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Thucydides on the Causes of the Peloponnesian War

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giving us a piece of his own *ars poetica*, that he may not be presenting some cryptic, indecipherable argument, that he may not be setting out to improve the productions on the Attic stage. Aristophanes the comedian may be going for a laugh.

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ROBERT J. MURRAY

### THUCYDIDES ON THE CAUSES OF THE PELOPONNESIAN WAR<sup>1</sup>

My object in this paper is to discuss not so much why the Peloponnesian War occurred (though I have views on that question, which will become apparent), but why Thucydides wrote as he did about why the war occurred.

The problem is notorious. Every student knows that Thucydides mentions four immediate causes but judges them less important than one underlying cause<sup>2</sup>, yet an analysis of book I shows that different views of the causes of the war seem to be given side-by-side throughout.

- 1 – 23.iii      The Peloponnesian War was greater than any of its predecessors. An account of early Greece is given, to justify this judgment.  
23.iv–vi      (A crucial passage, known to every student, which I give in full, in Greek and in English.)

ἤρξαντο δὲ αὐτοῦ  
Ἄθηναῖοι καὶ Πελοποννήσιοι λύσαντες τὰς  
τριακοντούτεϊς σπονδὰς αἱ αὐτοῖς ἐγένοντο μετὰ  
Εὐβοίας ἄλωσιν. διότι δ' ἔλυσαν, τὰς αἰτίας

<sup>1</sup> I have lectured on this subject over the past ten years to Classical Association branches in Newcastle upon Tyne, Hull, Lancaster, Manchester, Cardiff and Nottingham, at Swarthmore College (when I was a fellow of the Center for Hellenic Studies, Washington, D. C., and a Fulbright-Hays scholar) and at the University of Göttingen (which I visited under the auspices of the British Council and the Deutsche Akademische Austauschdienst). I am grateful to all who have listened to me and discussed the subject with me, to Prof. J. BLEICKEN of Göttingen for inviting me to write up a version for publication in *Hermes*, and to Prof. A. J. WOODMAN for his comments on a draft.

The subject is a familiar one, and could easily be encumbered with a great weight of footnotes, but I have preserved the manner of a lecture and have kept annotation to a minimum. Further bibliography may be found through D. KAGAN, *The Outbreak of the Peloponnesian War*, Cornell U. P. 1969, and G. E. M. DE STE CROIX, *The Origins of the Peloponnesian War*, London: Duckworth 1972: the latter will be cited below by author's name.

<sup>2</sup> DE STE CROIX objects to this formulation, but see below, p. 160 with nn. 20–1.

προύγραφα πρῶτον καὶ τὰς διαφοράς, τοῦ μή τινα ζητῆσαι ποτε ἐξ ὄτου τοσοῦτος πόλεμος τοῖς Ἑλλησι κατέστη. τὴν μὲν γὰρ ἀληθεστάτην πρόφασιν, ἀφανεστάτην δὲ λόγῳ, τοὺς Ἀθηναίους ἡγοῦμαι μεγάλους γιγνομένους καὶ φόβον παρέχοντας τοῖς Λακεδαιμονίοις ἀναγκάσαι ἐς τὸ πολεμεῖν· αἱ δ' ἐς τὸ φανερὸν λεγόμεναι αἰτίαι αἰδ' ἦσαν ἑκατέρων, ἀφ' ὧν λύσαντες τὰς σπονδὰς ἐς τὸν πόλεμον κατέστησαν.

»The Athenians and Peloponnesians began the war by breaking the thirty years' peace which they had made after the capture of Euboea. As to why they broke it, I have first set down the grievances (*aitiai*) and disputes (*diaphorai*), so that no one need ever enquire from what origin so great a war broke out among the Greeks. The truest reason (*alethestate prophasis*), though most concealed in word, I believe to be that the Athenians became powerful, filled the Spartans with fear and drove them to war; but the following were the publicly mentioned grievances on each side, as a result of which they broke the peace and embarked on the war.«

- 24–55 } There follows a detailed account of two grievances (i. e. *aitiai*),  
56–66 } episodes in which Athens comes into conflict with Corinth: the  
affair of Corcyra; the affair of Potidaea.
- 67–88 After the battle at Potidaea, Corinth invites members of the Peloponnesian League to send deputations to Sparta, and two other grievances (*aitiai*) emerge: Aegina complains that she is being deprived of autonomy in breach of a peace treaty; Megara complains that she is being subjected to economic sanctions in breach of the thirty years' peace<sup>3</sup>. A Corinthian speech mentions Corcyra and Potidaea (*aitiai*) but concentrates on Athens' expansion and Sparta's slowness to resist it (*prophasis*). There

<sup>3</sup> Despite DE STE CROIX, 225–89, 381–400, I still believe as others have done that Athens was imposing economic sanctions on Megara. Briefly: DE STE CROIX' view, which has some plausibility when applied to the Athenian agora, has less when applied to the harbours of the empire; 120.ii, [Xen.] Ath. Pol. ii. 11–12 and M & L 65 = IG i<sup>3</sup> 61 show contemporary awareness of the use which the ruler of the sea could make of her power, and Ar. Ach. 517–22, 533–5, 719–835, supports an economic interpretation; we do not know what proportion of Megara's trade was handled by Megarian citizens, and we cannot be sure that the exclusion clause quoted by Thucydides represents the full extent of the sanctions imposed on Megara.

- happen to be Athenian envoys in Sparta, and they make a speech in which they refuse to reply to the particular *aitiai* but emphasise the strength of Athens and defend the predominant position of Athens (*prophasis*). Finally the Spartans debate the issue on their own: Archidamus wants time to prepare, Sthenelaidas wants war immediately, and the assembly votes that Athens is in breach of the peace (*aitiai*) and therefore Sparta must go to war.
- 88 Yet at this point Thucydides repeats what he said in 23 *fin.*, that the Spartans voted for war not so much because they were persuaded by their allies' arguments as because they were afraid that Athens' power would continue to grow (*prophasis*).
- 89–118.ii That leads to Thucydides' digression on the Pentecontaetia, the fifty years between the Persian Wars and the Peloponnesian War, inserted to show how Athens' power had grown (*prophasis*).
- 118.ii Thucydides concludes that in this period Athens went from strength to strength while Sparta did little to stop her – because she was slow to go to war except when forced to do so, and because she was preoccupied with local wars – until Athens had become a power to be reckoned with and her own alliance was threatened; but then she decided to take energetic action and try to break Athens' power.
- 118.iii–125 The narrative of events leading up to the war is resumed with a congress of the Peloponnesian League: there is another Corinthian speech, again mentioning Potidaea (*aitia*) but concentrating on Athenian expansion (*prophasis*); and the congress votes for war.
- 126–146 Book I ends with the diplomatic moves of winter 432/1: Sparta's use of the curse on the Alcmaeonids, to try to undermine Pericles' position; her raising of particular grievances, Athens' treatment of Potidaea, Aegina and especially Megara (*aitiai*); and her ultimatum, »The Spartans want peace, and there would be peace if you left the Greeks independent« (*prophasis*). Finally Pericles makes a speech in Athens, claiming that the *aitiai* are merely excuses and appeasement will not work.

In all this, various contradictions appear. First, it is stated three times that Sparta was really persuaded not by the complaints of her allies but by her fear of Athenian power (23.iv–vi, 88, 118.ii); but also it is stressed that Sparta is slow to act, and in a narrative much of which is devoted to the complaints of the allies Sparta does not act (despite a promise, which she does not keep, to invade Attica in support of Potidaea: 58.i) until she is put under pressure by her allies. Secondly, the truest reason (*alethestate prophasis*), Sparta's

fear of Athens, is said in 23.vi to be »most concealed in word« (ἀφανεστάτην... λόγῳ), in contrast with the grievances (*aitiai*), which were »publicly mentioned« (ἐς τὸ φανερόν λεγόμεναι) – but this is palpably untrue of the account which Thucydides gives in book I: the first Corinthian speech concentrates on Athenian expansion; the Athenians in reply deal with the general issue and refuse to answer the particular complaints (as Thucydides emphasises in his narrative introduction to the speech); the second Corinthian speech concentrates on the general issue once more; Pericles in his speech says that the particular grievances are simply excuses. If we look at the demands presented by Sparta to Athens in winter 432/1 (139), we find that the first is irrelevant to the causes of the war, the second deals with the grievances, but the third with its demand that Athens should leave the Greeks independent returns to the *alethestate prophasis*<sup>4</sup>. Thirdly, of the four grievances which he mentions, Thucydides gives detailed accounts of two, those involving Corcyra and Potidaea, but barely alludes to those involving Aegina and Megara – yet in 140.i he says that the Spartan envoys to Athens in winter 432/1 laid particular stress on Megara, and in II.27 he tells us that in summer 431 Athens expelled all the inhabitants of Aegina, complaining that they were ‘not least’ to blame for the war. Aristophanes, on the two occasions when he alludes to the causes of the war (in *Acharnians*, 514–38, and *Peace*, 605–18) suggests that Athens has had to endure the miseries of the war because Pericles was obstinate over Megara<sup>5</sup>. If Aegina and Megara were so important, and were known by Thucydides to be so important, why did he say so little about them?

At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth it was fashionable, especially in Germany, to apply to Thucydides the analytical approach which had been applied to Homer, and to distinguish between early and late passages in his text. In principle this is a valid exercise: Thucydides claims to have started work at the beginning of the war (I.1.i), and although his narrative breaks off in the autumn of 411 there are passages in which he refers to the end of the war (e.g. II.65.xii), so the question how much of his history was written at different times is worth asking. There are still some unitarians, who believe that while notes were made earlier the whole history

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Thucydides’ remark in II.8.iv that in general the ‘Greeks’ sympathy was with Sparta because she proclaimed that she was going to free the Greeks.

<sup>5</sup> I am in sympathy with DE STE CROIX, 355–76, on the historian’s use of Aristophanes. I do not believe that the stories told in these two passages are true or were intended by Aristophanes to be taken by the audience as true (in »Peace« the chorus’ response is, »I never heard that one before«), but I do think we can infer that it was widely believed in Athens that the war had been brought about by Pericles’ obstinacy over Megara. Cf. below, p. 160 with n. 19.

was written up in a single spell of work after the end of the war<sup>6</sup>, but after the appearance of DOVER's appendix in the final volume of GOMME's Commentary a unitarian stance is even harder to maintain than it had been before<sup>7</sup>. It is widely acknowledged that separate strata in Thucydides' history do exist (most strikingly, II.65.xi on the failure of the Sicilian expedition of 415–413 cannot be the product of the same spell of work as VI–VII), but there are few passages which are demonstrably early or demonstrably late, and the search for early and late passages is now out of fashion.

E. SCHWARTZ in *Das Geschichtswerk des Thukydides*<sup>8</sup> tried by separating early passages from late to solve the problem of Thucydides' treatment of the causes of the war, and some more recent writers have used variations on the same approach. The fundamental suggestion is that originally Thucydides set out to write of the causes of the war in terms of the particular grievances, emphasising the part played by Corinth in the chain of events leading to the outbreak of the war, but later he changed his mind and came to see Athens' power and Sparta's fear of it as more important than the particular grievances: according to A. ANDREWES he came in the later part of the war to realise that an emphasis on Corinth which had seemed appropriate to the Archidamian War was less appropriate to the war as a whole<sup>9</sup>; according to B. R. I. SEALEY he advanced to a more sophisticated view of causation, from being satisfied with a chain of grievances as might have been presented by Herodotus to a deeper understanding of the realities of power politics<sup>10</sup>.

However, no one has produced a compelling application of this approach to our problem, and I believe that no one will, because the whole of book I is permeated by Thucydides' truest reason (it appears less in the chapters on Corcyra and Potidaea than elsewhere, for obvious reasons, but even there it is to be found: that there will be war between Athens and the Peloponnesians is predicted by Corcyra in 33.iii, weakly dismissed as »still uncertain« by Corinth in 42.ii, and confirmed by Thucydides in his comment on Athens' decision in 44.ii). It is impossible to filter out an early version of book I, written when Thucydides was not yet conscious of the truest reason<sup>11</sup>. Nor do I believe that

<sup>6</sup> The unitarian position is assumed rather than defended in some recent American books, e.g. W. R. CONNOR, *Thucydides*, Princeton U. P. 1984, esp. 4, 10–12, 18–19. A classic exposition of it is J. H. FINLEY, jr., *HSCP Supp.* i 1940, 255–97 = *Three Essays on Thucydides*, Harvard U. P. 1967, 118–69.

<sup>7</sup> K. J. DOVER in A. W. GOMME et al., *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides*, O. U. P. 1945–81, v. 384–444.

<sup>8</sup> Bonn: COHEN 1919; <sup>2</sup>1929.

<sup>9</sup> *CQ*<sup>2</sup> ix 1959, 223–39.

<sup>10</sup> *CQ*<sup>2</sup> vii 1957, 1–12; *CP* lxx 1975, 89–109.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. J. DE ROMMILY trans. P. THODY, *Thucydides and Athenian Imperialism*, Oxford: Blackwell 1963, 17–36.

the structure of book I displays the faults which we should expect if an early view of the causes and a late view had been imperfectly combined. In 23.iv–vi Thucydides says that he has set down the grievances out of which the war developed; the truest reason was Sparta's fear of Athens, but first he will set out an account of the particular grievances. In 24–88 he gives an account of the grievances, ending with the congress at Sparta at which they were voiced; and then he reiterates his view that the truest reason is to be sought not in these grievances but in Sparta's fear of Athens. Then, in 89–118.ii, to substantiate his view of the truest reason he gives his account of the growth of Athenian power<sup>12</sup>. Finally, in 118.iii sqq., the narrative is continued to the winter before the outbreak of the war. This is a perfectly coherent way of organising the material, and gives us no reason to suppose that Thucydides grafted a later view on to an earlier<sup>13</sup>: in the formulation of D. WHITEHEAD, Thucydides did not progress from being a fact-grubber to being a philosopher, but was both throughout his writing career<sup>14</sup>.

Thucydides wrote simultaneously, then, of two kinds of explanation of the origin of the war. What was his purpose in doing this? There has been much discussion of the Greek words used in 23.v–vi, especially *aitia* and *prophasis*<sup>15</sup>. It would be generally accepted that in that passage *aitia* denotes a grievance, a ground for complaint, and in that sense a cause; *prophasis* denotes some one's reason for acting as he does, and *alethestate prophasis* the truest reason which he will give under pressure, when his first explanations are rejected as inadequate. However, it is dangerously easy to identify two distinct meanings, in terms of English words, and to suppose that Thucydides' intention was to make a contrast based on those two meanings. GOMME and DE STE CROIX were right to protest against that<sup>16</sup>: Thucydides uses *prophasis* in 118.i of the particular grounds of complaint which he calls *aitiai* in 23.v–vi, and Dionysius of Halicarnassus in discussing 23 (796. *Thuc. Propr.* 6; 831–4. *Thuc.* 10) treated the two words as interchangeable; in any case, if fear of Athenian power was Sparta's »truest reason« for going to war, Athenian power might well be considered a »grievance«. The contrast between the two kinds of explanation lies not so much in the nouns used to label them as in two other

<sup>12</sup> Cf. H. D. WESTLAKE, *CQ*<sup>2</sup> v 1955, 66 = *Essays on the Greek Historians and Greek History*, Manchester U. P. 1969, 59; CONNOR (above, n. 6), 43.

<sup>13</sup> On the structure of book I see especially N. G. L. HAMMOND, *CQ*<sup>2</sup> ii 1952, 127–41.

<sup>14</sup> *G & R*<sup>2</sup> xxvii 1980, 158–65.

<sup>15</sup> The most useful studies are G. M. KIRKWOOD, *AJP* lxxiii 1952, 37–61; L. PEARSON, *TAPA* lxxxiii 1952, 205–23 = *Selected Papers*, Chico: Scholars P. 1983, 91–109, *TAPA* ciii 1972, 381–94 = *Selected Papers*, 120–33. Polybius was to distinguish *aitiai* as events giving rise to a grievance, *prophasis* as the pretext for war supplied by the *aitiai*, and *arche* (»beginning«) as the first action of the war itself (III 6, cf. XXII. 18. vi).

<sup>16</sup> GOMME (above, n. 7), i. 153–4; DE STE CROIX, 53–6.

factors: the particular grievances were »publicly mentioned« whereas the truest reason was »most concealed«; and the truest reason was truest, in some sense more genuine or more fundamental than the other reasons.

The claim that the truest reason was »most concealed« has caused difficulty, because (as we have seen) it occurs again and again throughout book I. ANDREWES suggested that Thucydides was thinking specifically of Pericles' speech at the end of book I<sup>17</sup>, but that is a strained interpretation, and although no passage in the speech spells out the truest reason 140.ii–141.i rejects the *aitiai* as mere excuses. DE STE CROIX refers the claim to the official decisions and propaganda of the Peloponnesian League<sup>18</sup>, which is better (cf. 87.vi, 119.iii), but still I think not right (cf. 139.i–iii). I suggest that at the end of 23, as immediately before in 20, Thucydides is taking pleasure in showing that he knows better than popular opinion. We can reasonably infer from Aristophanes that ordinary Athenians blamed the war on one or other of the particular grievances, and especially on Pericles' refusal to give way over Megara<sup>19</sup>; we have no Corinthian comedy to adduce as evidence, but it would not surprise me if ordinary Corinthians blamed the war on one or other of the particular grievances, and especially on Aristeus' enthusiasm for supporting Potidaea. Thucydides in book I gives his own account of the grievances, which he hopes will be definitive, »so that no one need ever enquire from what origin so great a war broke out among the Greeks«, but the theme of book I, summed up in Pericles' speech at the end of it, is that the grievances were only excuses and others would have served equally well, that the real reason why the grievances were used as pretexts for going to war was that Sparta was afraid of Athens' power. The grievances are genuine, not »cooked up by the Spartans« (as DE STE CROIX after D. H. 831–2. *Thuc.* 10 alleges<sup>20</sup>), but a more fundamental explanation is to be found in Sparta's fear of Athens (though DE STE CROIX objects to a distinction on these lines<sup>21</sup>). The one place where the truest reason cannot be concealed is book I of Thucydides, since his main theme is that other people have not given this reason the weight which it deserves.

Other problems remain. How can Thucydides' view of the truest reason be reconciled with a narrative of the incidents leading up to the war in which Sparta does not take the initiative but has to be urged on by her allies, particularly by Corinth? And why does Thucydides in his treatment of the *aitiai*

<sup>17</sup> ANDREWES (above, n. 9), 237–8.

<sup>18</sup> DE STE CROIX, 56–8

<sup>19</sup> Cf. above, p. 157 with n. 5. Notice also »Peace«, 989–90, reckoning the duration of the war from 433; P. Oxy. iv 663, a *hypothesis* to Cratinus' Dionysalexander; And. III. De Pace, 8.

<sup>20</sup> DE STE CROIX, 55.

<sup>21</sup> DE STE CROIX, 53.



devote so much attention to Corcyra and Potidaea and so little to Aegina and Megara?

We must notice what it is that Thucydides is explaining. *Aitia* and *prophasis* are both subjective words used to explain an actor's reason for acting, not objective words used to explain why something happens (the most objective word for »cause« is *aition*)<sup>22</sup>. Formally, Thucydides' grievances are grievances on both sides (23.vi, cf. 66, where the affair of Potidaea is interpreted in such a way as to provide each side with a ground of complaint against the other), but they are in fact presented so as to show how the Peloponnesians came to make war on Athens, and the truest reason contrasted with the particular grievances is the Peloponnesians' truest reason for making war on Athens. This should cause no surprise, partly because it is strictly true that the Peloponnesians began the war, and partly because Thucydides was himself a patriotic Athenian.

The view of a wholly dispassionate, scientific and impartial Thucydides still lingers in some quarters, but it needs to be discarded. Thucydides was an Athenian, from a family deeply involved in politics on the anti-Periclean side, whose own attitudes were in general as we should expect from his background but who was nevertheless an ardent admirer of Pericles and Periclean democracy, who served as a general in the war and was exiled for his failure to keep Amphipolis out of the Spartans' hands<sup>23</sup>. It would be astonishing if such a man was wholly dispassionate, if such a man, aware of the difficulties of sifting evidence but confident of his ability to uncover the real truth behind the appearances, was always successful in unearthing and pronouncing on the truth. I therefore echo the words of DOVER: »Anyone who believes that Thucydides was omniscient, dispassionate and infinitely wise, and that there is nothing to be said on the other side of any question on which Thucydides has made a pronouncement, may find some of my comments irreverent and cynical. I offer no apology«<sup>24</sup>. On the causes of the war Thucydides gives what we should expect a patriotic supporter of Pericles to give, an account of »why the Peloponnesians made war on us« which shows Athens in a favourable light, and I believe this is a key to understanding why he wrote of the causes as he did.

This may help us to explain why he devotes so much attention to Corcyra and Potidaea, and so little to Aegina and Megara. The episodes of Corcyra and Potidaea were unconcealable incidents in which Athens found herself fighting

<sup>22</sup> See KIRKWOOD (above, n. 15).

<sup>23</sup> It will be sufficient to cite J. H. FINLEY, jr., *Thucydides*, Harvard U. P. 1942, 3–20.

<sup>24</sup> P. iv of his small editions of books VI and VII (O. U. P. 1965). N. G. L. HAMMOND, *JHS* 1xxxvi 1966, 186, expressed disappointment; GOMME (above, n. 7) and DE STE CROIX are among those who seem to me excessively reluctant to criticise Thucydides.

against Corinth and other Peloponnesians. If Athens had been anxious for peace, she could perfectly well have stayed out of the quarrel between Corcyra and Corinth and have let them weaken each other: the result would not necessarily have been to put the fleets of both, intact, at Sparta's disposal, as the Corcyraeans are made to claim in 36.iii<sup>25</sup>. Athens' pressure on Potidaea, Thucydides himself implies in 56, was a result of the Corcyraean episode, in that the Corinthians wanted revenge and Athens needed to forestall them. We are not given as much background information as we should like, but it is in fact possible that there would have been a crisis in Athens' relations with Potidaea, and at this particular time, in any case<sup>26</sup>. Nevertheless, one of Athens' demands to Potidaea was that she should cease receiving regular magistrates from Corinth (56.ii), and so it is at least true that, however important other considerations may have been, Athens was prepared to risk a second clash with Corinth immediately after the first. But in both of these cases Athens was careful to keep within the letter of the law. Corcyra had not been included in the thirty years' peace, so Athens was entitled to make an alliance with her, and the alliance made was a purely defensive alliance, so that Corcyra could not involve Athens in aggression against Corinth (44.i). Potidaea evidently had been included in the thirty years' peace as a member of the Athenian bloc, and so according to the principle which the Corinthians themselves are made to uphold in 40.v Athens was within her rights in disciplining Potidaea.

On Aegina and Megara, however, I am tempted to be irreverent and cynical. Aegina like Potidaea will have been included in the thirty years' peace as a member of the Athenian bloc, and so Athens' treatment of Aegina could be represented as no concern of the Peloponnesians; but Aegina is made to complain that Athens is depriving her of independence in breach of a treaty (either the thirty years' peace or a separate, bilateral treaty) (67.ii), and Thucydides says nothing to suggest that the complaint is unjustified. Megara complained that Athens' imposition of economic sanctions was contrary to the thirty years' peace (67.iv): in this case I suspect that economic sanctions had not been envisaged when the treaty was drawn up, and Athens was not clearly in breach of the treaty, but that this treatment of a member of the Peloponnesian League with whom she was in dispute could reasonably be seen as an act of war<sup>27</sup>. It may be that Thucydides says so little about these two matters

<sup>25</sup> In 44.ii Thucydides suggests that Athens' small-scale support for Corcyra would help to bring about a conflict in which Corcyra and Corinth would weaken each other; and P. A. STADTER, *GR & BS* xxiv 1983, 131–6, accepts that this was Athens' intention.

<sup>26</sup> See DE STE CROIX, 79–81.

<sup>27</sup> As stressed by P. A. BRUNT, *AJP* lxxii 1951, 269–82, it is uncertain how long before 432 trouble between Athens and Megara began: we cannot be sure that Athens had been provoked by Megara's support for Corinth against Corcyra (46.i: Thucydides nowhere alludes to this in connec-

because Athens was not so clearly in the right here as in her dealings with Corcyra and Potidaea, and it seemed best to play down these complaints as unimportant.

The prominence of Corinth in the narrative is to some extent justified, in that Corinth was the most powerful member of the Peloponnesian League after Sparta and the member most inclined to go her own way in defiance of Sparta: if the members wished to put pressure on Sparta to act against Athens, Corinth was the natural leader. To some extent, however, the prominence of Corinth is accidental, in that Corinth was concerned in two of Thucydides' four *aitiai* and it happened to suit Thucydides to give detailed accounts of those two but not of the other two. The fact that in Thucydides' narrative Sparta decides to act only when pressure is applied by Corinth and the other allies is not incompatible with Thucydides' view of the truest cause: even states which are eager for war commonly prefer to embark on the war in circumstances in which they can be represented as in the right, and it is not a sign of conflict between different strata in Thucydides' account if he claims that Sparta was eager for war, because of her fear of Athenian power, but did not decide to embark on the war until her allies presented her with a suitable occasion for it<sup>28</sup>.

I believe, then, that Thucydides wrote simultaneously about the particular grievances and the truest reason, in order to show that the truest reason was the truest and counted for more than the grievances; that in writing about the grievances he stressed the unconcealable episodes in which Athens had nothing to hide; that Corinth is prominent in the narrative partly because she did take the lead in making representations to Sparta but partly also because she happened to be involved in the episodes which Thucydides wished to stress; and that Thucydides can reasonably have believed that although Sparta responded to pressure she responded not merely because of the pressure but because she was ready to respond.

It remains to ask whether that is all that there is to be said, whether Thucydides' account is the final account which he wished it to be or we can improve on it.

I have already stressed that Thucydides was an Athenian, explaining why the Peloponnesians made war on Athens. Strictly, as I have said, it is correct

tion with the sanctions imposed by Athens). But, even if the dispute had begun earlier, the Athenians will probably have realised as war with the Peloponnesians became increasingly likely that it would be strategically desirable for Megara to be detached from the Peloponnesian bloc as she had been in the First Peloponnesian War.

<sup>28</sup> Against the view that there was an important »peace party« in Sparta see E. BAR-HEN, *Anc. Soc* viii 1977, 21-31.

that it was the Peloponnesians who made war on Athens: the Peloponnesians voted that Athens was in breach of the thirty years' peace and declared war on her. However, they did this in circumstances where Athens was better prepared for a major war (cf. Archidamus in 80–1, Pericles in 141.ii–143.ii) and could claim to be technically in the right (because she did not admit to any breach of the treaty, and offered to go to arbitration: 78.iv, 85.ii, 140.ii, 144.ii; cf. VII.18.ii–iii); and I am among those who believe that Athens deliberately provoked an outbreak of war in circumstances which favoured her.

Athens could have avoided trouble by refusing to help Corcyra, and the financial decrees of Callias (M & L 58 = *IG* i<sup>3</sup> 52), almost certainly to be dated 434/3, show that Thucydides was not merely exercising hindsight when he suggested that the war could be foreseen as early as then. In her ultimatum to Potidaea Athens was at least accepting the risk of a second clash with Corinth. The sanctions imposed on Megara may not technically have been a breach of the thirty years' peace, but can nevertheless be seen as an act of war. The Athenian speech at Sparta, not deigning to reply to the particular grievances but emphasising the strength of Athens, can easily be seen as another act of provocation<sup>29</sup>. Even an offer to go to arbitration was easy to make if it was thought unlikely that the offer would be taken up<sup>30</sup>.

There was bound to be war between Athens and Sparta some time, unless Athens moderated her ambitions – and that of course was unthinkable. Thucydides represents the Athenians as being unashamed in the exercise of their power, and I am prepared to believe that that is true of many Athenians if not of all. I suggest that Pericles realised that Athens' policies were bound to lead to a war with Sparta sooner or later, that he wanted this war to come in favourable circumstances for Athens, where she was better prepared than her enemy and could claim to be in the right, and that he obtained what he wanted. SEALEY goes so far as to argue that Thucydides himself came round to this view, and that his account of the truest cause in 23.vi means that the Athenians deliberately set about filling the Spartans with fear and driving them to

<sup>29</sup> I cannot discuss here the extent to which Thucydides' speeches are authentic reports, but what I say of this speech is stated in Thucydides' narrative introduction to the speech (72.i), and satisfies even the minimal interpretation of 22.i championed by DE STE CROIX, 7–16, that Thucydides reported authentically only the »main thesis« of the speeches actually delivered. Thucydides represents the Athenians' purpose as deterrent: J. R. GRANT, *CQ*<sup>2</sup> xv 1965, 261–6 esp. 264–6, accepts that; A. E. RAUBITSCHER in P. A. STADTER (ed.), *The Speeches in Thucydides*, U. of N. Carolina P. 1973, 32–48 esp. 47–8, finds the introduction more provocative than the actual speech and thinks the speech was deterrent in intention but provocative in effect; GOMME (above, n. 7), 252–6, found the speech provocative and was puzzled that it is not so characterised by Thucydides.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. the Corinthians' attack in 39.ii–iii on Corcyra's offer to go to arbitration.

war<sup>31</sup>, but I do not believe that that meaning is to be read into Thucydides' words, or that he was as dispassionate as that.

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<sup>31</sup> SEALEY (above, n. 10), CQ<sup>2</sup> vii 1957, 9-10; CP 1xx 1975, 90-3.

## COMIC PLEASURE

### *I. δι' ἡδονῆς καὶ γέλωτος*

Scholars who believe that the 'Tractatus Coislinianus' is a witness to authentic Aristotelian comic theory must defend the definition of comedy which it offers and which is obviously constructed on the model of the famous definition of tragedy at 'Poetics' 1449b 24-28. That definition instructs us that comic catharsis accomplishes its goal δι' ἡδονῆς καὶ γέλωτος, a formulation which parallels the operation of tragic catharsis δι' ἐλέου καὶ φόβου. The idea of a comic catharsis taking place through »pleasure and laughter« has been defended and attacked in various ways and its most recent advocate, RICHARD JANKO, has presented the case, pro and con, with admirable clarity<sup>1</sup>. The principal attacks on the validity of the »through pleasure and laughter« clause were those of BERNAYS who, as JANKO tells us (157) charged (1) that ἡδονή and γέλωτος were not equal concepts (and presumably should not be equated here) since the latter is a sub-category of the former and (2) that since ἡδονή is also an attribute of tragedy it cannot be a defining characteristic of comedy in Aristotelian theory. JANKO's response to BERNAYS' first charge is that Aristotle sometimes equates terms which at other times he subordinates. His answer to BERNAYS' much more important second charge is that Aristotle uses ἡδονή to refer to »many kinds of pleasure ... one of which is peculiar to tragedy, while the others are not.«

Now it is quite true that Aristotle uses pleasure in different senses and does remark at Poet. 1453a 35 that plots which end happily provide a pleasure appropriate for comedy and not for tragedy. We must remember, however, that the definition of comedy in the 'Tractatus' is clearly modeled, clause for clause, on the definition of tragedy in the 'Poetics' and it is therefore designed to offer precisely parallel information to that provided by the definition of

<sup>1</sup> R. JANKO, *Aristotle on Comedy: Towards a Reconstruction of Poetics II* (University of California Press: Berkeley and Los Angeles 1984) 156-60.