anyone. (83.1-2)

Corcyra is a catalyst, one whose horror appeared all the worse because it was the first of such events to occur. Afterwards, in the minds of contemporary Hellenes, these events become normalized in memory, providing later people in *staseis* to justify going to even greater lengths, to stray even further from the inherited tradition of *nomoi*:³⁸

(82.1) Such was the degree of savagery which the stasis reached, and it seemed even more so because it was the **first** of that time (to reach such an extent), whereas later practically the **whole Hellenic world** was disturbed (by stasis), there being contentions everywhere between the democratic leaders who tried to bring in the Athenians and the oligarchs who tried to bring in the Lacedaemonians. And whereas in peacetime the parties in individual states would not have had the pretext, nor would they have been so prepared to call them in, once they were embroiled in war and an alliance was available

³⁸ “Corcyra became a precedent, which only increased the savagery in communities already experiencing similar pressures. At the core of this ever-growing expansion, this self-feeding destruction of community within one polis and within the whole Greek world of *poleis*, some aspect of logos has changed.” Shanske, *Thucydides and the Philosophical Origins of History*, 79.

to each side for the detriment of their opponents and their own self-aggrandizement in a single stroke, bringing in Athens and Sparta was a facile matter for them as they desired some revolutionary change.

This paradigm presents *stasis* as a kind of disease, with Corcyra as the epicenter and later cities as new points of infection. Thucydides' Corcyra describes what Price calls a "pathology of *stasis*."³⁹

Many calamities befell the cities in the course of stasis, such as occur and will always occur so long as human nature remains the same, although they will be more intense or milder and varying in form, according to vicissitudes of circumstance prevailing in each instance. For in periods of peace and prosperity, both states and individuals maintain more positive dispositions because they are not compelled to face circumstances over which they have no control; **but war is a teacher of violence in that it does away with the easy provision of daily needs and brings most people's passions to match the level of their actual circumstances** [ὁ δὲ πόλεμος ὑφελών τὴν εὐπορίαν τοῦ καθ' ἡμέραν βίαιος διδάσκαλος καὶ πρὸς τὰ παρόντα τὰς ὀργὰς τῶν πολλῶν ὁμοιοῖ.] (3.82.2)

This analysis reinforces the degree to which Thucydides sees Corcyra as a paradigm for societal deterioration. There is an ironic echo of the rhetoric from Pericles' *epitaphios logos*, where he had claimed that "Our city as a whole is an education [παίδευσιν] for Hellas" (2.41.1).

Thucydides authoritatively suggests that it is war, rather than Athens as the idealized rhetorical creation of Pericles, that acts as an educating force in history. Thucydides further claims that such an occurrence of *stasis* is not an isolated event. It is not limited to the Hellenic world; it is characteristic of human nature—which is to say, it is not temporally limited at all: such an event "will always occur so long as human nature remains the same, although they will be more intense or milder and varying in form, according to vicissitudes of circumstance prevailing in each instance" (3.82.2). As Price notes in his consideration of the epidemiological vocabulary:

A disease which breaks out in different places and in different times will not appear identical in each case; a competent physician discerns the underlying similarities and disregards surface variations. Similarly, in his account of stasis, Thucydides describes

³⁹ Price, *Thucydides and Internal War*, 17.

how the condition “befell” or “afflicted” the cities (ἐπέπεσε) and how it “progressed” (προυχώρησε), using words which medical authors used to describe the development of disease. His account will necessarily be selective: the calamities of stasis “will be more intense or milder and varying in form” (εἴδεσι), according to varying circumstance (82.2): fluctuations in the outward manifestations of the underlying disease should not fool the experienced observer.⁴⁰

Corcyra’s *stasis* demonstrates the ease with which political turmoil affects human behavior and the ease with which humans abandon *nomoi*, the traditional structuring (or guiding) element of social conduct. In Corcyra, fear compelled men to reject abidance to *nomoi*, the opposite behavior to what Pericles in his Funeral Oration said of Athenian citizens, where fear kept Athenians obeying the law. And, when war is a recurring condition in the world, the deterioration of *nomoi* is, for Thucydides, seemingly inevitable. If morality and ethics are the conditions of peacetime, conduct in wartime becomes largely defined by its uncertainty and ambiguity, with *logos* being used to justify aberrations from social order.

As Thucydides demonstrates through the juxtaposition of the Funeral Oration, Athenian Plague narration, and the Corcyra *stasis*, the Hellenic world during the Peloponnesian War was in an unprecedented state of crisis. With political tensions high and fear running rampant, the traditional sociological, behavioral constraints ceased to effectively function. As the Hellenic world collapsed, so followed the traditional Hellenic *nomoi*. This left many in a situation where to act as one did before made little sense: the larger social structure that contained the *nomoi* no longer existed securely; likewise, the deterioration in normative behavior followed suit. *Logos*, as a particularly Athenian value, is a part of this system of *nomoi*. Its collapse threatened the

⁴⁰ Ibid., 15.

means for rational analysis and evaluating behavior. The microcosms depicted in these three Thucydides scenes act as case studies, reflecting on the wider social condition for the Hellenes.

2. CRISES OF LOGOS ON STAGE

In contemporary drama, similar themes were being explored. Euripides' *Medea* (431) explores a specific contemporary political concern with obvious links to the larger crisis of *logos*: the validity of oaths. Traditionally seen as a binding type of speech-act or social contract, oaths in the era of the Peloponnesian War were losing power, as Thucydides' own narrative makes clear. Oaths, as another manifestation of *logos* and *nomos*, are a central focus of the *Medea*, and they have direct parallels to the uneasy peace treaties and agreements between Athens and Sparta. Similarly, Sophocles' *Philoctetes* (409) engages with the question of deception and the use of a twisted *logos* to achieve an end deemed just, as is the case with Odysseus and Neoptolemus in this tragedy.

Euripides: Medea

In his *Medea*, Euripides presents a pressingly relevant contemporary Athenian concern: the reliability of oaths. As indicated in the introductory chapter, the center of this tragedy is a scene of oath-taking between Medea and the Athenian king Aegeus. Medea needs a place to which she can flee after committing the murder of her children and of Jason's bride-to-be. She secures the king's help through an oath. And yet, significantly, the root of Medea's anger is also a broken oath—the marriage oath between herself and Jason.

Even when the power and validity of the oath is in question, Medea relies upon this

speech-act as a means for securing her safety in the future. Despite the questioning of the oath, it still remains a fundamental component of commitment between individuals. These three characters can be interpreted metaphorically as well, as standing in for the complicated condition of oaths in the Greek world in the Peloponnesian War, particularly because of the date of *Medea's* production: 431 BCE, the year the war began.

An important, recurring theme throughout Euripides' *Medea* is the language of contract, both of pledging and oath-taking. Although some scholars have debated the fine semantic distinctions between oaths and pledges, suggesting various interpretations of Jason's true criminality,⁴¹ it is nevertheless the case that both a pledge and an oath involve a mutual, verbal and social contract between two persons. This act, too, is paralleled in the external world, where political entities engage in varying forms of contractual agreements. For the purposes of this analysis, pledges and the language about trust (*pistis*) will similarly be considered under the larger category of speech-acts or verbal-contract, the breaking of which is a violation.

In the opening lines of the tragedy, the nurse describes the unfolding situation between Jason and Medea, where Jason has decided to marry Creon's daughter:

Μήδεια δ' ἡ δύστηνος ἠτιμασμένη
 βοᾷ μὲν ὄρκους, ἀνακαλεῖ δὲ δεξιᾶς
 πίστιν μεγίστην, καὶ θεοὺς μαρτύρεται
 οἷας ἀμοιβῆς ἐξ Ἰάσονος κυρεῖ. (20-23)

And Medea, wretched and dishonored, calls
 on his promises, invokes the strong bond
 of his right hand and appeals to gods to witness
 the kind of recompense she gets from him.⁴²

⁴¹ Arlene Allan, "Masters of Manipulations: Euripides' (and Medea's) Use of Oaths in *Medea*," in *Horkos: The Oath in Greek Society*, (Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2007).

⁴² All *Medea* translation are by Rachel Kitzinger (*Greek Plays*, Modern Library, 2016).

Medea calls on his ὅρκοι, his promises or oaths, and his μεγάλη πίστις, his strong or strong pledge. Immediately, it is clear that a great emphasis has been placed upon verbal contracts and their relation to action and reality. In elaborating upon her predicament, Medea calls upon

Themis, goddess of oaths, and Artemis:

ὦ μεγάλα Θέμι καὶ πότνι Ἄρτεμι,
 λείσσεθ' ἃ πάσχω, μεγάλοις ὅρκοις
 ἐνδησαμένα τὸν κατάρατον
 πόσιν; ὅν ποτ' ἐγὼ νύμφαν τ' εἰδοίμ'
 αὐτοῖς μελάθροις διακναιομένους,
 οἱ' ἐμὲ πρόσθεν τολμῶσ' ἀδικεῖν.
 ὦ πάτερ, ὦ πόλις, ὦν κάσιν αἰσχυρῶς
 τὸν ἐμὸν κτείνας' ἀπενάσθην. (160-167)

Me. O great Themis and lady Artemis,
 do you see what I suffer? I bound
 my husband with great oaths, cursed man.
 May I see him and his bride
 ground to dust someday, with all the house,
 since they dared, unprovoked, to wrong me.
 Oh, Father, oh, city, to my shame
 I killed my brother and left you.

Contrary to some interpretations of this play, which focus on the trope of the scorned woman, here Medea indicates that her anger is not at her husband's infidelity per se, but rather at his breaking the oath he had taken. Medea's anger at Jason throughout the play continues to center around his breaking the oath and thus betraying Medea and their children (e.g., *Med.* 488-498; 579-587; 1392). While the new bride that Jason is taking is, of course, a product of Jason's oath-breaking, it is not the specific action on which Medea remains focused. She addresses the great Themis, who is the guardian of oaths, which further suggests that the oath-breaking (or pledge breaking) is at the forefront of her thinking. She wishes ill for Jason and his bride, not out of jealousy, but rather because of the magnitude of Jason's crime of breaking the oath he took with Medea (μεγάλοις ὅρκοις, 161). She was wronged (ἀδικεῖν, 165). This vocabulary belongs in

part to the language of ethical action and legality.⁴³

In their odes, the chorus elaborates on the theme of corruption of oaths and contractual language more generally.

ἄνω ποταμῶν ἱερῶν χωροῦσι παγαί,
καὶ δίκαια καὶ πάντα πάλιν στρέφεται·
ἀνδράσι μὲν δόλια βουλαί, θεῶν δ'
οὐκέτι πίστις ἄραρεν. (410-413)

Uphill flow streams from sacred springs,
the balance in all things is reversed;
men's designs are deceitful; their oaths—
sealed by the gods—dissolve.

βέβακε δ' ὄρκων χάρις, οὐδ' ἔτ' αἰδῶς
Ἑλλάδι τᾶ μεγάλα μένει, αἰθερία δ' ἀνέπτα.
σοὶ δ' οὔτε πατὴρ δόμοι,
δύστανε, μεθορμίσασθαι
μόχθων πάρα, σῶν τε λέκ-
τρων ἄλλα βασιλεία κρείσσων
δόμοισιν ἐπέστα. (439-445)

Gone the binding powers of oaths; no more
does shame abide in mighty Greece;
it's flown into thin air. And you have no father,
no home to give you shelter from your troubles.

The chorus generalizes about human nature and Greece based upon Medea's specific circumstances. These statements have relevance for the contemporary Greek world. βουλή and δίκη are associated with justice and government. ὄρκος too is an essential feature of political life, though it of course crosses over into the area of religion. That the nurse uses δόλιος to describe the βουλή is significant, insofar as it directly connects between specious arguments and subterfuge in formal matters.

⁴³ Medea's "otherness" does not affect her belief in the sanctity of oaths: "Representations in classical Greek sources of oaths and alliances sworn with and by foreigners ('barbarians') display no real features of 'othering' proposed by the 'polarity' and 'alterity' approaches to Greco-foreign relations. Foreign communities, just like Greek communities, share a common belief in the binding ritual performance of oaths, and in the dangers of punishment attendant on perjurers." (Sommerstein 2013, 320).

To underscore the vital importance of oaths, *logos*, and *pistis* to the play's themes, Euripides goes to the trouble of dramatizing onstage the administering of an actual oath—one that will, inevitably, recall the oath Jason once took:

Μη. ἔσται τάδ'· ἀλλὰ πίστις εἰ γένοιτό μοι
τούτων, ἔχοιμ' ἂν πάντα πρὸς σέθεν καλῶς.
Αἰ. μῶν οὐ πέποιθας; ἢ τί σοι τὸ δυσχερές;
Μη. πέποιθα· Πελίου δ' ἐχθρὸς ἐστὶ μοι δόμος
Κρέων τε. τούτοις δ' ὄρκίοισι μὲν ζυγεῖς
ἄγουσιν οὐ μεθεῖ' ἂν ἐκ γαίας ἐμέ·
λόγοις δὲ συμβὰς καὶ θεῶν ἀνώμοτος
φίλος γένοι' ἂν κάπικηρυκεύμασι
τάχ' ἂν πίθιοιο· τὰμὰ μὲν γὰρ ἀσθενῆ,
τοῖς δ' ὄλβος ἐστὶ καὶ δόμος τυραννικός.
Αἰ. πολλὴν ἔδειξας ἐν λόγοις προμηθίαν·
ἀλλ', εἰ δοκεῖ σοι, δρᾶν τάδ' οὐκ ἀφίσταμαι.
ἐμοί τε γὰρ τάδ' ἐστὶν ἀσφαλέστερα,
σκῆψίν τιν' ἐχθροῖς σοῖς ἔχοντα δεικνύναι,
τὸ σόν τ' ἄραρε μᾶλλον· ἐξηγοῦ θεούς.
Μη. ὄμνυ πέδον Γῆς πατέρα θ' Ἥλιον πατρὸς
τούμοῦ θεῶν τε συντιθεῖς ἅπαν γένος.
Αἰ. τί χρῆμα δράσειν ἢ τί μὴ δράσειν; λέγε.
Μη. μήτ' αὐτὸς ἐκ γῆς σῆς ἔμ' ἐκβαλεῖν ποτε,
μήτ', ἄλλος ἦν τις τῶν ἐμῶν ἐχθρῶν ἄγειν
χρήζη, μεθήσειν ζῶν ἐκουσίῳ τρόπῳ.
Αἰ. ὄμνυμι Γαῖαν Ἥλιου θ' ἀγνὸν σέλας
θεούς τε πάντας ἐμμενεῖν ἅ σου κλύω.
Μη. ἀρκεῖ· τί δ' ὄρκῳ τῶδε μὴ ἰμμένων πάθοις;
Αἰ. ἂ τοῖσι δυσσεβοῦσι γίγνεται βροτῶν.
Μη. χαίρων πορεύου· πάντα γὰρ καλῶς ἔχει.
κάγῳ πόλιν σὴν ὡς τάχιστ' ἀφίξομαι,
πράξασ' ἂ μέλλω καὶ τυχοῦσ' ἂ βούλομαι. (731-758)

Me. So be it. But if I might have a **guarantee** of your promise, all would be good between us.
Ae. Surely you trust me? What is it that worries you?
Me. I trust you, yes. But the houses of Pelias and Creon are my enemy. If the **oath** I ask for binds you, you won't send me away, when they do come for me. But if you make a pact **unsealed by oath**, you might protect your friendships, be persuaded by their demands. My position is weak, while they have wealth and power on their side.
Ae. Your **reasoning** shows great forethought. So, if it's what you want, I won't refuse. Safer for me that I can show your foes a pretext to refuse them, and more secure for you. By which gods should I swear?

- Me. **Swear** by Earth and by Sun, father of my father,
and the whole race of gods, all in one.
- Ae. Swear to do—or not do—what? You say it.
- Me. Never yourself expel me from your land.
Never, if one of my enemies wants to take me,
willingly hand me over while you live.
- Ae. **I swear** by Earth, the pure light of the Sun,
and all the gods, to abide by what you've said.
- Me. Good. And what if you don't fulfill your **oath**?
- Ae. I'll suffer what men suffer who spurn the gods.
- Me. Go in peace: all is as it should be.
I will come to your city as soon as I can, once
I've done what I intend, got all I want.

Medea explicitly lays out the expectations associated with oath-taking. If Aegeus formally takes an oath, it will bind him; accordingly, he will follow through with his promise. A pact lacking the formal constraints of the oath (literally, “agreed [upon] in words but unbound by oaths of the gods” [λόγοις δὲ συμβᾶς καὶ θεῶν ἀνώμοτος, 737]) will not suffice, because he could be persuaded to break this (informal) pact by a friend. Euripides shows the details of a successful oath-taking scene in having Aegeus ask Medea by which gods he should swear. Medea walks Aegeus through the specifics, indicating the correct procedure, and providing another counterexample to Jason's (now) invalid oath. Medea specifies the gods by which Aegeus should swear, and clarifies the punishment in the case of his not fulfilling the terms of the oath. Here the process of oath-taking is demonstrated; originally, of course, this would have occurred on stage before a live Athenian audience, and the physical movements accompanying the words would have further emphasized the solemnity and seriousness of the agreement. The specifics of this scene, the successful communication between Aegeus and Medea, and the final agreed upon oath present what oaths *should* do: that is, to finalize an agreement between two (or more) entities, establishing a mutual trust between the two that will ensure that the actions promised by the oath will, in fact, take place. The oaths in *Medea*, both broken and administered, are powerful reminders of the ideal relationship between word and action, rhetoric and fact.

The scene of oath-taking in the *Medea* uncannily anticipates a scene of oath-taking in a much later Athenian drama, Sophocles' *Philoctetes*. While the *Medea* provides insight into the concern about oaths at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War, the *Philoctetes* indicates that similar concerns are still extant in the Hellenic world, as it was produced only a few years before the eventual end of the war, in 404. The overlap in thematic preoccupation between two authors writing at different points in the history of the Peloponnesian War suggests the significance of the matter. In the case of the *Medea*, the formal agreement after the Battle of Plataea, beginning the Thirty Years' Peace, is about to be broken, having lasted less than half its intended span of time.⁴⁴ These oaths, treaties, and agreements were in the process of ceasing to function; they are losing their validity in the contemporary world. *Logos, in other words, was not meaningfully influencing action.* The *Philoctetes* comes after both the failed Thirty Years' Peace and the failed Peace of Nicias, making it a double critique on the increasing powerlessness of *logos* in the Hellenic world.⁴⁵ "Ultimately, both treaties failed because internal and external political pressures for power overcame a mutual will for peace."⁴⁶ The oaths of the *Medea* and the *Philoctetes*, and their connections to contemporary Hellenic politics, connect back to Thucydides' *History*, as *logos* — both rational thinking and breakdowns in communication — comes to characterize the Peloponnesian War more and more.

⁴⁴ "In all the years since the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War the Spartans had fought with a guilty conscience. They knew that the fighting had begun when their Theban allies had **violated a truce** with their attack on Plataea. Even more serious, the Spartans recognized that in refusing to submit grievances to arbitration in the years before 431, they had **broken their sworn oaths** and violated the Thirty Years' Peace" (Kagan, *New History*, 290).

⁴⁵ "It was the Athenians who, by attacking Spartan territory in Laconia, had now **broken the oaths** that they had taken in the Peace of Nicias; they were now the ones who refused arbitration. The gods could be expected to visit upon the Athenians the kind of retribution hitherto suffered by the Spartans" (Ibid.).

⁴⁶ Sommerstein, *Oaths and State*, 266.

Sophocles: Philoctetes

Sophocles' *Philoctetes* begins with Odysseus and Neoptolemus as having arrived at the island of Lemnos, where an injured Philoctetes had been abandoned a decade earlier as the Greeks sailed for Troy. Now, Odysseus and Neoptolemus are coming to fetch the bow of Heracles, which Philoctetes possesses and without which, as an oracle reveals, Troy cannot be taken. Odysseus cannot reveal his identity because of Philoctetes' grudge against him; instead, Odysseus charges Neoptolemus with gaining Philoctetes' trust and—by trickery—taking the desired weapon. The discussion again returns to *logos*, as something which can be utilized for a specific end. And, in Odysseus' view, it can be justified (Soph. *Phil.* 79-85). This raising the question about ethics in wartime, and the extent to which manipulating *logos* remains moral during persuasion and deception.

At the beginning of the tragedy, Odysseus prepares Neoptolemus for his task—to retrieve the bow of Heracles from Philoctetes by any means necessary: “You must mislead, ensnare / the soul of Philoctetes, when you speak with him [τὴν Φιλοκτῆτου σε δεῖ ψυχὴν ὅπως λόγοισιν ἐκκλέψεις λέγων]” (Soph. *Phil.* 54-55).⁴⁷ Odysseus specifies that in speaking (*λόγος* is the verbal noun of *λέγων*) Neoptolemus needs to deceive (*ἐκκλέπτω*) using *λόγοι*.⁴⁸ Neoptolemus is hesitant to use this means to achieve his goal; he worries about the shame in acting in a duplicitous manner. Odysseus, however, reassures Neoptolemus that his actions will be justified.

⁴⁷ Translations are from Robin Bond's (CC licensed) *Philoctetes*.

⁴⁸ LSJ, s.v. “ἐκκλέπτω,” II “ἐ. τινὰ λόγοις,” to deceive.

ἔξειδα, παῖ, φύσει σε μὴ πεφυκότα
 τοιαῦτα φωνεῖν μηδὲ τεχνᾶσθαι κακά·
ἀλλ' ἡδὺ γάρ τι κτῆμα τῆς νίκης λαβεῖν,
τόλμα· δίκαιοι δ' αὖθις ἐκφανούμεθα.
 νῦν δ' εἰς ἀναιδῆς ἡμέρας μέρος βραχὺ
 δός μοι σεαυτόν, κᾶτα τὸν λοιπὸν χρόνον
 κέκλησο πάντων εὐσεβέστατος βροτῶν. (79-85)⁴⁹

I understand, my son, that you are by your nature
 not equipped to tell such lies, devise such wrongs;
However, since the fruits of victory are sweet,
be bold! At length we will be proven justified.
 Entrust yourself to me for the part of one brief
day of shame, and then for evermore be called
 the best and the most dutiful of all mankind.

The line of argumentation is straightforward: Neoptolemus must act in a way traditionally seen as shameful because the end achievement (κτῆμα) is “sweet.” The use of ἡδύς (“sweet”) to describe the product of manipulation is peculiar; Odysseus avoids, in this moment, an adjective that connotes a moral or ethical evaluation. Sweet appeals to sense perception (smells, tastes, etc.), enjoyment, and pleasure in successfully deceiving Philoctetes. Odysseus does, however, follow this statement up with a further clarification that they will be shown to be just again/after (αὖθις). The above translation interprets this sentence as vindication, that their duplicity will be excused. It is also possible to interpret this sentence differently, as claiming that, despite the current duplicity, again (i.e. at some indeterminate time in the future) they will be given the opportune to prove they are just (δίκαιοι). Odysseus claims either that their shameful actions will be seen as just, or that, although they have acted shamefully, they will otherwise be able to prove themselves to be just men in the future. The ambiguity raises questions about the effects of shameful actions undertaken intentionally, with full knowledge of the scope of the wrongdoing. Given Odysseus’ next statement, that Neoptolemus can have a short day of shameful action and

⁴⁹ Greek text from: Hugh Lloyd-Jones and N.G. Wilson, *Sophocles Fabulae*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1990), 294-354.

then become most righteous (εὐσεβέστατος) later on, complicates the question of adherence to moral and ethical *nomoi*. Sophocles creates an ironic indictment of Odysseus's failure to understand that morality is continually re-enacted, not only when it is deemed convenient.

Odysseus' *logos* reveals a lack of morality.

Odysseus and Neoptolemus continue their disagreement:

- Ne.** I fill with horror when I hear your words [ἐγὼ μὲν οὐς ἂν τῶν λόγων ἀλγῶ κλύων],
Odysseus, and shrink from giving them effect [πράσσειν στυγῶ];
my constitution is opposed to evil subterfuge
[ἔφυν γὰρ οὐδὲν ἐκ τέχνης πράσσειν κακῆς],
as was the man's, they say, who fathered me.
But I am ready to bring this fellow in by force [πρὸς βίαν],
if not by guile [μὴ δόλοισιν]; for on one foot this man cannot
prevail in force against two men as strong as us.
And yet as your appointed helper I am loath
to earn a traitor's name [προδοτής], but I would rather fail
through acting well [καλῶς δρῶν ἐξαμαρτεῖν] than win by evil
means [νικᾶν κακῶς].
- Od.** You do your noble father proud! And even
in youth was active handed, slow of tongue,
but now I see that words not deeds must take
the lead, when issues arrive at the critical point.
- Ne.** Your orders then amount to this—that I should lie?
[ψευδῆ λέγειν]
- Od.** My orders are for you to take Philoctetes by guile [δόλω].
- Ne.** But why the need for guile [ἐν δόλω] and not persuasion [μᾶλλον ἢ πείσαντ']?
- Od.** Neither persuasion nor force will capture him
[οὐ μὴ πίθηται· πρὸς βίαν δ' οὐκ ἂν λάβοις].
- Ne.** Is his strength so terrible it breeds assurance?
- Od.** His arrows are unerring, dealing death...
- Ne.** So nobody is brave enough to deal with him
- Od.** No, only if you can outwit [δόλω] and take him, as I said.
- Ne.** But don't you think that telling lies brings shame [αἰσχρὸν]?
- Od.** Not if falsehood wins for us salvation
[οὔκ, εἰ τὸ σωθῆναι γε τὸ ψεῦδος φέρει].
- Ne.** How dare a man speak so and look you in the face?
- Od.** When advantage is at stake, you must not hesitate
[ὅταν τι δρᾶς εἰς κέρδος, οὐκ ὀκνεῖν πρέπει].

Neoptolemus proposes alternative means of securing Philoctetes' weapons: by force and by open persuasion. But according to Odysseus, these methods will not work. The task requires guile/deceit (δόλος). Odysseus, advocating “underhanded persuasion,” sees δόλος as the extension of the rational faculty of *logos*, as his vocabulary, which includes ἔλεγχος and γλῶσσα (both of which relate to *logos*) indicates.⁵⁰ With ἔλεγχος the rational faculty of deduction and reasoning is emphasized. A more literal rendering of the phrase εἰς ἔλεγχον ἐξιέναι would be “to proceed to the proof” or “put to the test.”⁵¹ This more scientific language further underscores the rational component of *logos* in Odysseus' conception of deceit. In using γλῶσσα, he highlights the physical instrument of language—here for duplicitous manipulation. Speech is an instrument of *logos*, which, in turn, is an instrument in the larger plot of subterfuge. More sinister still is Odysseus' assertion that one must not hesitate to do something for the sake of advantage. Again, the end justifies the means.

A short digression will further link this line of argumentation to the power of *logos* in the wider context of Athenian politics and society during the War. In Book 5 of his *History*, Thucydides famously dramatizes the debate between Athens and Melos that took place when the Athenians attempted to persuade the Melians (under threat of war) to renounce their neutral position and join the Delian League. The Athenians resorted to an argument that was characterized by later scholars as the start of the philosophy of political realism. This argument eschews any reference to the morality or ethics of the various parties' positions, instead relying upon discussion of advantages for the states involved—not least, the desire for expansion and rule. The Athenians justified their threatening of the Melians by saying: “We are under an innate

⁵⁰ “Neoptolemus is associated with force and open persuasion, and Odysseus with deception and underhanded persuasion” (Alan H. Sommerstein et al., *Oaths and State in Ancient Greece*, [Berlin, De Gruyter, 2013], 95).

⁵¹ LSJ s.v. “ἔλεγχος”

compulsion to rule wherever empowered” and “we know that you and anyone else who attained power like ours would act accordingly” (5.105). The Athenians based their argument in what they see as occurring before their own eyes, grounding their position in practical, pragmatic considerations. Thucydides himself recognizes the amoral quality of the debate: as he puts it, the Athenians did not use “noble phrases to furnish a lengthy and unconvincing speech” (5.89), but they relied to the idea that there is a natural law that validates the stronger’s rule over the weaker.⁵²

The appeal to necessity and for greater benefit strikingly reflects Odysseus’ line of argumentation in Sophocles’ play, which similarly relies on the principle of the “necessary.” As we have seen, the Athenians carried their policy to the extreme, handily obliterating Melos after the Melians rejected their proposal to join to Delian League. If they did eventually did get Melos to ally itself with Athens, it was only after they had sacked the city, killed all the men they captured, enslaved the children and women and settled the land with their own colonists (5.116). Odysseus’ logic, in considering only the practical reality and ignoring considerations of morality on a larger scale, similarly justifies the course of action dramatized by Thucydides in the Melian Dialogue.

It is in this context—that is, of fairly recent and unavoidably memorable historical incident that showcased Athenian *Realpolitik*—that, I suggest, we must read *Philoctetes* and its presentation of oaths, loyalty, and *logos*. When Neoptolemus’ attempt to deceive Philoctetes is finally made clear to him, Philoctetes focuses on an integral aspect of Neoptolemus’ deceit, his false pledge:

⁵² Gerald Mara, “Thucydides and Political Thought,” in *Cambridge Companion to Ancient Greek Political Thought*, (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2009), 110.

προσθείς τε χεῖρα δεξιάν,⁵³ τὰ τόξα μου
 ἱερὰ λαβὼν τοῦ Ζηνὸς Ἡρακλέους ἔχει,
 καὶ τοῖσιν Ἀργείοισι φήνασθαι θέλει,
 ὡς ἄνδρ' ἑλὼν ἰσχυρὸν ἐκ βίας μ' ἄγει,
 κούκ οἶδ' ἐναίρων νεκρόν, ἢ καπνοῦ σκιάν,
 εἴδωλον ἄλλως. οὐ γὰρ ἂν σθένοντά γε
 εἴλέν μ'· ἐπεὶ οὐδ' ἂν ᾧδ' ἔχοντ', εἰ μὴ δόλω.
 νῦν δ' ἠπάτημαι δύσμορος. τί χρὴ με δρᾶν; (942-949)

He pledged his faith with his right hand's grasp,
 then stole the sacred bow of Herakles, the son of Zeus,
 and holds it, and wants to flaunt it before the Greeks,
 as though he took and leads a mighty warrior by force,
 but does not know he kills a corpse, an insubstantial shade,
 a phantom only. He could not have captured me had I
 been strong, could not have, even as I am, except by guile!
 But I have been so sorrily deceived. What must I do?

In his discussion of Neoptolemus' deceit, Philoctetes focuses upon the specious promise Neoptolemus made for the express purpose of getting the bow of Heracles. He imagines what Neoptolemus might want to do with the bow, picturing him flaunting it before the Greeks in victory; immediately after, however, Philoctetes reveals his current lowly position, because of which even Neoptolemus' boasting would be empty. Philoctetes is but a shadow of his old, strong self—an εἴδωλον.⁵⁴ Not only has Neoptolemus acted shamefully in breaking a pledge in deceit, but he has done so to a fellow Greek who has been injured, falsely promising to help him. He describes himself as δύσμορος, literally "ill-fated," and poses the existential question as to what his next course of action should be. Neoptolemus feels guilt and shame upon seeing Philoctetes' reaction and the weight of his own actions. He seeks to mend the relationship and prove himself to be a virtuous man again.

⁵³ This gesture, the extending of the right hand, is a formal sign of oath-taking.

⁵⁴ It is worth noting here that this word, as I shall discuss in Part 2, becomes a key element in a dramatic discourse about the relation of *logos* to reality itself, in Euripides' *Helen*.

Νε. μὴ ἰπεύξῃ πέρα·
 δέχου δὲ χειρὸς ἐξ ἐμῆς βέλη τάδε.
 Φι. πῶς εἶπας; ἄρα δεύτερον δολούμεθα;
 Νε. ἀπώμοσ' ἀγνὸν Ζηνὸς ὑψίστου σέβας.
 Φι. ὦ φίλτατ' εἰπὼν, εἰ λέγεις ἐπήτυμα.
 Νε. τοῦργον παρέσται φανερόν. ἀλλὰ δεξιὰν
 πρότεινε χεῖρα, καὶ κράτει τῶν σῶν ὄπλων. (1286-1292)

Ne. Curse me no more,
 but take these weapons from my hand.
 Ph. What's that? Is this some second trickery?
 Ne. My oath upon the highest majesty of holy Zeus!
 Ph. Your words are welcome, if they prove true.
 Ne. The very act is proof. Stretch out your own
 right hand, and take control of what is yours...

Of course, Philoctetes is wary of his attempts at reconciliation. Neoptolemus uses an abundance of solemn and religious language to convince Philoctetes of his sincerity: ἀπόμνημι, to swear an oath; σέβας reverential awe; ἀγνός holy or pure; and, of course, Zeus, who is further described as ὑψίστος, the highest. The religious language adds to the seriousness of Neoptolemus' words, and his more formal invocation of Zeus has an effect on Philoctetes. Neoptolemus proves the veracity of his statement by telling Philoctetes to extend his right hand—the very same hand used in pledges and oaths, and so also reminiscent of Neoptolemus' previous deceit. Odysseus sees this exchange occurring and attempts to prevent the bow being returned to Philoctetes by offering his own oath, “calling the gods to witness (ὡς θεοὶ ξυνίστορες) that he forbids the handing over of the bow (1293), but the oath is meaningless since it is attached to the performative utterance of forbidding which is made true by the very fact of being uttered”—invoking the gods to witness the fact that he forbids the transaction does not actually *cause* the gods to intervene— “[which] demonstrates Odysseus' loss of control over manipulative speech.”⁵⁵ At this critical moment in the drama, Odysseus' speech fails to effect the desired

⁵⁵ Sommerstein et al., *Oaths and Swearing in Ancient Greece*, (Berlin, De Gruyter, 2014), 99.

results, demonstrating, in part, the inability of speech and deception to accomplish all desired ends. And so Neoptolemus agrees again to return Philoctetes back to his home, abiding by the original pledge he made.

However, in a twist at the end of the tragedy, the deified Herakles appears to Philoctetes. He stops Philoctetes from leaving and returning home, delivering a message that Philoctetes must go to Troy to assist the Greeks; in doing so, Herakles assures him, he will find a cure to his illness. It is ultimately persuasion that gets Philoctetes to agree to go to Troy, except persuasion by a divine being. This change in hierarchical dynamics speaks to the centrality of the power of persuasion and, furthermore, to what Alan Sommerstein has called the “‘critical importance of speech’ [both speech as an instrument of corrupted *logos* and speech as the communication between characters] in the play, an aspect of the tragedy that is intimately connected with the theme of persuasion.”⁵⁶ But this apparent victory of persuasion raises retrospective questions about the difference between the persuasion of Odysseus, which seemed to have been presented as distinctly amoral, and the persuasion Heracles uses. In her analysis of the Greek *polis*, Hannah Arendt offers a potential solution to this puzzle. Arendt sees persuasion as invaluable to the *polis*, as the means by which the public space, and thus politics itself, comes to exist. This necessitates action in speech, the constant exchange of ideas, and the shared goal of working toward a common good.

In the experience of the polis, which not without justification has been called the most talkative of all bodies politic, and even more in the political philosophy which sprang from it, action and speech separated and became more and more independent activities. The emphasis shifted from action to speech, and to speech as a means of persuasion rather than the specifically human way of answering, talking back and measuring up to whatever happened or was done. To be political, to live in a polis, meant that every- thing was decided through words and persuasion and not through force and violence. In Greek self-understanding, to force people by violence, to command rather than persuade, were

⁵⁶ Ibid., 100.

prepolitical ways to deal with people characteristic of life outside the *polis*, of home and family life, where the household head ruled with uncontested, despotic powers, or of life in the barbarian empires of Asia, whose despotism was frequently likened to the organization of the household.⁵⁷

In the interaction between these three Greek mythological figures, we see the effects of persuasion taken to the extreme: to the point of deception. *Peitho*, the fundamental quality of politics, is neglected in preference to *dolos*, deception. Deception does not function through discussion and conversation as persuasion does. Rather, deception ignores the conversation and exchange of ideas that marks the power of persuasion. It skips the process—which is essential to politics—and seeks the end alone; however, this end is not in service of a common good, but rather is in the service of a personal benefit or advantage.

Reconciling the persuasion that finally leads Philoctetes to Troy is not as difficult as it may initially seem when persuasion (*peitho*) is viewed in the context of the politics of the *polis*. This manner of dialogue is, in fact, the hallmark of successful interaction between members; furthermore, in this instance, the end is sought with an eye to the greater common, shared good of the Greek world. Heracles' ultimate persuasion of Philoctetes need not be seen as a re-complication of persuasion as a negative means of manipulation. Rather, Heracles demonstrates the open dialogue with Philoctetes that, for Arendt, defines the *polis*. The *Philoctetes* leaves us with the image of persuasion as a just political process.

Philoctetes' illness is an essential feature of Sophocles' play, and his suffering exists throughout the entire plot, even when not explicitly mentioned. Philoctetes has been suffering from a festering wound on his foot, which led him to be left on the island of Lemnos. He is in real pain. The illness, however, also functions as a metaphor. As Susan Sontag observed in her

⁵⁷ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1958), 27.

groundbreaking cultural study *Illness as Metaphor*, illness in literature operates in two ways: (1) every form of social deviation can be considered an illness; (2) every illness can be considered psychologically.⁵⁸ In Sophocles' play, Philoctetes' isolation and physical injury relates to both the political (the Hellenic world of the Peloponnesian War—by definition, a violent interaction between humans) and the individual, psychological spheres: the pain he suffers as an individual, a participant (however directly or indirectly) in the Trojan War, can be seen to parallel both the disintegration of mores and the psychological states of many Greeks of the time period, too—a disintegration already made powerfully clear in Thucydides' handling of the Plague narrative, as we have seen above.

In the Plague Narrative, we saw how the motif of disease speaks to the vulnerability of each and every citizen, but also to the vulnerability of the entire Hellenic world during the Peloponnesian War. The political turmoil and destruction present throughout the region have serious effects on civilization as a whole. A person who was once great, like Philoctetes and even Pericles, is not guaranteed continued good health. And, upon becoming ill, there is no guarantee of a remedy or, on the political stage, an easy solution. Philoctetes' illness as depicted in Sophocles' drama has clear resonances with Thucydides' depiction of the Athenian plague and of *stasis* itself as a quasi-epidemic in the *History*. The use of disease and illness in *Philoctetes* highlights in particular the vulnerability of the character and his susceptibility to subterfuge. Philoctetes is desperate to leave the island of Lemnos and to return home, and more willingly trusts Neoptolemus, a stranger to him. And the despondence that Philoctetes experiences in his

⁵⁸ Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor*, (New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1978), 57.

resignation to his suffering,⁵⁹ resonates with the description that Thucydides gives of the Athenian plague where depression set in:

What was most terrible in the whole affliction was the despair [ἀθυμία] when someone realized he was sick (for immediately forming the judgment that there was no hope, they tended much more to give themselves up instead of holding out). (2.51.4)⁶⁰

The dependency or despair here is psychological, a result of bodily harm. A similar dynamic exists for Philoctetes, where his suffering because of his foot causes his mental condition and health to deteriorate further, putting him into an equally affected mental space. The metaphor of disease operates on different levels, applying to the region, the respective city-states and their “body-politics,” and to individuals.⁶¹ These three levels relate to one another, connecting larger societal and governmental health and stability with the condition of individuals. Philoctetes as an individual suffers from his injury, which he received on his way to fight at Troy on behalf of Hellas. His anguish, both physical and mental, exists in the context of a long-lasting war, where

⁵⁹ See, for example:

ὦ τλάμων τλάμων ἄρ' ἐγὼ / καὶ μόχθῳ λωβατός, ὃς ἤ- / δη μετ' οὐδενὸς ὕστερον / ἀνδρῶν εἰσοπίσω
τάλας / ναίων ἐνθάδ' ὀλοῦμαι (“Distressed and destitute am I and damned to suffering, who from now on until I fade in death shall be forever on my own...,” 1101-1104).

ᾧ στυγνὸς αἰὼν, τί μ' ἔτι δῆτ' ἔχεις ἄνω / βλέποντα κοῦκ ἀφῆκας εἰς Ἄιδου μολεῖν; (“I hate this life of mine... oh, why, oh why do you insist I look upon the light of day, do not dispatch me down to Hades?,” 1348-1349).

οὐ γάρ με τᾶλγος τῶν παρελθόντων δάκνει, / οὐ γάρ με τᾶλγος τῶν παρελθόντων δάκνει, / ἀλλ' οἷα
χρὴ παθεῖν με πρὸς τούτων ἔτι / δοκῶ προλεύσσειν. (“It is not the pain of things gone by that tortures me, but rather I can see the kinds of thing I needs must bear in the future now,” 1357-1360)

⁶⁰ Lattimore's translation.

⁶¹ Here I am looking mainly at scale: individual, body-politic, and larger regions. Elaine Scarry offers another framing for analyzing the effects of war on, which incorporates the concept of culture and self-identity: “There are [...] three arenas of damage in war, three arenas of alteration: first, embodied persons; second, the material culture or self-extension of persons; third, immaterial culture, aspects of national consciousness, political belief, and self-definition. The object in war (as in any imaginable surrogate contest through which an international dispute was to be settled is the third; for it is the national self-definitions of the disputing countries that have collided, and the dispute disappears if at least one of them agrees to retract, relinquish, or alter its own form of self-belief, its own form of self-extension. In war, the first and second forms of damage are the means for determining which of the two sides will undergo the third form of damage. Both sides will suffer the first and second kinds of damage, but only one will undergo the third, and it is the designation of ‘winner’ and ‘loser’ that determines which side will undergo that change in the third arena” (Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, [Oxford, OUP, 298], 114).

morale is low even among the healthier fighters. But Philoctetes was abandoned by these comrades, left alone to suffer in isolation, further indicating the degree to which the illness—which began because of war—isolates members of communities, breaking down social ties and mutual trust. Philoctetes’ brand of suffering existed, as we know, on a larger scale for the Greeks during the Peloponnesian War. Thousands of people were injured or stricken (in Athens during the Plague, for instance) and similarly harmed. The degradation of mental health follows from the physical affliction as well: as indicated in Sophocles’ presentation of the character of Philoctetes in his tragedy and Thucydides’ portrayal of the Athenians in the *History*.

As we have seen, *logos* itself is subject to “disease” — to outside forces that act like infections, ultimately perverting its true nature: in Sophocles as in Thucydides, a powerful metaphorical nexus between *logos*, civilized values, and disease operates to illustrate the stresses and ultimately the failings of the existing rhetorical, social and political structures. At the root of this dilemma is the matter of *logos*, as that which is perverted in the course of lying and as the instrument through which deception occurs. By twisting *logos* with specious argumentation and illusion, the larger condition of *logos* itself is threatened, as is its ability to facilitate communication responsibly. And the process of destroying *logos* is done by careful calculation of how to effect the desired result. The active misuse of *logos* destroys the structure and power of *logos* as it functioned in stable times.

The external politics of the Hellenic world are important considerations for this dilemma. A defense of subterfuge within the play directly connects to the external, political world theater, particularly given its date of performance in 409—just years before the end of the Peloponnesian War in 405. The internal events of the tragedy, concerning the ethics of unjust behavior for the

sake of a supposedly just cause, have immediate significance for the latter years of the war, as the political turmoil further deteriorated into chaos.

The threat of pain and suffering is omnipresent in wartime. In the *Philoctetes* this suffering is further tied into the plot of deceit and unjust use of *logos* in the characters of Odysseus and Neoptolemus. The illness affecting the individual person, Philoctetes, is mirrored in the corruption of *logos*, as in Odysseus' defense of the necessity of subterfuge. *Logos* and bodily health are connected in Sophocles' writing, providing further commentary on the state of the greater contemporary Hellenic world, where, too, these two concepts are intertwined, afflicting the region as a whole. What Sophocles does not offer, however, is a solution. Rather, he alerts his audience to his observation of this connection between the physical and the mental, showing the interplay of the two forces in the personages of Philoctetes, Odysseus, and Neoptolemus.

PART 2: *LOGOS* AND THE CRISIS OF REALITY

With the problem of the confusion and untrustworthiness of *logos* so prevalent in contemporary 5th-century Athenian discourse, the question of narration and truth was on the minds of many cutting-edge intellectuals — notably Gorgias and Euripides. Although they write in different genres, both authors use the figure of Helen to speak to this theme, the orator in his *Encomium of Helen* (likely c.427) and Euripides in his romance, *Helen* (412). In both works, the authors exculpate Helen of the guilt for the Trojan War, using the arresting suggestion that Helen was innocent to explore the nature and effect of *logos* on history—and on our understanding of reality itself.

The claim that Helen was, in fact, innocent of the adulterous crime of which mythology had long found her guilty had been made by Stesichorus, the Greek lyric poet who was active c.600–550, in his *Palinode*⁶²; and by Herodotus (c.484-c.425) in his *History*.⁶³ Both of those authors suggest that Helen remained in Egypt. (Neither, however, suggests the existence of a deceptive *eidolon*, a theme that Euripides developed in his *Helen*.⁶⁴) Gorgias and Euripides deal with the Trojan War as a historical event and use the possibility of Helen’s innocence to explore how that historical reality might be perceived retrospectively. The parallel to the contemporary Peloponnesian War undoubtedly heightened the stakes of their arguments, which, in a broader sense, question the possibility that we can document reality, and the means by which the truth might be retained and presented. This discussion again circles back quite naturally to *logos*, as the faculty through which language, reason, and analysis function.

⁶² P.J. Parsons, “Stesichorus,” in *OCD*, (Oxford, OUP, 2012).

⁶³ John P.A. Gould, “Herodotus,” in *OCD*, (Oxford, OUP, 2012).

⁶⁴ William Allan, *Helen*, (Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2008), 72-82.

This “awakening of rhetorical self-consciousness,” to use George Kerferd’s phrasing, connects Gorgias and Euripides both to one another and to the wider contemporary context in which they wrote. As Kerferd observes in his 1981 study of the sophists, the sophists and the playwrights belonged to a larger cultural movement, one instigated by the turmoil of politics and warfare, and preoccupied with the relationship of language to reality:

What did emerge [in the fifth century B.C.] however was a realization that the relationships between speech and what is the case is far from simple. While it is likely that fifth-century thinkers all were prepared to accept that there is and must always be a relationship between the two, there was a growing understanding that what is very often involved is not simply a presentation in words of what is the case, but rather a representation, involving a considerable degree of reorganization in the process. It is this awakening of what has been called rhetorical self-consciousness that is a feature both of contemporary literature and of theoretic discussion in the fifth century.⁶⁵

Yet, while the questioning of *logos* remained a pressing concern to the Athenian intellectual scene, the means for exploring the complex nature of *logos* were not necessarily somber in tone. While they treat serious concerns about *logos*, truth, and reality, Gorgias’ *Encomium of Helen* and Euripides’ *Helen* share an additional unique characteristic: their playfulness. This rhetorical playfulness suggests that, despite their apparent criticism and concern, these two authors also engage with the testing of *logos*, with pushing the boundaries of the capacity of *logos* to represent reality, across different genres (here epideictic rhetoric and tragedy/tragicomedy). *Logos* is complicated and used in many tones and genres as these authors treat the issue of *logos* and reality, demonstrating through the varying tones and genres the variety, subtlety, complexity, and potential disruptiveness of *logos* itself.

⁶⁵ George Kerferd, *The Sophistic Movement*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981), 78.

1. THE CRISIS OF REALITY IN RHETORIC: *Gorgias's The Encomium of Helen*

Although the sophists were not a formal school or single movement, they are particularly well-known for their “systematic study of [the] techniques of persuasion and argument, which embraced various forms of the study of language, including grammar, literary criticism, and semantics.”⁶⁶ The sophists were polarizing figures, celebrated by some but held in great suspicion by others. While most of their works have been lost, their historical significance in 5th-century Athens cannot be overstated, as Kerferd notes:

[The sophists] were a part of the movement that was producing the new Athens of Pericles, and it was as such that they were both welcomed and attacked. They attracted the enthusiasm and the odium which regularly accrues to change. The change that was taking place was both social and political on the one hand and intellectual on the other. But these two aspects were not separate, they were aspects of a single complex process of change.⁶⁷

The interconnectedness of the social, political, and intellectual currents suggests the degree of upheaval that the Greek world, and specifically Athens, was experiencing. These, of course, are precisely the upheavals that Thucydides charts in his *History*, as I have discussed in Part 1.

Gorgias (c.485-c.380), a sophist known for his epideictic oratory, wrote his *Encomium of Helen* during or shortly after the Peloponnesian War. A piece of epideictic oratory, the *Encomium* performatively establishes an alternative account of Helen’s movements during the Trojan War, correcting the error he sees in the accepted *logos*. He opens his work with the following statement:

κόσμος πόλει μὲν εὐανδρία, σώματι δὲ κάλλος, ψυχῇ δὲ σοφία, πράγματι δὲ ἀρετή,
λόγῳ δὲ ἀλήθεια· τὰ δ' ἐναντία τούτων ἀκοσμία.⁶⁸ (1)

⁶⁶ Christopher Taylor, “Sophists,” in *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press).

⁶⁷ Kerferd, *The Sophistic Movement*, 22.

⁶⁸ Greek text, unless otherwise noted, is from: Franceso Donali, *Helenae Encomium*, (Berlin, De Gruyter, 2016).

What is becoming to a city is manpower, to a body beauty, to a soul wisdom, to an action virtue, to a speech [*logos*] truth, and the opposites of these are unbecoming.⁶⁹

Gorgias immediately presents the reader with a dichotomy between order (κόσμος) and disorder (ἀκοσμία), setting out the qualities proper to different things. Let us note here an important assumption—one that, as we have seen, becomes problematic in Thucydides: that truth, ἀλήθεια, is the proper counterpart to *logos*. Not only does Gorgias need to persuasively present a new version of a canonical story, he must also overcome the cultural associations with Helen. His analogies state that just as truth is proper to *logos*, beauty (κάλλος) is proper to the body. Traditionally, Helen is a byword for both beauty and falseness (for her adultery).⁷⁰ Gorgias’s task, therefore, is not only to reveal Helen’s innocence as an individual in a myth, but also to undo the preconceptions that this mythic character represents. As she herself traditionally embodies falseness, through her adultery, so Gorgias must also overcome what Helen has come to represent. Nevertheless, recognizing an error in the common opinion, Gorgias proposes to challenge this consensus, this orthodoxy, by saying “what needs to be said” to exculpate Helen.

Gorgias’s exculpation of Helen is marked by its heterodoxy, its establishing of a (heterodoxic) “contra-consensual consensus” about Helen.⁷¹ He will accomplish this through reasoning:

⁶⁹ English comes from George Kennedy’s translation of the *Encomium* in: Rosamond Kent Sprague, *The Older Sophists*, (Indianapolis, Hackett, 2001), 30-67.

⁷⁰ Nancy Worman notes that “By the classical period, then, Helen has become a fabricated item, the emblem of specious or changeable beauty that distracts audiences from the truth about her type” (*The Cast of Character*, [Austin, University of Texas Press, 2002], 113).

⁷¹ The terminology of the two vectors (orthodoxy and heterodoxy) in the *Encomium* comes from Cassin, *Dictionary*, 1039. Her analysis helps to illuminate an important aspect of performativity in Gorgias’s writing, where he is “creating a world” in proposing a radically different reading of the Helen myth. Though he was not the first person to take up this opinion, his engagement with the myth in connection to *logos* (and in the context of the Peloponnesian War) demonstrates the contemporary preoccupation with this matter, as something which crosses social, political, and philosophical boundaries.

ἐγὼ δὲ βούλομαι λογισμόν τινα τῷ λόγῳ δοῦς τὴν μὲν κακῶς ἀκούουσιν παῦσαι τῆς αἰτίας, τοὺς δὲ μεμφομένους ψευδομένους ἐπιδείξει καὶ δείξει τὰληθῆς καὶ παῦσαι τῆς ἀμαθίας. (2)

By introducing some reasoning into my speech, I wish to free the accused of blame and, having reproved her detractors as prevaricators and proved the truth, to free her from their ignorance.

He must (re)introduce reason (λογισμός) into his own *logos* (his speech) and into the *logos* of Helen (the account of her actions which blames her for the Trojan War) which has been corrupted by falsehoods. Gorgias seeks to establish the truth, τὰληθῆς, a process that calls for radical revision and analysis. And if truth is absent, it necessarily follows, in the paradigm established by Gorgias in his first sentence, that so is order; and as we know, order (κόσμος) is often a synonym for beauty (κάλλος) in Greek thought. Hence the mythological figure of Helen, notorious for her beauty but also for her adulterous deception, embodies an interesting paradox that Gorgias must unravel: in showing that she was not false but “true” to her husband, he is simultaneously reorienting reality to *logos*. It is, moreover, not enough to offer another anecdote as a counter-story; he has to start from the beginning, analyzing all possibilities: “in order to get at the truth it is necessary to indicate the truth or reality itself and not the *logos*, and this can only be done by applying some kind of process of reading to the *logos* in question.”⁷²

The figure of Helen, then, is representative of a wider phenomenon of anxiety about *logos* and the attempts to come to terms with *logos* as both powerful and dangerous.⁷³ This anxiety, in turn, complicates communication and representation in speaking and in writing:

[T]he means by which we communicate is speech or *logos*, and this *logos* is not and can never be the externally subsisting objects that actually are. What we communicate to our neighbors is never these actual things, but only a *logos* which is always other than the

⁷² Kerferd, *The Sophistic Movement*, 81.

⁷³ In fact, as Nancy Worman writes in her major study of Helen as a figure of rhetoric: “In this climate the figures of Helen and Odysseus become repositories for some of the fear and resentment that accompanied the Athenians’ exposure to sophistic ideas, particularly the visual impact of embellished performance styles and the appropriative use of character type” (*Cast of Character*, 149-50).

things themselves. It is not even, says Gorgias, speech that displays the external reality, it is the external object that provides information about the logos.

It follows that Gorgias is introducing a radical gulf between logos and the things to which it refers. Once such a gulf is appreciated we can understand quite easily the sense in which every logos involves a falsification of the thing to which it has reference—it can never, according to Gorgias, succeed in reproducing as it were in itself that reality which is irretrievably outside itself.⁷⁴

The idea that “every *logos* involves a falsification of the thing” raises the stakes of Gorgias’s project more. For Helen, being associated with beauty and thus with ornamentation, has, by this time in Greek culture, come to represent false ornamentation, presenting beauty but disguising an evil. On a larger scale, Helen represents a certain type of sophistic rhetoric of her own:⁷⁵ civic *epideixis*, the genre within which Gorgias himself is writing. This bolsters the validity of a reading of Gorgias’s *Encomium* as, ultimately, an exploration of the *logos* of his own written type, his own necessary falsification in the act of composing. Gorgias does so through creating the “radical gulf” between *logos* and its referent, and navigating the implications for this gulf through the process of reasoning, λογισμός.

Gorgias establishes four possible explanations for Helen going to Troy, using systematic reasoning to explain the possibility and remove guilt from Helen:

For either by will of fate and decision of the gods and vote of necessity [τύχης βουλήμασι καὶ θεῶν βουλευμάσι καὶ ἀνάγκης ψηφίσμασιν] did she do what she did, or by force reduced [ἢ βίᾳ ἀρπασθεῖσα] or by words seduced [ἢ λόγοις πεισθεῖσα] or by love possessed [ἢ ἔρωτι ἀλοῦσα]. (6)

He takes each of these options and explains how, if it were the case, still Helen would not be blameworthy. If gods are stronger than humans and a divine will/predetermination caused Helen to go to Troy, Helen cannot be held responsible, since it is natural for the weaker to follow and be ruled by the stronger (πέφυκε... τὸ ἧσσον ὑπὸ τοῦ κρείσσονος ἄρχεσθαι καὶ ἄγεσθαι, καὶ

⁷⁴ Kerferd, *The Sophistic Movement*, 80.

⁷⁵ Worman, *Cast of Character*, 122, 157.

τὸ μὲν κρεῖσσον ἠγεῖσθαι, τὸ δὲ ἥσσον ἔπεσθαι). In this case, the gods (or divine forces) would be responsible, not Helen. Similarly, “if she was abducted by violence and illegally assaulted and unjustly insulted, it is clear that the rapist, as the insulter, did the wronging, and the raped, as the insulted, did the suffering” (Εἰ δὲ βία ἠρπάσθη καὶ ἀνόμως ἐβιάσθη καὶ ἀδίκως ὑβρίσθη, δῆλον ὅτι ὁ μὲν ἀρπάσας ὡς ὑβρίσας ἠδίκησεν, ἡ δὲ ἀρπασθεῖσα ὡς ὑβρισθεῖσα ἐδυστύχησεν, 7). In this case, it is just to pity (οἰκτίρειν) her. Gorgias’s use of ἀνόμως to describe the assault recalls the vocabulary Thucydides used to describe the lawlessness at Athenians in the wake of the plague (ἀνομία, *Thuc.* 2.53.1), which suggests a breakdown in social order (*nomoi*), too. Gorgias explains this breakdown in social order as also vindicating Helen. Corruption of *nomos* is a stronger force, for whose effects Helen cannot be held accountable.

The third and fourth potential reasons are variations of this argument: something more powerful than humankind is responsible. Either a higher being willed it to happen, or an imperfection in humankind allowed for Helen to be tricked. The third reason, Gorgias writes, is that she succumbed to the power of speech:

If it was speech which persuaded her and deceived her soul [εἰ δὲ λόγος ὁ πείσας καὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ἀπατήσας], not even to this is it difficult to make an answer and to banish blame as follows. Speech is a powerful lord [λόγος δυνάστης μέγας ἐστίν], which by means of the finest and most invisible body effects the divinest works: it can stop fear and banish grief and create joy and nurture pity. (11) All who have and do persuade people of things do so by molding a false argument [ψευδῆ λόγον πλάσαντες] ... So that on most subjects most men take opinion [τὴν δόξαν] as counselor to their soul, but since opinion is slippery [σφαλερὰ] and insecure [ἀβέβαιος] it casts those employing it into slippery and insecure successes.

Speech [*logos*] has constrained the soul, persuading it “to believe the things said and to approve the things done.” The persuasion of which *logos* is capable is treated as a power equally as strong as the physical, forcible taking of her person (ἢ βία ἀρπασθεῖσα, 6). The juxtaposition of violence and persuasion recalls the paradigm, discussed in the previous chapter, which Sophocles

established in his *Philoctetes* between violence and deceit through *logoi*. As Nancy Worman notes, the power of deceit was represented there by Odysseus, who comes to represent the “violent sophistic type,” who uses *logos* in a manipulative, duplicitous, and thus immoral, manner.⁷⁶ The ability of *logos* to have physical effects in the world is a central concern. In the case of Helen, *logos*, the stronger persuading force, is thus the agent at fault, being the entity that compelled the action. But, the one persuaded is wrongly charged, and her false charge is preserved and transmitted through *logos* too (ἡ δὲ πεισθεῖσα ὡς ἀναγκασθεῖσα τῷ λόγῳ μάτην ἀκούει κακῶς).

Here the gap between what is true and what is believed to be true factors into Gorgias’s account: *logos* is at fault, but Helen, having fallen victim to the overwhelming power of *logos*, is unjustly held to be blameworthy. There is a complex layering in this argument: Gorgias, through the reasoning, *logismos*, that he uses in his own *logos*, is claiming that the popular *logos* about Helen (that she is blameworthy) is false; and he is claiming that *logos* itself is potentially the responsible party. The simultaneous roles of *logos*—as the means for vindicating Helen, as the vehicle for her false reputation, and even as the reason *why* Helen was forced to Troy—speaks to the complex status of *logos* in contemporary thought. It is powerful, but the “fitting thing” for it, truth (ἀλήθεια), is not always present. The external referent, reality, can easily be manipulated in its presentation.

As his fourth possible explanation for Helen’s behavior, Gorgias suggests that Helen’s reason for going to Troy might have been love. But, in this case too, it evolves that Helen should incur no blame. Combining aspects of his first and second arguments, Gorgias asks “if, being a god, love has a divine power [θεῖαν δύναμιν], how could a lesser being reject and refuse it?”

⁷⁶ Worman, *The Cast of Character*, 142.

And “if it is a disease of human origin [νόσημα] and a fault of the soul [ψυχῆς ἀγνόημα], it should not be blamed as a sin [ἀμάρτημα], but regarded as a misfortune [ἀτύχημα]” (19). A stronger power is responsible, either a higher divine entity or an inherent flaw in humankind. In either scenario, Helen, being a mortal, was powerless and, therefore, blameless.

So love, like *logos*, is an overwhelming force that no human may be expected to withstand. It is worth taking a closer look at Gorgias’s use in these key passages of a medical metaphor, the *pharmakon*, to encompass the dual potentiality of *logos*—that is, for both noble and corrupt ends:

τὸν αὐτὸν δὲ λόγον ἔχει ἢ τε τοῦ λόγου δύναμις πρὸς τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς τάξιν ἢ τε τῶν φαρμάκων τάξις πρὸς τὴν τῶν σωμάτων φύσιν. ὥσπερ γὰρ τῶν φαρμάκων ἄλλους ἄλλα χυμούς ἐκ τοῦ σώματος ἐξάγει, καὶ τὰ μὲν νόσου τὰ δὲ βίου παύει, οὕτω καὶ τῶν λόγων οἱ μὲν ἐλύπησαν, οἱ δὲ ἔτερψαν, οἱ δὲ ἐφόβησαν, οἱ δὲ εἰς θάρσος κατέστησαν τοὺς ἀκούοντας, οἱ δὲ πειθοῖ τιμὴν κακῆ τὴν ψυχῆν ἐφαρμάκευσαν καὶ ἐξεγοήτευσαν. (14)

The effect of speech upon the condition of the soul is comparable to the power of drugs over the nature of bodies. For just as different drugs dispel different secretions from the body, and some bring an end to disease and others to life, so also in the case of speeches, some distress, others delight, some cause fear, others make the hearers bold, and some drug and bewitch the soul with a kind of evil persuasion.

Like drugs, then, *logoi* have a variety of effects, all of which exert strong influences on a person. This characterization of Helen’s flaw as a physical suffering (disease) rather than a moral flaw, sets up the related metaphor of the *pharmakon*, strongly recalls Thucydides’ use of the metaphor of illness to portray the destructive spread of stasis throughout the Greek world, as discussed in Part 1, and its relation to the larger breakdown in *logos* in Athenian society. Here, the process of reasoning, *logismos*, which initially Gorgias seemed to propose as a remedy to the manipulation or falsehood of a *logos*, is now undercut by the introduction of its comparison to a *pharmakon*, something which can also be used for good and for bad. The initial cure, the endeavor to reintroduce systematic *logismos* to the *logos* in question, is hence similarly subject to doubt.

Gorgias double-edged assessment of *logos*, implicit in his use of the *pharmakon* metaphor, is notably recalled in Jacques Derrida's comments on Plato's use of the word in the *Phaedrus*, *Republic*, and *Laws*:

As a *pharmakon*, *logos* is at once good and bad; it is not at the outset governed exclusively by goodness or truth. It is only within this ambivalence and thus mysterious indetermination of *logos*, and after these have been recognized, that **Gorgias determines truth as a world, a structure or order, the counterpart (*kosmos*) of *logos***. In so doing he no doubt prefigures the Platonic gesture. But before such a determination, we are in the ambivalent, indeterminate space of the *pharmakon*, of that which in *logos* remains potency, potentiality, and is not yet the transparent language of knowledge.⁷⁷

It is this “indetermination of *logos*” that seems key to understanding Gorgias's project, particularly in light of his concluding statement in the *Encomium*:

Ἀφείλον τῷ λόγῳ δύσκειαν γυναικός, ἐνέμεινα τῇ γνώμῃ ἣν ἐθέμην ἐν ἀρχῇ τοῦ λόγου· ἐπειράθην καταλῦσαι μώμου ἀδικίαν καὶ δόξης ἀμαθίαν, ἐβουλήθην γράψαι τὸν λόγον Ἑλένης μὲν ἐγκώμιον, ἐμὸν δὲ παίγνιον. (21)

I have by means of *logos* removed disgrace from a woman; I have observed the procedure which I set up at the beginning of the speech I have tried to end the injustice of blame and the ignorance of opinion; I wished to write a speech which would be a praise of Helen and a plaything to myself.

Derrida's comment that Gorgias “*determines truth as a world*” — phrasing which recalls Barbara Cassin's statement that *epideixis* as a genre “transforms, or even performs, the world, by producing new objects and new values”⁷⁸ — recalls Gorgias's opening statements about truth being the proper counterpart (*kosmos*) to *logos*: we recall that *kosmos* means both “order/beauty”

⁷⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1981), 115.

⁷⁸ Cassin ties in another extant work of Gorgias's, his *Treatise on Non-Being*, in her discussion of the *Encomium of Helen*'s ability to effect changes: “For instead of having to express the phenomenon adequately and convey it, discourse, in complete autonomy, produces it: ‘It is not speech that indicates the outside, but the outside that comes to reveal speech [οὐχ ὁ λόγος τοῦ ἐκτὸς παραστατικός ἐστιν, ἀλλὰ τὸ ἐκτὸς τοῦ λόγου μηνυτικὸν γίγνεται]’ (*Treatise on Non-Being*, RT: DK 82B3, 85). Gorgias, in his ‘game’ of recreating a Helen who is now innocent, makes it clear that *epideixis* involves moving, not from being to speaking about being, as in ontology, but rather, in a logological mode, from speech to its effect. It is in this respect that the performance of rhetorical-sophistical discourse, of which *epideixis* is the emblem, is (to adopt Austin's expression) the art of ‘doing things with words.’” *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, 1038.

and “the world.” Yet, to re-emphasize Derrida’s words, this proper world of truth exists “*within* this ambivalence and thus mysterious indetermination of *logos*” and requires recognition.

Derrida writes: “But in showing that Helen gave in to the violence of speech (would she have yielded to a letter?), in disculpating this victim, Gorgias indicts *logos* in its capacity to lie...

Before being reined in and tamed by the *kosmos* and order of truth, *logos* is a wild creature, an ambiguous animality.”⁷⁹ It is not the case that the dangers of *logos* are solved only by the introduction of reason, *logismos*, and truth, *aletheia*. Rather, it is the awareness of the essential ambivalence and indetermination of *logos*, and the commitment nevertheless to the truth as a world/structure/order that creates the potentiality for knowledge.

The seemingly inevitable (and necessary) tension in *logos* is brought out by Gorgias in other ways, too. While he writes about the complicated nature of *logos*, he himself demonstrates it in his writing, in his challenging of orthodoxy. Gorgias attempts to correct the narrative, reintroducing truth through reason. He posits this process as an (at least partial) solution to the *akosmia* of unrestrained *logos*, which no longer has a stable connection to the external reality of the world. However, in systematically expounding the causes by which Helen could have gone to Troy and exculpating her on every front, Gorgias himself engages in the process of twisting or, as Hans-Joachim Gehrke calls it in his study of history in ancient culture, of “pluralizing of truth [*Pluralisierung von Wahrheit*].”⁸⁰ This irony is further confirmed by the final word of the piece,

⁷⁹ Derrida, *Dissemination*, 116.

⁸⁰ Hans-Joachim Gehrke, *Geschichte als Element antiker Kultur*, (Berlin, De Gruyter, 2014), 89-90: „Das Problem mit der Wahrheit und ihrer Verbiegung, das schon in den ältesten uns greifbaren Phasen der griechischen Überlieferung und damit in ihren als historisch angesehenen Traditionen thematisiert wurde und das in dem unmittelbaren Nebeneinander, ja Ineinander von Wahrheit und einer sich als wahr gebenden Täuschung – oder Fiktion (?) – pointiert zugespißt wurde, bleibt haargenau bestehen, ja es wird noch um den Aspekt der Relativierung bzw. Pluralisierung von Wahrheit erweitert. Es gilt nicht nur für Dichtung und Bildkunst, sondern auch für die Prosagattungen, nunmehr besonders für die Rhetorik, die doch auch mit dem Anspruch angetreten waren, einen echten Weg zur Wahrheit zu weisen. Nun schienen sie im Subjektiven zu enden bzw. dem Schein des Trügerischen die Überzeugungskraft des subjektiven Arguments hinzuzufügen.“

παίγνιον, which seems to tease us with a double-meaning. The *Encomium* is at one and the same time a serious exploration of *logos* and a “plaything” for its author: Gorgias both resists the contemporary degradation of *logos* and participates in it, using sophisticated rhetorical style to explain away Helen’s guilt.

Taken seriously, this could also be construed as a warning. If he can explain away the guilt of one of the most infamously blameworthy figures of Greek mythology, what might be done in the contemporary intellectual world of Athens during the Peloponnesian War and beyond? To what extent can *logos* select, erase, and change history? But perhaps this severe a condemnation of *logos* is not warranted. At the very least, Gorgias is presenting, and perhaps warning us about, the complexities of *logos*. With the potential to create and sustain the truth and the simultaneous power to destroy truth—and thereby to create a “new” truth by means of a strong enough argument—*logos* is acknowledged as a powerful ruler (δυνάστης μέγας, 8). Recognition of this power is essential, and the task of the *Encomium* is, at the very least, to call attention to this urgent matter.

2. THE CRISIS OF REALITY ON STAGE: Euripides's Helen

In his *Helen* (412 BCE),⁸¹ Euripides similarly uses the figure of Helen to explore the relationship between *logos* and reality, as he, too, exculpates Helen for her role in causing the Trojan War. It is noteworthy that his defense of Helen echoes the first of the four potential causes laid out by Gorgias for Helen's innocence: in his play, Helen is presented as a mortal pawn in a larger divine plan. Her predicament is, we learn, the result of the disagreement between Hera and Aphrodite; in the Prologue, Helen describes how Hera, upset because Paris had judged Aphrodite to be the most beautiful, foiled Aphrodite's plan to reward Paris with the gift of Helen, the most beautiful mortal woman. "She gave king Priam's son an empty image / not me but something like me, made of air / but breathing [εἶδωλον ἔμπνουν οὐρανοῦ ξυυθεῖσ' ἄπο]," "made of air but breathing" (Eur. *Hel.* 31-36).⁸² Gorgias and Euripides agree in maintaining that Helen could not have resisted her fate, as she was overpowered by a stronger force. For Gorgias, Helen's physical presence in Troy does not imply her guilt, since she was influenced by some more powerful force. Euripides similarly claims that Helen is innocent because she was controlled by a more powerful force, but in his reworking of the myth he goes one step farther: she never went with Paris to Troy. Rather, she remained in Egypt for the duration of the Trojan War, while the "Helen" that actually accompanied Paris to Troy was merely an *eidolon*, her likeness or phantom, an "empty false appearance" [κενήν δόκησιον, 36].

⁸¹ The significance of the date is debated by scholars. In an introduction to her translation of the play, Emily Wilson observes that, "*Helen*, it should be noted, was put on only a few months after the devastating news reached Athens of its armada's destruction in Sicily" (*Greek Plays*, [New York, Modern Library, 2016], 684). Others, such as William Allan, insist that the proximity to the Sicilian Expedition need not be overemphasized (*Helen*, [Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 2008]). I treat the specific date of the play as significant. The specifics of the Sicilian Expedition need not be considered individually; rather, I see the Sicilian Expedition as historical evidence of, and subsequently a contributing element to, the prevailing turmoil in the Greek world.

⁸² All Greek text quoted is from Allan's 2008 edition. All English translations are by Emily Wilson from *Greek Plays* 2016. Wilson based her translation upon Allan's Greek text.

Yet everyone believes this *eidolon* to be the true Helen; the reality—the truth—of the matter is not known outside of Egypt.

The split between the “true Helen” in Egypt and her *eidolon* in Troy, which is universally believed to be the true Helen, is a central conflict in the play, establishing Euripides’ keen interest in epistemological fallibility—specifically the limits of human knowledge and the gap between reality and appearance.⁸³ Helen’s language in referring to herself indicates the existential implications for such a lack of correspondence between reality and appearance. “I am named Helen [Ἑλένη δ’ ἐκλήθη],” she declares in her Prologue speech (*Hel.* 22). Here, rather than actively asserting her identity — “I *am* Helen” — she refers to the social context of her identity—the way in which it has, throughout her life, been determined and indicated. In light of the existence of her *eidolon*, with its implication of a multiplicity of Helens, there can be no absolute existential certainty of “being Helen.” And yet for her, this constructed Helen — both literally and figuratively (the *eidolon* nicely symbolizes the popular *logos* about her: an appearance without substance) — is more real, insofar as the false Helen has had such real effects in the world:

Φρυγῶν δ’ ἐς ἀλκὴν προυτέθην ἐγὼ μὲν οὔ,
τὸ δ’ ὄνομα τοῦμόν, ἄθλον Ἕλλησιν δορός. (42-43)

So “**I**”—not **I, my name**—was made the prize,
a gift for Greeks, a test for Trojan valor.

ψυχὰι δὲ πολλὰι δι’ ἐμ’ ἐπὶ Σκαμανδρίοις
ῥοαῖσιν ἔθανον· ἡ δὲ πάντα τλᾶσ’ ἐγὼ
κατάρατος εἶμι καὶ δοκῶ προδοῦσ’ ἐμόν
πόσιν συνάψαι πόλεμον Ἕλλησιν μέγαν. (52-55)

And by Scamander’s streams, so many souls
have died for me. I’m cursed: **it looks as if**
I cheated on my husband and I caused

⁸³ Allan, *Helen*, 47-49. He also notes that, “The deceptiveness of appearances was also articulated in terms of the disjunction between the *name* (ὄνομα) that is given to something because of how it appears and its true *being* or reality (πραῖγμα/ἔργον/σῶμα). Once again, we see Euripides exploiting contemporary intellectual debate to further his dramatic ends, in this case by focusing audience attention on the gap between language and reality, and thereby underlining the disastrous fallibility and incompleteness of his characters’ beliefs.”

a massive war for Greece! That's what I suffer.

Ἰλίου κατασκαφαὶ
 πυρὶ μέλουσι δαΐω
 δι' ἐμὲ τὰν πολυκτόνον,
 δι' ἐμὸν ὄνομα πολύπονον. (196-199)

The ruins of Troy
 now belong to the enemy's fire,
 and **I am the killer of many,**
my name is the cause of the pain...

Hence Helen recognizes the tragic tension between her “I” and her name. A war was waged for this Helen, whom everyone believes to be the true woman. In a sense, the “truth” of her predicament, that she herself never physically went to Troy, matters little in the face of such consequences. The *eidolon* was believed to be real; real men died in the conflict. The reality of her body (σῶμα) remaining in Egypt does not remove the reality of the effect of her name abroad (ὄνομα).⁸⁴ For everyone else, this name is identified with the false body, the *eidolon*. It is believed to be Helen and that belief, the confidence in knowledge and identification, exists even if eventually shown to be false. The power of this construction “creates” real actions in the real world. In a sense, “the word is more real than the thing and what is real in the word is the effect it has.”⁸⁵ Troy is still destroyed, even if “through deeds that were not done [δι' ἔργ' ἀνεργ', *Hel.* 363].” This situation reflects an almost inversion of the situation in the *Medea*, where *logos* — in oaths — is not be able to influence reality effectively. In the *Helen*, we have the other extreme: *logos* is functioning almost *too* well, creating false realities which, perversely, eventually become real in their ability to influence the world.

⁸⁴ Name (or word), ὄνομα, is thematically related to *logos* in its connection to language and reasoning. A problem with name or word is necessarily also a problem with *logos*.

⁸⁵ Barbara Cassin, “Seeing Helen in Every Woman: Woman and Word,” In *Sophistical Practice*, (New York, Fordham University Press, 2014), 66.

This epistemological destabilization has further implications, too, when considered from other perspectives. It raises questions, not least, about the meaning of suffering—the meaning of pain endured for the sake of a goal that later proves to be illusory or false. When Menelaus informs the messenger, a fellow Greek fighter at Troy, about the two Helens, the messenger questions the meaning of all the suffering and tribulations they endured:

- Αγ. οὐχ ἦδε μόχθων τῶν ἐν Ἰλίῳ βραβεύς;
 Με. οὐχ ἦδε· πρὸς θεῶν δ' ἤμεν ἠπατημένοι
 νεφέλης ἄγαλμ' ἔχοντες ἐν χεροῖν λυγρόν.
 Αγ. τί φῆς;
 νεφέλης ἄρ' ἄλλως εἶχομεν πόνους πέρι;⁸⁶ (703-707)
- Messenger: This woman didn't cause the war in Troy?
 Menelaus: No. The gods tricked us. In our arms we held
 an image made of cloud—the source of ruin.
 Messenger: We suffered for no reason? For a *cloud*?

The messenger's response (literally: “what are you saying?”) indicates his shock. His further question (more literally rendered: “we endured suffering for the sake of a cloud?”⁸⁷) suggests the incongruity he recognizes between the costs of the war and its final outcome. If Helen were truly at Troy, all of the Greek warriors who died would have done so for a real cause, a cause whose values are comprehensible and rooted in reality, the retaking of Helen. But, if Helen was never actually there, if the lives lost did not serve the goal of regaining “Helen,” then the men died in vain. The survivors, too, must reconceive of their experience given the new information: suffering for what seems like no reason. And to make matters worse, this grand scheme of pointless suffering is organized deliberately by Hera. The apparent insignificance of human life

⁸⁶ βραβεύς is here used uniquely as meaning “author” or “cause.” It originally referred to an umpire of a contest or competition (both athletic and otherwise). Its unique usage here emphasizes how the perception of Helen's culpability focused upon her as personally responsible. She was an active, logical agent (capable of making decisions) who caused all the suffering. (Allan, *Helen*, 227)

⁸⁷ I have here provided an alternative (but clunkier) rendering of the Greek text here to more faithfully represent the grammar of the original.

becomes more pronounced. This devastating and painful new “reality”—one in which the gods organize suffering whose “meaning” is revealed as empty—irresistibly recalls the ironies we found in Thucydides’ juxtaposition of the Funeral Oration and the Plague Narrative, which suggested that those who died in the war had suffered on behalf of values that would soon enough melt away during the Plague.)

In the theatrical microcosm that is the *Helen*, this disjunction between reality and *logos*—in popular opinion, the believed truth—centers around the Trojan War, a mythic event with roots in a dim historical memory. But surely it is reasonable to identify the play’s concerns about the questions of truth and *logos*, about what *is* the case and what *seems to be* or what is *held to be* the case, as being of urgent importance to the Athenian word of 412 BCE; which is to say, the Athens in the wake of the disastrous Sicilian Expedition. Thucydides devotes two books of his *History* to the Sicilian Expedition, ending his main discussion with the following analysis:

And this Hellenic event turned out to be the greatest connected [τόνδε μέγιστον] with this war and, at least in my opinion, of Hellenic events we have heard of, the most splendid for those who won and the most wretched for those who were ruined. For after having been completely defeated in every respect and suffering [κακοπαθήσαντες] no little misery at any point in what can truly be called total destruction [πανωλεθρία], army, navy, and everything else was lost, and few out of many returned home. This was what happened concerning Sicily. (7.87.4-5)

This horrific event, πανωλεθρία, with all its ramifications politically and socially, was undoubtedly on the minds of audience members, whose reaction to learning the news Thucydides reports at the opening of Book 8:

And in Athens, when the news arrived, for a long time they would not believe, even from those who were very much soldiers surviving the action itself and reporting it plainly, that everything in its entirety could have been so entirely destroyed [μη οὔτω γε ἄγαν πανουδι διεφθάρθαι]; and when they realized, they were angry at the orators who had shared their zeal for the expedition, just as though they had not voted for it themselves, and furious at the oracle-mongers, seers, and anyone whose divinations had made them hope that they would capture Sicily. (8.1.1)

Political arbitration had failed to prevent the events leading up to the decisive defeat of the Athenians at Sicily. An agreement could not be reached between Athens and Sicily; there was a marked inability of *logos* to prevent violence. In retrospect, indeed, the Athenians blamed the orators, the oracles, seers, and diviners whose *logoi* had persuaded them to support the Athenian expedition. The Athenians held these people responsible for constructing a false reality—one in which Athenian victory was essentially guaranteed: a situation that finds a reflection in the *Helen*, where the Greek armies fought to rescue a woman who was never even there. The questions about the costs and benefits of human suffering, and the role of *logos* in this relationship, is central to the Athenian ethos of the 5th-century, and as such Euripides explores it through his *Helen*.

A further detail must be considered. I have mentioned above the issues emanating from Gorgias's description of the *Encomium of Helen* as a *paignion*, "plaything". Here it is worth commenting on the striking playfulness of the *Helen*—one of the playwright's so-called "romances," which so distinctively mix tragedy and farce, suffering and humor.⁸⁸ In writing this play about the disjunction between truth and *logos*, about the difficulties of communication and analysis, Euripides is employing *logos* with all its many and often disruptive powers. He is actively constructing a world that will have some degree of influence on its viewers (or readers). He is, therefore, doing something akin to what was done by the play's Hera, who fabricated an empty *eidolon*. In this "metadramatic" echo of his own character's action, Euripides is creating a new version of events, a new account of well-known figures from mythology. While Euripides was not alone in reconsidering the character of Helen and her blameworthiness,⁸⁹ he was unique

⁸⁸ Ibid., 46.

in his proposal of an *eidolon*—a second, phantom Helen.⁹⁰ In his creation of an alternative account, an alternative *logos*, that is itself a kind of verbal *eidolon*, a deceptive twin of a preexisting mythic story that has its own real-world power and consequences, Euripides engages in the same “pluralizing of truth [*Pluralisierung von Wahrheit*]” that, as we have seen, marks Gorgias’s *Encomium*.⁹¹ As if to underscore this potentially disruptive pluralization of *logos*, Euripides, like Gorgias, draws attention to his destabilization of genre: like Gorgias, he advertises his “playful” tone, which serves the “serious purpose of drawing attention to the power of rhetoric.”⁹² The playfulness in the manipulation of *logos* that exists in these texts further connects the preoccupations of the authors, as 5th-century intellectuals responding to their contemporary circumstances, to their themes: the multifarious potentiality of *logos*. “The point is that *logos* acts. It makes things happen, new things, which take place both inside people and outside.”⁹³ A reading of the *Encomium* and the *Helen* against each other and against the larger backdrop of the War as presented by Thucydides suggests that this generative capacity of language, and *logos* more broadly, defined the intellectual concerns of Euripides and Gorgias and indeed so many other thinkers during that crucial moment in history: writers and intellectuals who, disorientingly, explore this issue by actively engaging in the same process of invention about which they also so effectively warn.

⁹⁰ After Euripides, the figures of Helen and her *eidolon* have continued to appear in the works of many writers, from Goethe’s *Faust*, to Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s libretto *Die ägyptische Helena*, and even H.D.’s (Hilda Doolittle’s) *Helen in Egypt*. (Frenzel, *Motive der Weltliteratur*, 97; Frenzel, *Stoffe der Weltliteratur*, 303)

⁹¹ Gehrke, *Geschichte*, 90.

⁹² Allan, *Helen*, 46n204.

⁹³ Cassin, *Sophistical Practice*, 78.

Conclusion: The Value of Ambiguity

The stakes of Thucydides' project were high: having recognized that the Peloponnesian War was of unparalleled significance in Greek history, he was attempting to record a representative account of the events for the sake of preserving them for posterity (1.1.2). His work was to be a “possession for all time, not a competition piece to heard for the moment”⁹⁴ [κτῆμά τε ἐς αἰεὶ μᾶλλον ἢ ἀγώνισμα ἐς τὸ παραχρῆμα ἀκούειν ξύγκειται, 1.22.4].” And yet — curiously — despite his desire to preserve the events forever he admits that recalling the exact words of speeches was difficult (χαλεπὸν, 1.22.1), but continues, saying that:

In the way I thought each would have said what was especially required [τὰ δέοντα μάλιστα] in the given situation, I have stated accordingly, with the closest possible fidelity on my part to the overall sense of what was actually said [ἐχομένῳ ὅτι ἐγγύτατα τῆς ξυμπάσης γνώμης τῶν ἀληθῶς λεχθέντων]. (1.22.1)

This statement is key. Thucydides was writing what he thought was most of all required/necessary (τὰ δέοντα), by (literally translated) “following the general purport [ἐχομένῳ ὅτι ἐγγύτατα τῆς ξυμπάσης γνώμης τῶν ἀληθῶς λεχθέντων].” He is, in other words, inventing essentially fictional specifics (the words of the speeches as he reports them) in order to represent a general truth—i.e., an accurate sense or reality of the events themselves. These direct quotations are not “accurate” in a strictly journalistic sense, but they accurate in a dramatic sense, insofar as they attempt to faithfully provide characterizations of these historical figures. It is not the case that Thucydides is trying to present every single matter as it precisely occurred; rather, he is preserving what he deems the necessary information — a rhetorical move which gives the tension in his fictionalization an increased sense of objectivity — for creating this “possession for all mankind.”

⁹⁴ As such, his *History* is framed as the opposite of Gorgias's *Encomium*, which was a *paignion*.

And yet Thucydides notes that his method for reporting on the actual events of the war, as opposed to the speeches, differed: here, he sought not a broad accuracy in representation, but verifiable information. Although his investigation still inevitably relied upon *logoi*, he tells us that, in researching, he compared his own observations with the statements of others, whose perspectives he notes are biased by their own “goodwill [εὐνοίας] for one [of two sides, i.e. partisanship] or by memory” (1.22.3). In this case then, he accounts for the biased “truths” of individuals by comparatively analyzing (ἐπεξελεθῶν, 1.22.2) accounts. He did not take the *logoi* of others as fact, nor did he fully privilege his own. Even in his exploration of the events of the war, the ambiguity of *logos* required consideration before committing to his written document. What becomes clear is the overwhelming emphasis Thucydides places upon his analytical endeavor.

If the results are judged useful [ὠφέλιμα] by any who wish to look at the plain truth [τὸ σαφὲς σκοπεῖν] about both past events and those that at some future time, in accordance with human nature, will recur in similar or comparable ways [τῶν μελλόντων ποτὲ αὖθις κατὰ τὸ ἀνθρώπινον τοιούτων καὶ παραπλησίων ἔσεσθαι], that will be enough. (1.22.4)

Thucydides himself is evidently aware of the dangers of *logos* even within his own project. And it is his own acknowledgement of this fact that alerts the reader to the weight of Thucydides’ emphasis upon such a critical methodology. This sentiment speaks to another perspective for viewing Thucydides’ discussion of *logos*: that of the listener, the reader, the recipient of information. Thucydides advertises the fact that he is self-critical in his assumptions about his own observations, his own interpretations of his world. The irony is that, whatever his statements about stating what is “necessary” for the audience to perceive what really happened, he himself engages in the very practices of destabilizing *logos* that we have seen in the works of Sophocles, Gorgias, Euripides, where falsities can eclipse a truth. Why should Thucydides’ version of the truth—speeches not accurate but *parallel* to what was said—be given more credit than that of

Odysseus in the *Philoctetes*, Gorgias in the *Encomium*, or the whole world in *Helen*? The difference, perhaps, is that Thucydides self-consciously foregrounds his method: and in so doing, he introduces for the first time the element of critique. For by acknowledging his rhetorical game, he invites the reader to become the critical eye. The emphasis upon being critical is, to be sure, implicit in the *Medea* and *Philoctetes*, in both of which plays characters who believe in the binding power of *logos* come into conflict with others who view *logos* as no more than an expedient. In Euripides' *Helen* and Gorgias's *Encomium of Helen*, too, the need for a critical analysis of the information we have been given is underscored. But Thucydides more than any other was aware of the precariousness of his own devices, even as he sets out on his massive work of reporting and recording.

Perhaps it is that rhetorical self-consciousness, more than the story he tells, that has in fact made his *History* a “possession for eternity.” *Logos*, after all, is still the human means for communication, and as such still has the capacity to construct alternative realities that exist as influencing factors in the world. Phrases such as “fake news” and “alternative facts” are not uncommon today. These phrases similarly speak both to a deep-seated skepticism of popular accounts and to the capacity for stories to be written off when unfavorable. The concerns raised by the 5th-century authors I have undertaken to examine in this thesis — above all about the paradoxical power and powerlessness of *logos*, the inability of *logos* to affect the world in the way we often would like, and about its all-too-evident ability to do so in ways we find dangerous — remain pressing. In the end, we are left with an unresolved sense of uneasiness, an uneasiness about the indeterminacy of *logos* and its unreliability — an uneasiness that has coursed through Western intellectual culture, as we have seen, from its beginnings.

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